

I Will Make You Proud

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I Will Make You Proud

by [Wheredoesshego](#)

Summary

What would you give to save the person you love?

Draco Malfoy has lived a charmed life, growing up in the manor with everything he could want at his finger tips- A perfect, pampered prince.

As a teenager, he comes to Hogwarts and looks down on everyone he meets, he is cruel, vicious - heartless.

As an adult, he is merciless- a cold blooded killer.
Ruthless, inhumane, feared by those around him.

But when Draco is found dead, after hanging himself from the rafters of a room in the Hog's Head, with only a bag full of memory vials, and his diaries left beside him- Hermione discovers more about Draco, and who he really was.

That all he ever wanted to do was make people proud.

As she searches his memories, she slowly realises that he was never the person that he showed to the world.

He suffered so much in his short life.


Draco's memories tell a story of true, unending love and sacrifice and as she watches, Hermione needs to decide what she is willing to do to give Draco another chance at the life he truly deserves.

'I promise, I will make you proud.'

Notes

It has been said, that something as small as the flutter of a butterfly's wing, can ultimately cause a typhoon halfway around the world.

Chaos Theory

This fic is very kindly Alpha and Beta read by Asilynn with additional beta reading by Slytherin_girl91 

Perfect Pampered Prince

Draco - May 1987

Draco lay on the floor, bleeding.

He wanted to call out, but he knew it would do no good, no one would come.
He tried to move his legs a little, first one knee, then the other. He could move his legs.

Good.

He felt his knees scrape against the rough hewn wooden floor as he tried to bring his legs up under him.

He suddenly cried out as he attempted to move the arm that was pinned underneath his body. A bolt of lightening shot through him, screaming, shrieking in his veins.

He collapsed back onto the floor, allowing his tear-stained face to press against the grain of the wood. His lips just touching the floor, a line of bloody spittle dribbling out.
Draco felt more tears, fresh in his eyes, they blurred his vision, making the skin on his cheeks sting.

He wished someone would come to pick him up from the floor, his mama maybe.

He let himself stay there a little while longer, his arm still bent underneath him, his tears soaking the wood.

He wondered when he would be someone who didn't cry?

When he would be stronger?

His father told him that he needed to be braver, that he was a baby, that he embarrassed him. He didn't want to be a baby, he wanted to be strong, to be angry and sharp and pointy like his father.

But he wasn't.

He cried.

Every time someone hurt him, he cried. He tried to look up to the sky, to keep the tears inside his eyes, to stop them cascading down his cheeks.

He clenched his jaw, feeling his teeth grind together and he tried to swallow back the pain, keep his sadness inside.

He would look at his father's face, cold with rage, twisted with disgust and disappointment, then look past him, to his mother, to see if she had seen what his father was doing to him. Why did she always look at the wall?
Or the floor? Or at her hands?

Why couldn't he make his mother look at him. To see that he was hurt?

That he needed her?

Maybe if she had looked at him, then he could have kept his crying in- made his father proud.

But she didn't.

She never looked at him in those moments. She pretended like he was invisible.

Maybe he was invisible? But then if he was, his father couldn't get him? Could he?

Draco dreamed of the day she would come rushing over, to snatch him from his father's cruel grabbing fingers, or pick him up from the floor, to kiss him and hold him on her lap and rock him.

He imagined what it would feel like for her to wrap her arms around him and press his face to her chest, so he could smell her perfume and know that he was safe.

Sometimes, in the night he would sit up in bed and hug his pillow, pretending it was his mama.

He would whisper the things he wanted to say to her, pretending that his pillow was her. Then he'd hug his pillow tight. His hot, angry tears soaking the cotton, he'd tell her that he was scared, that he was cross, that he wanted to be brave, but he needed her help.

He could never imagine what the pillow might say back though, if it was his mama.

He didn't have the context for that. So his pillow always remained silent in that game too.

Just like real mama.

His father said that he was spoiled, that his mother gave him too much.

He did have lots of things, lots of toys. But he didn't play with them. Draco didn't know how to play, no one had ever shown him, ever played with him.

He would sit in his nursery at the manor, a room full of toys, a grand rocking horse, a jack in the box, toy cars, a train set.

But he didn't play with them.

Instead he just looked at them, at the pretty colours, so nice to see bright colours amongst the bleak, grey world of the manor. He would reach out his hands to feel the textures, rub the horses hair between his fingers, run the ridges of the wheels on the cars over his palms, feeling the tickle.

But he didn't play.

He would sit alone and wait, maybe the toys would show him how to play with them. He even asked them, he asked the horse what he should do. If it wanted to take him somewhere, maybe somewhere far away.

But it didn't answer, so he sat back down and just looked instead.

He wasn't sure how old he was when he first started pulling the hair from the horses tail. He pulled the hair out, then he used a knife from the kitchen to make scratches over it, deep gouges in the horses flank and neck. He stamped on the train, watching the pieces scatter over the floor. He felt himself grin as he watched the wooden cars splinter into pieces.

Maybe this was playing, he had thought.

When his parents found out he'd broken his toys, his father was very, very angry.

They took away the toys. So now he just sat, on the floor of the empty nursery, talking to himself, cuddling himself.

He sometimes walked through the silent halls to the library, but there were no children's books for him. He could read as well as any adult, but the books were boring, and he didn't understand them.

Once his father caught him in the library. He'd been so bored he'd pulled some pages from a book.

His father made him eat the pages he had pulled out. Watched him crumple the pieces of paper and chew them between his teeth, gagging as he tried to force the hard wads down his throat.

His eyes burned when clumps of paper got stuck, tears streaming down his face when he couldn't swallow one down, he panicked, thought he was going to choke, until his father hit his back to clear it, then hit him for being a baby.

Lucius made him continue to eat the rest.

After that, they told the house elves to take him outside. To get him out of their sight.

This was the only time he was happy. He'd climb the trees and look out at the land beyond the manor. He'd dream of when he was old enough to go to Hogwarts, rather than spend his time with the cruel governess he saw for four hours a day. He had thought she might be a friend for him. But she seemed to hate him too. She pushed him academically, and he tried his best, hoping to please her. But she rapped his fingers with her wand any time he made a mistake, looking down at Draco with pursed lips, disdain on her face. He couldn't seem to make her proud either.

When he was outside, Draco would hunt for bugs, watch the fish in the stream and pond. He even found things like squirrels, mice and once, a hedgehog.

It was ill, weak and shaking. Something in Draco wanted to hurt it, to stamp on it and kill it. But he didn't. Instead he got the house elves to hide it in the lower kitchens, to keep it warm

and feed it until it was well enough to release. He hoped it got away from the manor.

He made himself dens, places to hide. Sometimes he would hide there and not come when the house elves called him.

After a time they would panic, begging him to come out. He didn't, and would spend a delicious few hours undetected, pretending he was someone else.

His father always hurt him when he came out, for worrying his mother, he said.

This time Draco had been caught, spying on one of the girls his mother employed to do her hair, and help her dress.

Draco had thrilled to peek through her door and see her dressing herself, catching a glimpse of some of her naked parts. He hadn't seen his father until he strode to the door of the room and saw Draco's eye peeking through.

His father had chased him through the manor, finally catching up to him here, in one of the spare bedrooms.

He had hurt him lots this time.

Saying he mustn't tell his mother and if he did, that he would Avada him. He wasn't sure what that meant but he imagined it hurt.

He thought that this time, maybe his father had broken his arm. He pushed his tongue into the new hole at the back of his mouth where he was missing two molars. He remembered spitting them out, along with lots of blood. His cheek was bleeding there too, where it had been forced against his teeth by his father's foot as he stomped on him.

Draco sat up now, letting his tears fall, and a ragged sob escape him. He used his good arm to push himself up, his other one hanging loose by his side.

His nose was bleeding, he felt stuffy, like he couldn't quite take a full breath. The blood was in his mouth, and ran down his throat now he was upright. He swallowed it and tried not to gag.

His nails on both hands were ragged where he had been dragged across the floor. Some were broken, hanging off. He hissed as he took hold of one in his teeth and tried to prise it off completely, pulling at the thread of skin left.

He wondered if he could get all the way up with one arm or if he would fall on his face. He looked around the huge dingy room, the dark walls, the candelabras, the dark mahogany furniture and up to the chandeliers. Maybe he could crawl to something and use it to help him stand.

He wondered how loud he would have to shout for someone to come. The house elves had been told to ignore him if he called them, Lucius said that they were doing too much for him, making him soft.

He thought his mother was entertaining today, taking tea with her friends. She wouldn't want him and his blood covered face getting in the way of that. She would be embarrassed.

His father would be out on business, and he wouldn't call him anyway.

Draco thought maybe it was best he just went to sleep. He was cold, he wished he had a blanket. Instead, he curled in on himself on the floor, hugging himself, instead of his mama.

He felt like he was being brave. Maybe he was getting stronger. As he drifted off to sleep he thought... I'll be eight soon.

That's big and strong.

Then only three years until I go to Hogwarts.

I'll have lots of friends and we can all tell each other jokes and learn spells together. We can play Quidditch and do pranks on people.

He grinned a small bloodied smile from his place on the floor.

He wondered what house he'd be put in. He wished for Gryffindor but he didn't think he was brave enough, and anyway, his father would be angry. He would probably be sorted into Slytherin, like everyone else in his bloodline. He knew that it was important- the family bloodline, his father talked about it all the time.

Draco fell asleep, shivering, curled in a ball, his breathing whistled through his broken nose and his teeth chattered with pain.

But he fell asleep with a peaceful expression on his face, dreaming of his new friends at Hogwarts and all the things he could do there to make his family proud.

Draco knew he would be the best student Hogwarts had ever had.

Just three more years to go.

The Body

Hermione - May 2006

Hermione wrinkled her nose as she entered the Hogs Head pub.

She hadn't been inside its oppressive, gloomy walls for years, not since the DA had used it for meetings. She hadn't liked it then, finding the smell and the general atmosphere not exactly to her liking. It gave her the creeps.

Most of her friends avoided it like the plague now, ever since Ron had gotten horrendous food poisoning after drinking too much and ending up there of an evening. He'd needed some food to try and sober up. He'd never told them what he'd actually eaten, the thought of whatever it had been making him gag to this day. Suffice to say the sight of him, green and sweating for days had been enough for them to ensure they hadn't gone near it since.

She looked around at the dozen or so patrons gathered at the mismatched tables, finding exactly what she would have expected. Her Auror senses told her that most of them wouldn't like her poking around. Many had their faces covered, leaning hunched at the bar, fingers wrapped around drinks in grimy glasses or sat in huddles, speaking in hushed voices.

There was a witch sat eating something unidentifiable, food spilling off her plate onto the scarred wooden table. She looked up as Hermione passed and bared her teeth at her, foul bits of brown food staining her teeth, either recognising her from her 'Golden Girl' days, or just recognising that she was not meant to be there, that she was an outsider, someone who could cause trouble.

Either way, Hermione was eager to leave the bar area. She had come with a job to do, she wanted to do it and get back to the Auror's office. Her desk was piled high with work. This had come in as a last minute job, a death at the Hogs Head, the body still in situ.

Harry had called her to his office and asked if she could take it, most of the others in her department were already out, dealing with their cases for the day, and she was better with the more sensitive ones, better at dealing with bereaved families and gleaning information from them.

She had sighed as she'd agreed. She hated these types of cases. Hermione preferred jobs where she was travelling, working with a partner to catch undesirables, using her lightening fast brain to make decisions, outsmarting people who thought they stood a chance against her. She loved the thrill of the chase.

When they were already dead it was just sad. She was usually very good at piecing together evidence and finding out what had lead to their deaths, but it didn't mean that she enjoyed it. She enjoyed it even less when it brought her to places like the Hogs Head.

She ducked her way through the low doorframe of the bar and resisted the urge to put a hand to her nose with the smell, which grew stronger as she was lead up the rickety staircase which led to the inn rooms.

A faintly animal-like smell, reminiscent of a farmyard she thought.

The pub had been taken over after Aberforth Dumbledore's death in 2005, and was now owned by an unsavoury character by the name of Garrus Flint. He was a cousin of Marcus and did not have the reputation of being someone who would be honest about why there was a dead man in his pub.

However, Hermione thought as she followed him up the stairs, he had looked shaken up as he'd greeted her in the bar.

He had told her that the corpse was in one of the rooms he rented. That he hadn't touched it, there was a lot of dark magic in the room he'd said, he hadn't wanted to go near the body.

Hermione ensured he hadn't touched anything, worrying he may have rifled through the persons belongings looking for valuables, he'd insisted he hadn't and she thought she believed him.

He looked pale, eyes wide, a little in shock. He'd obviously not expected to find a dead man when he'd gone in to clean the room that morning.

Hermione had asked him the name that the room was booked under, but hadn't recognised it, Randolph Keitch. She charmed her quill to take notes and added that in. He told her that he hadn't seen his face, that he had been wearing a cloak, and that he didn't tend to look too closely at people who came in at 10pm asking for a room. He'd given him the key, taken his money and pointed him upstairs. He hadn't seen or heard from him and had assumed he'd left when he'd entered the room to find him, hanging by his neck from the rafters this morning.

Garrus stopped outside the door, clearly not wanting to go in.

'It's in there,' he said, bringing up a dirty finger to scratch at his greasy head.

'I'll be back downstairs dealin with my customers, let me know when you're done, I want that body out of here. Somethin bad has happened in that room, and I don't like it.'

Then he shuffled back downstairs, leaving Hermione to push open the door and enter the darkened room alone.

Flint was right, the room was awash with dark magic. An ominous feeling settled in Hermione's bones as she peered into the gloom. There was very little furniture, a saggy bed in the middle of the floor, grubby blankets still in place, it had not been slept in. The large armoire had one door hanging off, it looked to be empty, but she could check that. It smelled strange, a sweet smell, like apples, mixed with the sharp tang of dark magic, something like a burnt sugar smell, that sparked Hermione's nose and made her rub at it.

She realised as she entered, that maybe she shouldn't have come alone, that maybe this was more than just a traveller who had died in his room, another unexplained death of someone who had come to the Hogs Head to disappear, and had met an unexpected end.

She had a sudden thought that someone else could be there, waiting in the dark, and she slid her wand out from her holster, holding it out in front of her.

She cast a lumos and in the dim light, the body in the corner became visible.

It hung, suspended, swaying slowly from one of the rafters in the corner. The body was wearing a cloak, the hood pulled up, it was facing towards the wall. She swallowed hard and entered the room, approaching the corpse.

She could see a pair of black dragon skin shoes, on feet that pointed limply towards the floor, they looked to be expensive, good quality, barely worn. Her quill made notes. She looked sadly at the plain black socks covering the ankles. Such a mundane thing, made grotesque by the situation, did he know he was going to do this when he'd pulled those socks on? She wondered.

Hermione kept looking, black trousers protruded from beneath the cloak, again looking to be high quality, the cloak was thick, tailored with green velvet at the cuffs and lining.

On the floor beneath the body was a canvas bag, it looked to be full, and several books, leather bound, in a neat pile.

She stepped slowly forward, hearing the rope creak slightly as the wind blew in the rafters above. Hermione held her breath, creeping slowly, as though she didn't want to wake the person, rotating there.

She could see hands now. Clawed, ringed fingers frozen in death, purple with lividity. She could see a ring in the shape of a skull, one in the shape of a snake, that curled up a long finger to the knuckle, and a signet ring, it looked vaguely familiar. She made a note to have another look once the rings were in evidence.

There was nothing for it now, she approached the body fully. Hermione stood underneath it, noting the rickety chair on its side where it had been kicked out from under the person as they had hung.

She faced the body and looked up, being able to put it off no more. Hermione's eyes focused on the face, purple and bloated, frozen into an expression of despair, the eyes were open, bloodshot.

She felt her heart stop as she looked more closely at the features, at the hair that had fallen from the hood and over the forehead.

She felt, inexplicably, like she might cry.

Hermione took in the almost unnatural shade of silver of the irises, the white blonde of the hair.

Her mouth fell open and she thought she might be sick. She stepped back in horror, banging her shoulder painfully on the wall as she did so, but barely registering it as her mind fought to make the connection.

That the body hanging from the rafters was Draco Malfoy.

Draco Malfoy, her one time school mate, bully, and now wanted murderer.

Who He Had Become

Hermione - May 2006

The pub was crawling with Aurors by lunch time.

The bar had been emptied, the room swept thoroughly, and Garrus Flint had been taken in for questioning.

He would be required to give a memory that could be stored and then pored over by the best investigative Aurors they had, looking for clues as to how Draco Malfoy, Undesirable Number 1 had managed to walk into a pub in the middle of a wizarding village, rent a room and kill himself in it, without anyone noticing.

Every Auror in Britain had been on high alert for Malfoy for several years, and he wasn't exactly unremarkable, someone who could easily pass under the radar. He was excessively tall, at least six foot three, athletic and broad, to say nothing for the shock of blonde hair that immediately marked him as a Malfoy. He could not move around unnoticed.

There was discussion as to whether he'd been polyjuicing himself. Hermione thought that this was quite plausible, however, it begged the question as to where he would get the ingredients from, whilst on the run.

After realising that it was him, Hermione had stumbled from the room, gasping for air and sat, dry heaving on the staircase, Garrus had appeared in the entryway to the door below, dirty rag in hand, along with the glass he'd been supposedly cleaning.

'You alright?' He'd asked, clearly alarmed by her grey complexion.

Hermione had felt like she could faint. It was one thing to see dead bodies, she did it all the time. It was another to see someone you had known since you were eleven, their face frozen into a mask of agonised despair, bloodless lips pulled over white teeth, eyes bulging, the whites filled with blood.

The rope burns on his slender neck had made her want to weep. It had been such a confronting death, not a peaceful one.

She wondered if he had changed his mind after he had pushed the chair away. If he had fought, kicked his legs, tried to reach out to the chair, to find purchase. But she had noticed that his nails had been neatly clipped, smooth straight lines. There was no evidence that he had tried to get his fingers under the rope.

She wondered if he had been scared.

Hermione couldn't imagine Draco Malfoy being scared of anything, quite the opposite in fact.

His name was now one that inspired fear, much in the way Voldemort's had. Except Malfoy wasn't weak, clinging to power and life through dwindling Horcruxes, the way Voldemort had been at the end.

Voldemort had not stood a chance when Malfoy had overthrown him spectacularly at the end of the war, effortlessly killing anyone who had stood in his way. Voldemort was dead, and within weeks the Death Eaters had disbanded, or hidden underground.

Malfoy wasn't weak, he was young, strong, an exceptionally powerful dark wizard, much more so than anyone had realised.

Currently, his motives for his actions since the war were largely unknown. Other than killing, seemingly indiscriminately, he had an agenda that the Aurors could not decipher. He didn't seem interested in carrying on where Voldemort had left off. He never stayed in one place but left a trail of destruction wherever he went,

He was impossible to track down, he maimed and injured at will, seemingly hell bent on something, but no one knew what.

He had supporters, many people viewed him as a hero of some sort, for getting rid of Voldemort and effectively bringing about the end of the war.

But Hermione guaranteed none of them would want to be in a locked room with him. Stories of his brutality were reported to Harry's Aurors office constantly.

Harry, who was currently acting as Head Auror while Robards recovered from a bout of ill health, was tortured by the stories of Malfoy.

He blamed himself for thinking that there had been something redeemable in him.

They spoke about it often, Hermione reassuring Harry that nobody could have known the depths that Malfoy would sink to, or that he was capable of the level of dark magic he seemingly produced without thought or consequence.

The Malfoy of their school days had been petty, spiteful. He had changed beyond recognition after his failed attempt to murder Albus Dumbledore and his indoctrination as a Death Eater.

No one could have predicted that the snotty, pampered prince of their school days would become a deadly killer, his brutal murder of his own father at the age of twenty one seemingly the catalyst for his life heading in this doomed direction.

Garrus had swayed on his feet when she had eventually descended the stairs, and informed him, in a shaking voice, that the body in the rafters was Draco Malfoy.

His eyes had grown wide as the implications had hit him.

'Draco soddin Malfoy, in my pub,' he had muttered on repeat. 'Of all the people to bloody die in my pub it 'ad to be 'im.'

Once Hermione had gathered herself enough, she had Floo called the office to let them know what had happened, and then attempted to question Garrus herself.

‘I’m sure I would have noticed if it was Malfoy, I swear I didn’t know!’ He insisted, his dirty hands out in front of him.

‘Last thing I bloody need is the likes of ‘im in ere.’

Garrus looked suitably horrified and Hermione was inclined to believe him.

His memories would be examined in the Pensieve and he would also be subject to a full interrogation under Veritaserum, to be sure.

It wasn’t long before she heard a succession of loud pops and her colleagues descended on the scene in their droves.

Harry strode into the pub looking extremely harried, closely followed by Robards, who had been called back to duty on this occasion.

She stood in the bar area and filled them in on what she knew, taking in Harry’s own pale face, the shock there evident.

She used her wand to transfer her notes to Robards’ notepad, then stood, clenching and unclenching her fists and anxiously waited for her own partner to make an appearance.

A faint pop behind her a minute or two later told her that Blaise had arrived.

She could see that he already knew.

If Harry had been pale, then Blaise was positively chalky. His usually beautiful complexion a sallow shade, his brown eyes, so normally full of laughter were wide, glassy and unblinking.

Hermione put a hand on his arm.

‘Are you ok? You don’t need to be here, you know that. Harry knows the situation.’

Blaise shook his head. ‘I’ve already told him, I want to be here’ he replied, although his shaking hands betrayed his words.

‘Blaise, I know he was your friend,’ Hermione began.

Blaise let out a bitter sounding laugh.

‘He was, until he decided to make himself Britain’s most wanted man,’ he replied, shaking his head slightly.

‘I can’t believe I’ll never be able to ask him why now. I so desperately wanted to catch him, to talk to him. I can’t actually believe he’s dead.’

Blaise looked utterly exhausted, Hermione knew this would be a hard day for him. She put a hand on his arm and gave him a gentle squeeze.

Katie Bell came stomping down the rickety stairs.

‘They’re cutting him down now,’ she said, her voice low and reverent, she was aware of how distressing this might be for Blaise. She used her wand to levitate the leather bag and the books out in front of her, avoiding tampering with any finger prints.

‘I’ll get these back to the office for you, Hermione.’

‘Thank you. Leave them at my desk please Katie.’ Hermione replied, her eyes and mind already at the top of the stairs.

Katie apparated away and Hermione looked at Blaise.

‘Are you ready?’ She asked. He took a deep breath and started up the stairs. His reluctance was palpable.

The dark magic still infused the room, as it had when Hermione had entered a few hours earlier. They had found nothing more of interest, other than his bag, and the books, which Hermione was desperate to get a look at.

The medical personnel were here now. They were bringing Draco down from the rafters. Hermione watched as they cut the rope and his body fell, caught by the waiting hands below that had gripped his legs, ready to take his weight.

‘Be careful!’ Blaise had shouted with a splutter. He had rushed forward as they lowered him to the floor, putting a gloved hand out to cradle his head as they lay him down.

Hermione felt her heart break a little as she watched Blaise take in the sight of his old friend, the evidence of his violent death clear, inescapable.

He shouldn’t be here, she thought.

Blaise had clapped a hand over his mouth, and was now trying to stifle tears as his eyes roved over Draco’s face.

Hermione went to his side, not looking down. She couldn’t see Malfoy’s face again.

‘Blaise-’ she began.

But he held up a hand. ‘Come on, come back,’ she said, trying to sooth him away from the awful sight.

But he remained, stock still. He seemed to be angry now, his sadness replaced by rage.

‘What the fuck happened?’ He almost shouted, hitting his palm on the floor.

‘How the fuck did he end up like this?’

‘He was a killer Blaise,’ Hermione replied. ‘Maybe he couldn’t live with himself.’

Blaise was thoughtful. Hermione could see his throat working as he swallowed down his grief.

‘A lot of people will think this is good news, you know.’ She said to him. ‘His reputation-’

‘Fuck his reputation! Blaise exclaimed.

‘None of you knew him. Something happened to make him this way, he wasn’t always like this. Someone could have stopped him, stopped this.’

He let Hermione guide him away from the body now, as the medical staff stepped in to put Draco into a body bag for transfer.

Blaise wiped away one tear and sniffed.

Then he stood up straight, his sorrow pushed aside. ‘Right,’ he said, hands on hips. ‘I’m going to sweep the room again.’

Hermione left him up there, heading downstairs and giving him a moment to recover himself. She was surprised by Blaise's tears for Malfoy. She hadn't thought they'd been friends for years, Blaise had defected early in the war and come to fight for the Order, he was a good friend to Harry and Ron, and had been in a relationship with Ginny for some time now.

She thought back to what he'd said, about Malfoy changing. She wondered what he had been like with his friends at Hogwarts. It would be interesting to find out the other side of Draco Malfoy while he had been at school.

The day was long and draining, emotionally and mentally. There was so much to unpack. Later, Hermione had stood with some of the others who had gone to Hogwarts, and she had a lump in her throat as they had brought the body bag past. The finality of it jarring to her. A whole life reduced to a plastic bag, zipped up over a face, to be taken to a cold, lonely morgue. She wondered if he would have a funeral, who was there to mourn him?

Hermione was relieved, when at six pm Harry told her to return to the office. To turn in her notes and then head home.

She apparated back, her mind ablaze with questions she had about the Malfoy case, and was greeted by Katie, her cheeks flushed and seemingly full of energy, despite the lateness of the day.

'Guess what?' Katie asked her as she reached her desk.

'What?' she asked flatly, her enthusiasm at almost zero.

'The bag and books from the scene?' Katie said, and Hermione nodded.

'Well, they've been processed, fast tracked for evidence to make sure we've got everything, and they've already told me.'

Hermione waited, impatient for Katie to get to the point.

'So, it turns out that all that was in the bag was vials,' she had a grin on her face as she delivered the news.

'The bag was bloody chock full of Malfoy's own memories,'

'Memories?' Hermione looked up sharply from her quill and pad.

'Yep, loads of them, and the books look like they are diaries too, he's practically done your job for you!' Katie exclaimed, clearly excited.

Hermione was confused. 'Just a bag of memory vials? Where was his overnight stuff, all of his other belongings?'

'No idea' Katie replied.

'But they've said they can all be released into evidence now they've been checked. they should be on your desk by tomorrow lunchtime at the latest.'

Hermione nodded.

A bag of Draco Malfoy's memories.

Her eyes widened. These could have the answers to so many questions she had.

She was desperate to start looking into the case but knew she needed to get home, to eat, and rest, before she fainted.

As she lay down that night, her mind was haunted by Draco Malfoy's cold, dead face. She thought she'd not close her eyes without seeing it for a long time.

She couldn't wait for the next day, for the chance to search his memories, and maybe, finally get some insight to the enigma that had been Draco Malfoy.

Run

Draco - June 1990

Draco had finally turned ten.

Double digits.

His parents had thrown him an elaborate party at the manor.

It was a good opportunity to impress the other pureblood families, a party for him in name only.

Draco didn't get a cake, and no-one sang Happy Birthday to him, but he didn't care. He was just so happy to not be alone.

The party gave him the chance to see other people, and most importantly, to see his friends.

Blaise, Theo, Pansy, Greg and Vince were all there with their parents.

They used the opportunity to run riot in the manor gardens, pretending to hex each other with sticks. The adults were all busy drinking, talking politics, they didn't care what the children did as long as they couldn't see or hear them.

Draco felt the unbridled joy of not being under the intolerable scrutiny of his parents, if only for a few hours.

He felt like he were a wild animal, like he had been inadvertently set free a from his cage.

He screamed, hollered and whooped.

He chased the boys, running until he felt like his legs were going to collapse, his heart pumping hard, blood buzzing in his veins.

He was much faster than both Crabbe and Goyle, but Theo was slightly harder to catch, and he had met his match in Blaise.

The joy he felt running through the orchards, the wind whipping his hair and his adrenaline pumping was like truly breathing for the first time in so long. He felt as though he had been inhaling dust up to now, the particles clogging his throat, suffocating him, and now he could take full, freeing breaths in the crisp, fresh air.

Draco ran so fast that his vision blurred and his chest heaved, he relished the feeling of it, laughing as he ran, even as his breath wheezed in and out of this chest. He kept his eyes on Blaise just up ahead, the thrill of the chase igniting something in him, he wanted to win, he had to win.

Although he was faster, Blaise tired before Draco did and they collapsed into a heap in the grass, laughing and roughhousing, Draco feeling a slight mad edge come over him.

He didn't even mind when Blaise inadvertently bumped some of his bruises, and elbowed him in a rib he thought may have cracked a few months back.

He bucked and twisted, fighting Blaise to be the one on top, the one pointing their 'wand' down at the other.

He knew he'd gotten a little too rough though, when he saw it in Blaise's eyes, saw the pain flash there.

Draco was ashamed to admit to himself that he'd liked seeing it. Liked being the one to cause the pain, rather than receive it.

He swallowed down the sudden grim satisfaction he felt, and allowed Blaise to wrest his stick from his hand and declare Draco the losing party.

He reluctantly clambered off Blaise, ignoring the darkness that had settled low in his belly, and allowed Crabbe to change the game to hide and seek.

They had needed to explain the rules to Draco, seeing as he had never played before, but he ended up being almost too good at it.

He used some of his usual hiding spots, waiting in the dark, mossy spaces, listening to his own breathing, thrilling at the sound of their voices calling him as he peeked out at them from his vantage point.

He had more patience than his friends though, and ended up coming out eventually, when Theo got bored and said he'd given up.

To end his perfect birthday, Draco even got a small, sweet kiss from Pansy.

She had pushed him up against the glass door of the greenhouse as they searched for Goyle during the final round of hide and seek, and planted her lips on his, briefly and chastely.

'Happy Birthday Draco,' she had whispered, her hair coming loose from her headband, mud on her face, and something Draco had no idea how to identify shining in her dark eyes.

Draco hadn't been touched by anyone gently for so long.

He had thought about that kiss for months afterwards, when the party was just a glittering memory amongst the monotony of his day to day life, using the recollection of the soft brush of her lips to comfort him as he lay in bed at night, bruised and sore, hugging his pillow.

He would press a fingertip gently to his lips, and try to replicate the sensation of a human touch that was kind, that didn't hurt, a small gesture that had meant so much.

Draco felt like he had been waiting to turn ten forever. Now he only had to make it through one more long year until he finally could start at Hogwarts.

Why did time have to crawl along so painfully slowly?

Now that he was ten, Draco did not cry any more. His father had finally beaten that out of him.

He was so proud of himself when he finally managed to grit his teeth and hold back his screams, no matter how hard he was hit, kicked, punched or slapped.

He often had blood, swirling around his mouth where he bit the inside of his cheeks or tongue to stop himself from making a sound.

He had a technique.

As soon as he saw the beating coming, the raised fist or drawn back boot, he closed his eyes. He clenched his jaw, and made his body go as rigid as he could. He would bite down on the inside of his cheeks and repeat his mantra to himself.

'I will make you proud,'

It was the only thing Draco wanted to do.

The only thing, he knew, which could convince his father to stay his hand. To stop Lucius from beating him for his failings. He knew that if he didn't cry, kept his face a blank mask, ignored the pain and rose above it, that he would be a true Malfoy.

Better than everyone else- superior.

It was hard, so so hard. He still wanted to cry, he thought the urge would be in him forever, the tears seemed constantly poised at the edges of his eyes, fighting to get out.

Any time he thought about how much he hated home, hated his father, hated how hard it was to please him, the tears threatened.

But now he was strong enough not to let them come out.

The first time he had used his technique it had stopped his father in his tracks.

Lucius had slapped Draco, hard across the face, for daring to answer back to his mother when she questioned his commitment to his school work.

Draco had been stood, fists clenched, in the parlour where he had been summoned to his mother after his lessons.

He was trying to tell Narcissa that he was doing his best, that he was working on arithmancy far above his academic years, reading up on complex spells well beyond what he would need for his first year at Hogwarts.

But his governess had told his mother that he had been distracted, fidgety and hadn't been concentrating in their lessons that day.

He had gotten all hot and sweaty, feeling the sting of betrayal as he fought to defend himself.

He *had* been distracted, he *had* been fidgety, he was struggling with pain in his shoulder.

The arm he had broken when he was seven still gave him trouble and in his lessons that day it had been aching as he'd held his quill.

He had been writing for several hours and had asked for a short break.

It wasn't granted, and as he continued, his shoulder had become more painful, a constant dull ache, sharpening to a white hot sting as he had continued.

He didn't dare ask for another break but yes, he thought that he probably had been distracted.

Draco had been so intent on explaining this to his mother, that he hadn't even seen the slap coming- His father had snuck up on him.

But he had felt it.

A hard thwack, connecting with his ear and cheek, whipping his head sideways.

He clenched his jaw, and brought his face back to center, his eyes locked with his mother's. She had cried out in shock and now her chin was trembling, her own eyes filling with tears as she avoided Lucius's stare.

Draco kept his silver eyes on hers. He set his teeth, didn't allow his head to drop. He heard the ringing in his ears, felt the red handprint spring up on his soft, pale cheek, and he told himself: *'I will make you proud.'*

He waited, tensed, ready for the next slap which would inevitably come. But his father remained, stock still, his hand poised in the air. Narcissa flicked her eyes then, from Draco's to her husbands, just for the briefest second.

Lucius didn't look at her, he just looked at the side of Draco's head, waiting for him to start crying.

He didn't.

The air was thick, the tension palpable. The three of them stood, in the grand parlour of the manor, in their expensive robes and designer shoes and none of them moved.

Eventually, Draco heard the swish of his father's departure, his robes swirling behind him as he left, his footsteps echoing in the cavernous room.

As he relaxed, a whoosh of held breath leaving his tensed body, he couldn't help but allow himself a small, grim smile of satisfaction, even as he waited for his hearing to come back, and tasted the coppery tang of the blood flowing into his mouth from his ripped cheek. His mother looked at him then, she almost reached out a trembling hand to touch him.

She looked strangely devastated, but Draco didn't want it now, didn't want her comfort.

He had come to hate Narcissa too. For her lack of action, for the way she listlessly accepted his father's treatment of him.

She was terrified to say a word against Lucius, protecting her own wellbeing over his. He was supposed to be the heir, the much wanted and prayed for only son. In public she doted on him, touching his arm and holding his hand, warning him not to touch anything that might hurt him.

He almost laughed out loud when she did it now, laughed at her simpering face when they were out in public. She saw him get hurt every day, here, within the bleak walls of the manor, and she did nothing.

Nothing.

But, Draco played his part as well, acted like the dutiful son, allowed his parents to fawn over him at parties and social gatherings, he held his head up high, looked down his nose at people, just like he had seen his father do.

A perfect carbon copy.

Draco was good at hiding his bruises, both physical and mental. Anyone who saw the Malfoys together would think they were a solid family unit.

He turned away from his mother now, from her slightly outstretched hand, sneering at her as he left. He didn't need her, didn't need, or want her help anymore.

He didn't cry now. His father would be proud of him- things were finally going to change.

He knew it.

It was only a few weeks after that, that Lucius began using the Cruciatus curse on him.

For short times to start with, and then longer, leaving Draco in a puddle of his own vomit, urine and snot, convulsing on the floor.

The first time, he had sneered down at him as he flicked his wand and scourgified the mess, a look of utter disgust on his face.

Draco had looked up, twitching, the agony white hot in his veins and he realised he'd somehow failed again.

After that Lucius didn't even bother cleaning up, he just left Draco on the floor, face in his own vomit, until he stopped shaking enough to pick himself up off the floor and make his way back to his bedroom.

He had heard his mother one evening, weakly protesting against this, as she sat at the dinner table with his father. He heard the sharp sudden rap of his father's cane against her knuckles as her hand lay on the table.

Her quiet sobbing, the shocked silence in the room afterwards.

How dare she tell him what to do with his son? he'd hissed. Who the fuck did she think she was?

Draco needed toughening up Lucius spat, the Dark Lord was planning a return.

He had heard, small whisperers on the grapevine. Slight undertones of worry he had sensed at the ministry that led him to believe the time was drawing near.

Lucius prided himself on being prepared, on planning for any eventuality.

The Dark Lord would need an army and Draco needed to be his best soldier.

Narcissa didn't believe that Voldemort could come back, she didn't believe the rumours, but Lucius would have none of it.

It was for Draco's own good, he said.

He wasn't going to present the Dark Lord with a weak, pathetic child, he was going to give him his next top general, someone who could be there, waiting in the wings when Voldemort was too weak to carry on, ready to take over.

The Malfoys would rule the wizarding world.

He was training him. He needed to be trained from now so that he was ready when the Dark Lord called him.

He would not let him fail.

I can do that.

Draco had thought, shivering, pressed up against the doorframe in his pyjamas.

I can be what he wants me to be. If that makes him happy, if it makes him proud, I can do it.

He made his way shakily back down to his bedroom, the tremors of the Cruciatus still echoing in his muscle memory, and he climbed into his large four poster bed, sighing with relief at being able to relax his taut muscles, letting his twitching fingers fall to his sides.

Draco didn't sleep. He lay and plotted.

How could he become what his father wanted? What did he need to do?

The first thing was to read, he decided. Read all the grown up books in the manor library, know more than anyone else, even if he didn't show them he knew it. He needed to know the spells, know the ways he could hurt people if he needed to.

Then, just like his father he would need to make friends in high places, even if he hated his father's friends, hated the slimy, smarmy people that came to the manor, posturing and preening, speaking about blood supremacy and good breeding.

He needed to act like he shared those values, like he looked down on everyone else, as though he didn't really just want desperately to have friends, to be liked, to not be so agonisingly lonely.

He hated them all, but he was going to be just like them. Be the best.

Draco vowed, he was going to make all of them proud.

Hermione - May 2006

Hermione jerked awake, her heart pounding, legs tangled in her sheets.

Draco Malfoy had been in her dreams.

Sometimes it had been the sight of his face, as he had hung from the rafter, purple and bloated, that flashed in her mind.

She kept thinking about the terror that she had seen in his silver eyes as they had bulged, forever frozen in an unseeing gaze.

She wondered whether anyone at the morgue would have closed his eyes for him.

Whether they'd maybe let her go and do it.

She shuddered at thought of seeing his body again, of how his cold skin would feel under her fingertips, but couldn't bear the thought of them, open, staring like that forever.

She lay on her back, sweating, her hair sticking to her neck, as her mind flickered through memories of him as a child. She remembered him as an eleven year old, his hair slicked back, laughing and smiling as he got onto the Hogwarts Express. She had flashes of him through the years, hexing Harry, his wand raised as they faced each other in Lockhart's class, his face as Harry flew through the air, the shocked expression in his eyes after she had slapped him, the stiff way he had left with the Death Eaters after the Battle of Hogwarts.

But the worst dreams had been of him as an adult, flashes of him smiling, laughing, all traces of his boyhood snootiness gone.

In those dreams, he had looked at her, his grey eyes full of love, gentle and kind. His face had been relaxed, he had looked happy. In the dream, Hermione had looked back at him, looking into his eyes, into those deep pools of silver and she had fallen down into them, jolting herself awake.

She had never seen Draco Malfoy like that, only ever seen him as cold and distant, looking down his nose at her.

She had no idea where her brain would conjure up such conflicting images of him.

Hermione had actually only seen Draco Malfoy a handful of times as an adult.

The last time had been during his trial for the murder of his father, when she had been at the ministry for work.

He had walked through the corridor towards the courtroom, a tall, rangy twenty one year old, in a tailored black suit, silver buttons glinting, hair oiled and shiny.

Malfoy had held his head high, no traces of remorse visible on his face.

His eyes were aflame, his lips a cold, cruel line. He had not even noticed her as he strode past, managing to look aristocratic, even with handcuffs at his wrists.

She had seen Narcissa then, a hunched, sobbing wreck, being supported to walk into the courtroom, to sit and watch her only son be convicted of the murder of her husband, his own father.

Hermione didn't see him after that, but was told that he had refused to answer a single question. Just stared blankly from the cage where he was questioned, emotionless.

He never made it to Azkaban.

There were varying reports about how he did it. Some said he managed to transfigure, others said he did it through powerful wandless magic, overpowering the Aurors and avoiding the dementors. Others said he had bribed the guards in charge of getting him down to his cell.

No one had any answers though, as the two Aurors on the job were both dead before they made it back to headquarters, the guards on shift all Confunded, unable to even recognise Malfoy when shown a picture.

He hadn't been seen for almost a year after that. The Aurors had scoured Britain looking for him. Narcissa insisted she had no knowledge of where he was, or would go, and intense pressure and questioning under Veritaserum showed that she truly had no idea where he had gone. He was like a ghost, untraceable but for the path of destruction he left in his wake.

The first people to go were Alecto and Amycus Carrow.

They had been found dead in their home, a swift killing curse had befallen Alecto, but Amycus had been tortured. He had been cut and healed repeatedly, bled out. Someone clearly looking for information. They hadn't wondered who by for long. Draco Malfoy had carved his initials into Carrow's cheek.

No one could figure out why he had gone for them, they were fellow Death Eaters.

The next one had been Antonin Dolohov.

He had been disemboweled, his insides brought to the outside, a veritable horror show of suffering. He had been found in his home, having rotted there for weeks. Again, Draco Malfoy's initials were carved into his skin.

It wasn't only Death Eaters though, people turned up dead all over Britain, their houses ransacked, Malfoy's initials carved onto their bodies.

They could track where he had been, but not predict where he was going. He seemed to travel alone, an unlimited amount of money and resources at his disposal.

A clause in Lucius's will had meant that the Aurors were unable to convince the Gringotts goblins to cut him off.

Even after his father's death the Malfoy money still sustained him, Harry had told her bitterly at the time.

He had not been heard from for a few months, the trail going cold. Hermione hadn't paid much mind at the time, being busy focused on other aspects of her work and never directly being involved in the search for Malfoy. But now she was curious. She couldn't get his face out of her mind.

She wanted to know more about Draco Malfoy, about the circumstances that led to his sad end. She wished she could feel more hatred towards him, but she couldn't shake the way he had looked in her dream.

She decided she wanted to speak to Blaise, to find out more about Draco's childhood, in the hope it could explain more about the devastating direction his life had taken him as an adult.

Indecipherable

Chapter Notes

Thank you so much for the subs, kudos and bookmarks so far! Updates on this fic will be sporadic due to my working schedule, so apologies for the quick succession of uploads. The gaps between will depend on the time I have inbetween work and family. Thank you for reading!

Hermione - May 2006

The next morning Hermione stood outside the office of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, and took a deep steadying breath.

She smoothed down the material of her skirt, tucked in her blouse and purposefully marched into the office, hoping that she didn't look as awful as she felt.

She hadn't managed to sleep at all, the images of Draco Malfoy had permeated her consciousness, not allowing sleep to come.

She had eventually gotten up at around 5am, groggy and sad, with an overwhelming feeling of being too late, having missed something before she'd even begun.

Hermione was angry with herself for letting Malfoy's death affect her so much. Hadn't her training explicitly taught her how to separate the person from the case?

She thought that maybe she needed to start Occluding when she worked on Malfoy's investigation, to help with the emotions it had stirred up, but she always felt like using Occlumency made her a bad Auror.

It took away who she was, and prevented her from resonating with the person she was investigating. It made her too removed.

One of the reasons that Hermione had climbed so high within her department, was her ability to see situations from multiple points of view, to play devil's advocate and examine angles that other people wouldn't have even considered.

She felt like this case was going to take all of her skills, that there was so much they weren't seeing already.

She had a million questions and felt desperate to take a look at Malfoy's memories, to find out more about where he had been, and more to the point who he had been.

She'd asked Katie to put the diaries on her desk as soon as they were released, they would be a good place to start.

As she walked through the office, Hermione saw that Blaise was already at his desk. His head was down, eyes scouring the document he had in front of him. She stopped and leant on his desk, waiting for him to look up.

When he eventually did, Hermione was concerned to see the dark circles under his eyes, the lack of colour in his face. His usually playful demeanour was nowhere in sight. He looked tired and troubled. She didn't think he'd be open to answering many questions yet.

'Blaise,' Hermione began.

'Whats going on? Are you ok?'

He indicated the document he was looking at, waving his hand over it and rubbing at his tired eyes irritably.

'This is the preliminary autopsy report on Malfoy,' he said, his voice flat and expressionless.

'They've just documented the external and immediate findings.' He looked back down at it, and didn't say anything else, just continued rubbing a hand over his face, an expression of anger and disbelief evident in his features.

Hermione came around to his side of the desk and bent over so that she could see the document.

It was charmed to show an outline of Draco Malfoy, as though he were laying flat. One front view and another from the back.

These were commonly used by Aurors when investigating deaths.

The medical staff used a spell to show injuries on the body, this was a quick way to confirm a cause of death, if they already had a good idea of what had happened, or if the cause was somewhat obvious.

They would perform more in depth searches in the coming days, looking for spell work, curses and cutting open the cadaver to study any internal injuries.

Hermione's eyes widened as she looked down at the report.

Lit up throughout Malfoy's body were the various notable injuries he had sustained during the course of his life, different colours indicating the severity of the injury and also how recent they were.

There were different colours depending on whether they were a possible cause of death, healed or fresh, historical, self inflicted or otherwise.

Blaise looked heartsick, his lips pressed together in a tight pale line.

'He's lit up like a fucking Christmas tree,' he said, the anger back again.

Blaise was not exaggerating. There seemed to be very little space on Draco Malfoy's body that was not lit up.

She glimpsed a dark red patch over his shoulder, and thought back to his encounter with Buckbeak the Hippogriff during their third year at Hogwarts.

She had told Hagrid to take Malfoy to the hospital ward after Buckbeak had attacked him, but they had all rolled their eyes at him writhing on the floor in agony, thinking that he had been putting it on for Hagrid's benefit.

Hermione had firmly believed that Malfoy deserved the attack and that the injury had not been that serious, but the document indicated differently.

Looking at it, she was surprised that Malfoy hadn't needed more treatment. It showed that his arm had been broken, at the shoulder joint and also there was a hairline fracture in the humerus.

She couldn't remember that at all, and was now less surprised by Lucius Malfoy's reaction to the injury.

She knew he had been furious that anyone had dared hurt his precious son, she just hadn't realised that he had been hurt quite so badly.

She let her eyes drift over the rest of the report, wanting to study his other injuries, but Blaise suddenly whipped the paper away and put it in his desk drawer.

'I can't look at that any more,' he said. 'Coffee?'

Hermione glanced at him, something in his demeanour was off, he wasn't himself.

As she returned to her own desk to drop off her things, she made a mental note to speak to Ginny after work and see how Blaise had been at home.

She supposed she shouldn't be surprised, she knew they had been friends as children, and even if that friendship had ended, Blaise probably still had a lot of memories of Malfoy to work through.

It was clearly an emotional time for him, regardless of what had happened as they had grown older.

She wondered whether she should speak to Harry about the appropriateness of Blaise staying on the case, but realised that she too had a previous relationship with Malfoy- many of the Aurors in her department did.

For some reason Hermione didn't want to let this case go, this was her case.

She didn't trust anyone else to investigate it as thoroughly as she would.

So she decided to say nothing, both she and Blaise were consummate professionals, they would both be able to put their emotions aside and do the job.

Quite frankly, Hermione thought, they'd have to. This was the highest profile case of her career, if she wanted to advance, she needed to do well, she needed to find out what had led Malfoy to the Hogs Head and find the answers to the questions already being shouted from the front page of the Prophet.

Someone had put a copy of the paper down at the front desk and she had picked it up on her way in. The front page screamed its headline:

DRACO MALFOY DEAD

Former Death Eater and wanted murderer Draco Malfoy was found dead this morning at the Hogs Head pub in Hogsmeade.

Early reports indicate he was found hanged. There are questions as to whether he killed himself, or was murdered.

This reporter believes murder to be the most likely cause.

There are many who would have liked to see Malfoy dead, including the families of his countless victims, none of whom stood a chance against this powerful dark wizard.

In recent years Malfoy has been on the run following the brutal murder of his own father Lucius Malfoy. There are many theories as to the reason for the younger Malfoy's heinous act- not least in order to gain access to the notorious Malfoy vault.

Narcissa Malfoy is currently unavailable to comment due to her incarceration at St Mungo's hospital, where she is reportedly being treated for trauma induced psychosis after witnessing her precious son murder her husband in front of her eyes.

The question remains as to where Draco Malfoy has been hiding out whilst on his campaign of terror.

Indeed it is believed there have been those who have harboured this fugitive, despite knowing of his despicable actions.

The best Aurors in Britain are now on the case, and no doubt those responsible for facilitating Draco Malfoy's murderous regime will face the justice that he himself, has managed to escape.

Hermione stopped reading and huffed as she looked at the byline.

Rita Skeeter obviously.

She knew Malfoy's death would be the biggest story for weeks to come.

Draco Malfoy had been tabloid fodder almost his whole life, much as she, Harry and Ron also had.

When Harry and Ron had first come out with their relationship in 2004, the papers had had a field day.

She had been painted as a jealous ex, a woman scorned. It had almost made them laugh with the ridiculousness of it.

Hermione had truly never been happier for two people than she had been when Harry finally decided that he wasn't able to hide the nature of his relationship with his best friend any longer.

Hermione knew Ron had struggled more with opening himself up publicly, concerned about how his parents would react to the inevitable media circus, but he hadn't needed to be.

Molly had been overjoyed, claiming that she had known for years, and that Harry was like a son to her anyway. It hadn't taken her long to start asking Ron when Harry would become a son in law, causing Ron's ears to turn pink and him to stammer out a 'Steady on Mum,' whilst refusing to meet Harry's eye.

Arthur Weasley was quieter in his acceptance of the relationship, but he had gone out of his way to support Harry with his application to progress through the Auror rankings, and they had the couple to dinner most weekends, along with Ginny, Blaise and Hermione.

Hermione and Ron had had a short lived relationship whilst in their last year of school, but it hadn't been serious for either of them, she just hadn't felt the spark there and clearly neither had he.

Hermione had often felt like she played second fiddle to Harry in Ron's eyes, and it had actually been a relief when he had tearfully admitted his feelings to her over several drinks one evening.

The love between Harry and Ron made Hermione's heart feel like it would burst. Since Ron's emotional confession and Harry's immediate reciprocation, they had become even more inseparable than they had been previously.

They were the ultimate team, she loved spending time at their house, watching the dynamic between the two of them and hoping she'd find a big love of her own one day.

Harry's green eyes followed Ron around the room, the corners crinkling with laughter when Ron grumbled about losing something or moaned good naturedly about his mother's meddling.

Harry was the more domesticated of the two, he had given up trying to teach Ron to cook years before, and was most definitely the chef of the household.

Hermione had spent many an evening sitting, sipping red wine in their cosy kitchen, whilst Harry cooked, smelling the delicious aromas coming from the stove top, and listening as Ron regaled them with hilarious stories from Hogwarts, where he was the most recent Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher.

His reputation as one third of the golden trio had preceded him, Ron was in equal parts loved and revered by his students.

Hermione still struggled to wrap her head around the fact that Ronald Weasley was in charge of educating other people's children.

The Prophet had run a new story about them almost daily for months following the revelation of Harry and Ron's fledgling romance. The stories unpicked everything notable they had ever done, looking for signs of unrequited love between Harry and Ron, and detailing all the ways Hermione had been overlooked.

She had been almost incandescent with rage as she had read yet another article describing how she clung on to the two men in desperation, seeing as no other man would have her.

She was described as being far too independent for her own good, her intelligence and ferocity being off-putting for any self-respecting wizard, not to mention the fact that she had been putting it about since her fourth year relationship with Viktor Krum.

Ron had spluttered with laughter at that, causing Hermione to hit him with her copy of the Prophet. Harry had given her a tight hug and told her to ignore it, that she had to know Rita would always be gunning for her, and to put it down to where it came from.

Hermione found that to be much easier said than done.

Interspersed with the copious amounts of articles about herself, Ron and Harry there had been more than a few written about Draco Malfoy.

Before his father's murder the articles had been about his eligibility, whom he was dating, how he had styled his hair, what designer robes he was wearing.

Malfoy had grown up to be an exceptionally handsome young man. His white blonde hair, silver eyes and wolflike smile befuddling many a young witch and wizard.

The Prophet seemed perfectly happy to overlook his Death Eater status, and painted him as a hero, he had rid the world of Voldemort, never mind how he had done it.

For his part, Malfoy had seemed to have no interest in courting the media, and many of the candid shots of him had been taken from a distance as he would shy away from cameras if he saw them.

Hermione remembered being shocked by how handsome he had grown up to be. His pointy features and narrow shoulders had made way for a tall, well-built physique and yes, even she had had to admit, a beautifully chiselled face. His lips were full, his hair looked soft, his skin was immaculate.

All that changed though, after the vicious murder of Lucius Malfoy.

The brutality of the murder had been leaked to the press, and had made for shocking reading. Malfoy was now written about with fearful reverence, painted as a beautiful devil, a wolf in sheep's clothing.

He was pictured scowling and malevolent, snatched photos of him as he had been marched in handcuffs from the manor, soaked in his father's blood.

The pictures of his bloodied hands and shirt had stayed with Hermione long after she'd seen them.

He had had blood running down his face, the silver of his eyes staring wildly out of the red splatters covering him, he even had blood staining the blonde of his hair.

Those pictures had shocked the wizarding community.

Malfoy had looked absolutely monstrous and the fact that he had escaped custody shortly afterward had sent the general public into a wild panic.

The articles about him had come in thick and fast ever since.

There hadn't been many pictures, mostly blurry, ambiguous images that might or might not have been him, snatched shots of the back of his head or a cloaked figure, among numerous reports of unconfirmed sightings.

Hermione folded the paper with a sigh and hid it from Blaise's view as he reached her desk and they made their way to the cafe for a coffee.

As they settled themselves at a table ten minutes later, Hermione watched Blaise closely. He looked so unhappy. She had never seen Blaise be anything other than exuberant and full of humour, he could find the fun in any situation.

Blaise was truly one of her favourite people in the world, she was grateful every day that not only did she get to work with him, but that he was also in a relationship with her best friend.

Ginny and Blaise had been engaged for just over a year, their relationship was sometimes tumultuous, but passionate.

Hermione often found it difficult to be stuck in the middle of them during a fight, but even harder to be with them when they made up and were all over each other, their barely concealed passion making her blush as she sat next to them on Molly Weasley's squashy sofa.

Blaise placed the coffees down on the table along with a plain croissant for her, and a pain au chocolat for him. They sat for a while in easy silence, sipping at their coffees, and she watched as he picked at his pastry, he clearly had no appetite.

She cleared her throat.

'I was thinking today, of conducting some preliminary interviews with people known to have been close to Malfoy.'

He raised an eyebrow.

'I thought you were desperate to start looking at the memories, and those books?'

'I am,' she replied, but I'm waiting for them to be released into evidence, and then I need a slot at the Pensieve. Harry is taking a look at Garrus Flint's recollections this morning, before he's released from custody.

Blaise nodded, 'Yes, he's asked me to go in with him for that.' He took a sip of his coffee. 'Who are you planning on speaking to?'

Hermione took her notepad from her pocket and flicked through the notes she'd made early that morning as she'd paced her living room at 5am, after giving up on going back to sleep.

'I'm planning on visiting Theodore Nott and Pansy Parkinson first. They were known associates of Malfoy's right up until his father's murder, and also, their house isn't far from here. I can go there and get back in time for my slot at the Pensieve at 12.00.'

Blaise paused with his coffee cup halfway to his mouth.

‘Theo and Pansy? What are you expecting them to tell you?’

‘I don’t know, anything. I want to know more about who he really was, not what the bloody Prophet said about him.’

Blaise rubbed the back of his neck uncomfortably.

‘If you really think they are worth speaking to. I doubt they know much, and isn’t it a bit soon? He only died yesterday.’

Hermione narrowed her eyes slightly as she studied him, Blaise looked firmly down at the table, not meeting her gaze.

She just could not get a handle on what was going on in his head.

Blaise was being shifty, his usually open face so closed, guarded. Hermione felt guilty for thinking it, but she was sure he was hiding something from her.

She reached a hand across the table to him.

‘Are you sure you’re ok Blaise? This case seems to be getting to you.’

He finally raised his eyes to hers.

‘I’m fine, I just have a bad feeling that’s all.’ He said eventually.

‘I think Draco Malfoy had secrets, dark secrets that I’m not sure we truly want to know the answer to.’

An hour later Hermione was crossing the road on her way to Theodore Nott and Pansy Parkinson’s huge townhouse.

As she approached the beautiful house, she felt the usual unwelcome twist of bitterness in her stomach. These pure blood witches and wizards still enjoyed the finer things in life, despite their parents Death Eater status and Voldemort’s death.

If there was one thing that never changed in the wizarding world, it was the fact that money bought influence.

None of the families associated with Voldemort had seemed to truly pay the price for their past crimes, these two appeared to be living a life of luxury, the house oozed moneyed sophistication, even from the outside.

She approached the door and rapped the heavy knocker in what she thought was a decisive, businesslike manner.

She waited as she heard brisk footsteps approach the door.

It swung open, and Pansy Parkinson stood before her.

Her hair was still her trademark sleek, black bob, her clothes expensively tailored, a fitted black dress and seamed tights, a pair of sharp stiletto heels on her feet.

However, Hermione's eyes were drawn immediately to Pansy's puffy, tearstained face.

She had clearly been crying before coming to the door, her eyes were rimmed red and bloodshot, she clutched a tissue inbetween her fingers and her breathing hitched as she saw Hermione stood there.

She said nothing as Theo came up behind her, his face also pale and wan.

His dark blue eyes widened as he saw Hermione standing there, and he put a hand on Pansy's shoulder and squeezed.

'Her- Granger,' he muttered.

'How can we help you?'

She looked at the two of them, her voice suddenly stuck in her throat. She was intruding on their grief. Maybe she had come too soon.

'I-I'm sorry to disturb you both,' she stuttered out eventually.

'As you can probably guess, I'm here on behalf of the DMLE to ask you some questions regarding Draco Malfoy.'

Pansy's eyes widened and she opened her mouth to reply, before Theo's hand tightened on her shoulder again.

'Yes, yes of course, come in,' he said, his voice level and polite.

Pansy turned to look at him, her face tight with an emotion Hermione could not decipher. She stood back to allow Hermione to enter, her eyes narrowed on Hermione, her gaze not leaving her for a second.

Theo led Hermione down a long, shiny tiled hallway and Hermione took in the elegant opulence of the townhouse, the tasteful minimalist decor screamed money.

She tried not to feel the stab of jealousy, but it came all the same.

Pansy followed close behind them, practically breathing down Hermione's neck.

Her skin prickled as she followed Theo's sweeping hand to a glass table in the center of the huge, white marble topped kitchen and sat down on a black leather seat.

The two of them stood, facing Hermione, neither of them saying a word.

Pansy seemed to be breathing hard, her eyes glinting as she faced Hermione. Theo was calmer, more controlled.

'Can I get you a drink?' He asked in his crisp, cut glass accent.

'Coffee? Water? A fire whisky perhaps?'

'No, no thank you,' Hermione replied. Trying to keep her nerves out of her voice.

'As I said, I'm investigating the death of Draco Malfoy. I'm aware that you both maintained a relationship with Mr Malfoy from a young age, and I'm keen to find out anything you may possibly be able to share with me regarding his experiences as a child, or anything you can

tell me about his years on the run.

I'm evidence gathering, in the initial stages right now, obviously.

Basically, anything you can tell me about how he came to be in the Hogs Head, or anything regarding his father's murder or his actions afterwards, would be a huge help as we begin this investigation.'

Pansy's eyes had widened as Hermione spoke, the look on her face becoming more incredulous with every word she uttered.

She suddenly stood up, slamming both hands on the table.

You really know nothing do you?' She spat, her face red, eyes wild.

Theo was instantly at her side, his hand on her wrist, a warning in his eyes.

'Pansy,'

She shook him off, rounding on Hermione again.

'You truly have no idea! How the hell-' her words abruptly cut off as Theo almost shouted now, the loss of control making Hermione jump.

'Pansy! Stop!' He took hold of her by the shoulders and marched her away from Hermione and into an adjacent room.

Hermione felt herself shaking, but she moved quickly across the room to look through the small gap in the door.

Pansy was crying now, deep wracking sobs. Theo had her in his arms, smoothing her hair, kissing her cheeks.

'Pans, Pans, I know it's hard. This is what he wanted, he wanted it like this,'

She sobbed even harder and clung to him, her chest heaving, her eyes looking up into his in desperation.

'I can't do it Theo, it's too hard, I can-' she cut off as Theo looked towards the door and caught sight of Hermione.

He kissed Pansy again and left the room, shutting the door behind him on Pansy as she stood, her hands limp by her sides, sobbing as though her heart was breaking.

'Unfortunately Miss Granger I fear this is all too much for my wife, and I'm going to need you to leave. Immediately.'

Hermione swallowed, moved by the level of Pansy's distress. She had always seemed such a cold, unfeeling girl at Hogwarts. Hermione had never seen her show weakness.

She nodded weakly and allowed him to guide her to the door. He looked sadly at her as he saw her to the step, something impossible to read in his eyes, as though he were trying to tell her something.

She opened her mouth, to ask him if there was anything he could tell her, but before she could, he swung the door shut into her face.

She walked back out to the road, and looked back to the house.

Pansy was silhouetted in the window, huge sobs wracking her body. Theo swept back into the room and took her in his arms.

She watched the two of them, stood in an embrace for several minutes, and as she looked, she was sure Theo was crying too.

Crimson

Hermione - May 2006

Hermione stood on the street, her face burning with embarrassment and contrition, and she watched Pansy and Theo cry through the large sash window at the front of the house, the lamplight illuminating them within.

Pansy's body shook with the force of her anguish, convulsing with each deep sob. Theo stood holding her tightly in his arms, his own shoulders shaking. She felt obscene watching their sorrow, like a voyeur, but she couldn't look away.

Crying like this over a murderer? Over someone so evil, so cruel?

Hermione jumped as Theo suddenly let go of Pansy and picked up an ornament from the table, hurling it against the wall with force, shards ricocheting back at them both, showering him.

Pansy didn't even flinch, nor protect herself from the flying glass. She watched as Theo lowered himself to the sofa now, head in his hands and Pansy sat next to him, they held each other, their fingers grasping at one another, lost in their anguish.

Hermione turned and walked away.

As she walked, she ruminated over every aspect of her interaction with Parkinson and Nott. She thought about what Theo had said to Pansy- 'He wanted it this way.' 'He' could only mean Malfoy, but what had he wanted? Did he mean Draco's suicide? He must, it was the only thing that made sense in context.

Furthermore, his words confirmed to Hermione that they had both been in recent contact with Malfoy.

They knew something - more than something. Their grief was more than that of an old family friend, Pansy had looked broken.

She thought about how Pansy had looked at her, the incredulous rage, as though Hermione was personally offending her with her questions. None of it made any sense.

When she got back to the office, Harry was stood with Blaise, their heads were together, voices low.

They both looked up as she entered, she walked stiffly, feeling almost bruised, her heart aching from her visit with Pansy and Theo.

'How did your interview go?' Harry asked, his face slightly disapproving. 'Maybe it was a bit soon Hermione, don't you think you should have left it a day or two?'

Blaise looked at her guiltily. He'd obviously shared his sentiments with Harry.

‘Did they give you anything interesting?’

Hermione knew her emotions would be writ on her face, ‘No,’ she said and walked away, back to her desk.

She sat heavily, the weight of the grief she had just been party to making her feel slightly sick. She could see that there was a new file on her desk, case photos from the scene.

She didn’t know if she could look at them yet. She needed to recover herself first.

Harry finished speaking with Blaise, and walked past Hermione’s desk.

‘Are you ok Hermione? You look a bit- off, was everything ok at Nott’s?’ there was concern on his face, she looked over towards Blaise, who was sat, eyes firmly cast down, frowning at his copy of the case photos.

‘Yes, it was fine, they just didn’t have much to tell me that was all.’ She didn’t know why she didn’t tell Harry what had happened. She thought maybe she wanted to discuss it with Blaise first.

‘I think this case is weighing heavy on all of us,’ Harry said. ‘Are you ok to carry on with it? I can ask Simons to take over if you-,’

‘No!’ Hermione said, slightly louder than she intended to. ‘Blaise and I are the right people for this case, we have the background knowledge on Malfoy, not to mention the skill set.

We will find out how he came to be in that pub Harry, and I’d thank you not to question my professionalism, you of all people should know that I will go to the ends of the earth to solve any case I am given, I wouldn’t let the fact that I knew the subject ten years ago impact my work.’

She felt flushed in her face, realising she had let her emotions get the better of her.

Harry though, looked suitably cowed. She had used her ‘Hermione’ voice on him, something she rarely did any more. Despite the fact he was technically her boss, he did know that she was a good Auror, and he couldn’t take her off this case.

Harry held up his hands and backed away, ‘Okay, of course Hermione, I just know it’s bound to be slightly more emotionally taxing that’s all, if you’re sure you’re ok, we wont talk about it again.’

‘I am okay,’ she snapped, and busied herself opening and closing drawers, indicating that she was done with the conversation.

‘We’re going in to look at Flint’s memories in ten minutes if you want to come?’ Harry said, a peace offering.

‘Yes, most definitely, thanks Harry.’ She offered him a small smile, her way of accepting, and he finally walked away.

She let out a breath, she would need to get herself under control, she needed to be less emotionally involved in this case, remember that Malfoy was a murderer, that the people who

were showing so much grief over him were also from Death Eater, pureblood families, that their morals didn't align with hers, and their sorrow over his death could just as easily be to do with some plot for power that she didn't know about.

She wished she could make herself believe that.

Hermione wondered when the memories and diaries would be returned from evidence, she left her desk and walked the short distance down to Katie Bell's office.

Katie was in charge of handling and documenting evidence, she had access to the archives of physical evidence, memories deemed vital to cases and also interview transcripts etcetera. She looked up from the scroll she was reading as Hermione entered.

'Hermione, hi, have you come about the Malfoy evidence?'

'Hi', Hermione smiled warmly at Katie, realising that she had probably been a bit short with her the day before. 'Yes, I was hoping it would be on my desk by now, I've got the viewing of Garrus Flint's memories in a moment, but I was really hoping to take a look at the diaries afterwards, before my slot at the Penseive.'

Katie's enthusiasm from the day before was gone. 'Ah, umm, yes, about the diaries,' she said. 'There's been a problem'.

'What kind of a problem?'

Katie looked disappointed. 'Well,' she hesitated, 'We cant seem to actually be able to open them.'

'What do you mean you cant open them?' Hermione asked, feeling the faint stirrings of irritation at Katie again. It wasn't her fault, Hermione knew she could be impatient, but Katie had told her they would be on her desk, hadn't they already been checked?

'Yes, ah, there seems to be some sort of charm on them to have sealed them shut. We can see they all belong to Malfoy, the handwriting on the front of each one matches up with handwriting samples we have in evidence, but we can't physically open any of them to read the contents.'

She gave Hermione an apologetic look. 'I'm afraid I got a bit ahead of myself last night after opening the bag.'

Hermione felt instantly deflated. The diaries could have given them instantly available, vital evidence.

'Where are they now?'

They've still got them down in the Curse Breaking Division, they're trying all sorts of unlocking charms but so far, nothing is working. You can see them, take a look at them, but there's no way currently to look inside. Whatever charm has been put on them is a powerful one, one we've never seen here before.'

Hermione sighed in frustration. Why had Malfoy placed them so deliberately next to him, if they couldn't be read?

'Okay, thanks Katie, I'll head down there after the viewing'. She left feeling deflated and headed back to her desk.

Blaise was stood, ready to go to the viewing.

'It didn't go well then? With Parkinson and Nott?'

'You didn't expect it to.'

'No. I didn't. Pansy, she's not the most amenable at the best of times, I can't imagine her wanting to speak to anyone from the DMLE, particularly not this soon.' She knew he was right, but she didn't want to admit it.

'How well did you know them? Pansy and Theo?'

Blaise sighed. 'We were all good friends as kids, me, Malfoy, Pansy and Theo. To a lesser extent Crabbe and Goyle.' He added. 'We spent a lot of time unsupervised at social events, and then obviously Hermione, we were good friends at school.' He paused, looking slightly pained.

'We were close, our upbringing, it made us cling to each other, I know you think we were all just a bunch of spoiled rich kids, but it could be tough.'

Hermione tried not to let her derision show on her face. She looked back at how they had all acted in school it was very hard to feel sorry for any of them. Blaise saw it there anyway.

'You can't imagine what life was like Hermione, being the child of a Death Eater, we didn't get much say in how we viewed the world, we were told there was one way and one way only. We were taught to hate, from a young age. That can impact on you as a person, it made us closed off, wary of people. We were close, we had each other and we didn't need anyone else.'

'You all always seemed fully on board with your parents views,' Hermione said, not meaning to sound bitter.

'A lot of people, seem a lot of things,' Blaise said. 'You don't know Hermione, you weren't in that world. We weren't bad people, none of us, not even Malfoy. He just had a raw deal.'

'A raw deal?' Hermione was incredulous. 'He was a pampered little weasel! He was awful to everybody, and look how he turned out Blaise! How can you say he wasn't bad. He almost killed Dumbledore, he did kill his father! And anyway, if they were all so great, why did you defect? Why did you join the Order?'

Blaise sighed. His brown eyes looked haunted again, he was holding things back, Hermione knew before he even opened his mouth.

'Like I said Hermione, we were a product of our environment, particularly Malfoy. There was never any hope for him. I- I saw the way things were going, I heard the whisperings and I just

wanted out. My mother, she didn't care about me, she was just focused on the next rich pureblood she could marry.

Malfoy, he was steadily losing himself under the pressure from his family, the pressure to do well at school, to excel at everything. He wasn't in a good way by sixth year.

After Cedric died and Voldemort started making his comeback, it did something to Malfoy. He was lost, he changed.

He took the dark mark just after fifth year, I just didn't agree with it, I didn't want to see the wizarding world the way Voldemort did.

Draco he, he really started losing his grip on reality around when Dumbledore died, he would say things, things that hadn't happened, he was talking about power, about being ready. He kind of fell in on himself, our friendship wasn't the same.

I had nothing keeping me there, and then, when I met Ginny, even before we were officially together, she was all I needed. I could see the light in her, and I followed it.

I was sick of the darkness Hermione.

I've got no idea what happened in the past few years, how he managed to overthrow Voldemort, what happened with Lucius. He was a stranger to me by then, they all were.

The only thing I'll say is that I would have never thought that the Malfoy I knew, could have been capable of the things he did. Something happened to him Hermione and I'm fucking determined to find out what.'

Hermione didn't quite know how to respond. It was the most Blaise had ever said to Hermione about his reasons for switching sides and it left Hermione with more questions than answers. How on earth had Malfoy had a raw deal?

She couldn't ask him any more though, as Harry appeared to take them down to the Pensieve. They chatted as they walked, but Hermione couldn't concentrate.

What had been going on in Draco Malfoy's life to make him so troubled? He had always seemed to have it all, a circle of adoring friends, more like followers, a constant gaggle of female admirers, a loving family, he'd been Snape's pet.

The way Blaise had described him was so different to her recollections of the cruel, jeering bully she had known.

She had never seen any signs that he was struggling. The only thing she had seen was that yes, he was extremely motivated to do well, their academic rivalry had been a thorn in her side all the way through their schooling, he was one of the only people who could ever match her in terms of knowledge and skill.

They arrived at the Memory Viewing Suite and Harry unlocked the door, leading them in. The room which held the Pensieve had controlled access, due to the rarity of them. The Pensieve was crucial to the DMLE and could only be used by senior Aurors.

He lead them in, heading over to the filing cabinet which held the currently active investigations, before withdrawing the memory that had been taken from Garrus Flint the day before.

‘Let’s take a look,’ Harry said. ‘I’m sure there’s not much here but I want to look before letting him go. It needs to be sooner rather than later, I’ve been told he’s making life difficult down in the cells, wanting to get back to his pub. I’m sure you’ve heard Hermione that Malfoy’s books are inaccessible?’

‘Yes, I have,’ Hermione glowered. ‘But I’m going to make a start on his memories later today.’

‘Great,’ replied Harry. ‘I’m sure those will hold the key to how he ended up where he did. From my perspective, he’s dead now, so at least the murders should slow down. I’ve got a stack of cases piling up on my desk, and a press conference later to discuss Malfoy. You sure you’re ok to take over the memory archives?’

‘Definitely,’ she replied, ‘and Blaise will oversee the autopsy’. Blaise nodded, not looking thrilled at the prospect.

‘Lets get going.’ She said, anxious to see what Flint had seen.

Hermione and Blaise positioned themselves at the Pensieve, their hands resting on the edge of the stone basin, and Harry poured the silvery liquid in. Then the three of them leant forward and immersed their faces into the memory.

They were instantly transported to the dank bar of the Hogs Head. Hermione was regretful of the fact that she could smell the bar, as well as see and hear it.

Garrus Flint was at the bar, busy serving. The bar was full, rowdy. He moved around, pouring drinks and conversing with his customers. There were groups of grubby looking patrons at most of the tables, several had people sitting alone.

Hermione recognised the witch she had seen the day before and made a mental note to find out who she might be. She was sat alone again, a glass of amber liquid clutched between her dirty fingers.

There looked to be a group of half- giants perched on some of the stools, their knees up around their ears, and a group of wizards gambled, playing exploding snap and laughing drunkenly along the bar.

Flint disappeared into the kitchen and reappeared a moment later, looking harried, plates of something unidentifiable in both hands. Hermione noticed with disgust that one of his grubby thumbs rested in the sauce on one of the plates.

He eventually returned behind the bar, just as the bell over the door rang and a figure entered, the figure was cloaked, much like many of the other patrons, however, this cloak wasn’t dirty, or threadbare, this cloak looked expensive.

The person strode in, the walk purposeful, but the head was still down, face towards the floor. She couldn't see if the cloak had the green lining.

Hermione looked over at Blaise and Harry, also in the memory with her, did it look like it could have been Malfoy?

The figure was certainly tall, they had ducked as they came through the door. She looked down, the dragon skin shoes were there, along with the pressed suit trousers. The figure approached Flint at the bar.

Flint looked up and immediately flinched. He froze where he was, Hermione watched the blood drain from his face. He looked around furtively before turning back to the figure, he didn't say anything.

The noise of the bar meant that Hermione couldn't hear what the figure said to Flint either, but he paled further again and nodded. He was stock still, his hands flat on the bar, he seemed to be sweating slightly.

He motioned behind him, to the rooms up the stairs and the figure nodded. An arm flashed out then, Hermione saw a silver cufflink, a flash of a tattoo on a pale wrist. The hand was long fingered, rings glinting, a signet ring, a snake and a skull. It was Malfoy, and Flint knew it was Malfoy. The look of fear on his face was only increasing.

The hand extended to Flint for only a moment, and then Flint's features seemed to relax, the fear melting away. He turned away from the figure and picked up some glasses he had been cleaning and resumed running his dirty dishcloth around the inside, doing nothing except further smearing them.

His face was serene, blank. He had been Confunded Hermione thought, although his expression wasn't quite that of someone who had been Confunded, they usually looked more addled. Flint just looked calm.

The figure then strode past Flint and up the stairs, no one else in the bar seemed to have noticed him, no-one looked up from their drinks. Hermione realised also, there was no sign of the diaries, or the canvas bag. Maybe they were charmed to fit into a pocket.

The last thing she saw as the figure descended the stairs was a flash of plain black sock. It made her feel sad again for some reason, as she thought about the limp ankles of the hanging body, the socks, appearing so ordinary, it was something you did every day, putting on socks, even, apparently on the day you killed yourself.

She looked at Harry and Blaise, and Harry nodded, the three of them abruptly left the memory, satisfied that Flint had seen Malfoy, but had no memory of it, it was one of the scenarios they had expected. They lifted their wet heads from the Pensieve, and Harry took out his wand and flicked it over them, drying them instantly.

She opened her mouth to speak, to tell Harry they needed to speak to Flint again, but before she could, she was aware of a commotion out in the hallway. Blaise strode to the door and opened it, there were several Aurors outside, their wands raised.

‘We need Potter now,’ one said, craning his neck into the room. ‘Or anyone, we need help down in the cells.’

Harry and Hermione now both reached the door and all three immediately began walking down to the lower part of the building, where suspects were held. Harry lead the way, Hermione and Blaise following behind, their own wands raised.

‘What’s happened?’ he demanded as he walked.

‘Its Flint, he’s dead.’

‘Dead?’

‘Yes sir, he just randomly started convulsing. He was shouting about leaving and then suddenly he dropped, none of us could do anything. Blood, it was coming out of him, everywhere, his eyes, his ears, his mouth. We tried healing him, tried to stop it but he died in seconds sir-’ he stopped speaking as they reached the scene unfolding at the holding cell where Flint had been kept.

The floor was awash with red, the walls, the bed, it was an ever-growing puddle, creeping towards the door. Harry stepped back to avoid it, almost colliding with Hermione and Blaise stood behind him. Hermione looked down at the body on the floor, Flint most certainly was dead. He was completely exsanguinated, his body was white, bloodless.

Hermione stood stock still, taking in the scene. Someone had made sure Flint could never be interviewed, or give another memory, ever again.

There was no way anyone could have accessed him here.

She thought back to Malfoy’s hand shooting out, the brief second it had wavered in front of Flint. He had done this, she was sure of it. Whatever dark magic he had used on Flint had lead him to bleed out on the floor.

Malfoy was still killing people, even when he was dead himself.

The DMLE was in chaos after that, with another body on their hands.

Hermione’s slot at the Pensieve was cancelled, she’d need to do it tomorrow Harry said.

The priority for the rest of the day was ensuring that there hadn’t been a security breach, strengthening security and going down to the Hogs Head to identify further witnesses.

Blaise and Hermione worked until gone eight o clock without a break.

When it was finally time to clock off, they were exhausted, glad to be done for the day. Blaise gave her a quick hug and told her he was off, Hermione pecked him on the cheek and disappeared home. She walked into her dark, lonely house and sat, slumped on the sofa. Her body was exhausted, but her mind was racing. So much had occurred since she had left that morning.

She let her mind wander back to Pansy and Theodore Nott.

‘My wife’, he had said.

They were married. Hermione felt the bitter pang of being alone again. Someone as foul as Pansy Parkinson was married. She had someone who loved her, Harry had Ron, Ginny had Blaise, who did she have?

Hermione liked to pretend that it didn't sting, but the truth was that it did, she wanted someone to hold her, to tell her she was amazing, that she was doing a good job.

She shook her head to clear her mind and headed to the kitchen to make a sweet tea, not bothering with dinner.

She just wanted to go to bed, the sooner tomorrow came the better. She could finally get a look at Malfoy's memories. She desperately wanted something to work from- a starting point. So far, everything in their investigation had been a dead end.

Hermione settled into bed with her tea and let her mind wander over what they knew so far.

'Hermione,'

She came up from the deep, darkness of sleep, had someone said her name?

'Hermione,'

Her name again.

She opened her eyes and looked across the room.

Draco was here.

'Draco,' she sat up. 'Draco, is that you?'

She squinted in the dark as he moved out of the shadows. He smiled as he moved towards her, a heartbreaking, sad smile, his silver eyes brimming with love.

She lay on the bed and looked up at him as he knelt down, knees between hers, and leaned over her. She felt tears prick her eyes as she looked up into his beautiful face.

'Draco, you're here.'

'I'm here,'

She sobbed.

I'm here Hermione. It's ok now,'

'Oh Draco,' she cried. She wrapped her arms around his neck and pulled him down towards her, his forearms flexing either side of her head.

He kissed her, gently, searingly, his full lips soft and sensuous, his eyes never leaving hers.

She ran her fingers up through the soft blonde hair at the nape of his neck, and pulled him tighter to her, opening her mouth as his tongue gently slipped in through her lips. She let her

own tongue slide over his and he groaned softly into her mouth.

‘Hermione,’

She opened her legs and wrapped them around his narrow hips, feeling him settle between her legs, she could feel the insistent pressure of him, pressing hard against her core, and she sucked in a sharp breath.

She was so ready for him, desperate for him.

He brought a hand up and ran one of her curls through his fingers, before letting it drop and cupping her face in his hand, she felt the cold of his rings contrasting with the warmth of his hand.

‘Oh Draco,’ the tears were leaking from her eyes. She was enveloped by him, in the sweet apple and bonfire scent of him, she needed him, inside her, now.

She moved her hands from his neck, lowering them to his belt and he looked down at her hands,

‘Hermi-‘ his words suddenly cut off. A strangled sound coming from his throat.

She looked up at him in alarm. His eyes were wide, his face turning an alarmingly pale shade.

‘Draco?’ He suddenly began to move back off her, but he didn’t manage to get past his knees before he coughed again, and blood bubbled from his throat, cascading from between his lips, out and over her.

‘Draco!’ she screamed, scrambling to sit up. He didn’t answer her, he couldn’t.

More blood flowed out of his mouth, it was coming from his nose now too, his silver eyes were staring, terrified. He tried to put a hand over his mouth, but the blood flowed still, out between his fingers, turning his palm scarlet, dripping off his rings.

They were both slippery with it, it ran hot and violent, down his naked chest to his lap, covering his stomach and thighs. It dripped onto Hermione, onto her face, her neck.

Hermione screamed, she tried to reach for him, to do what she didn’t know, to stop him bleeding somehow. But she couldn’t. His eyes rolled back in his head. He fell, back, onto the bed, and she couldn’t see him anymore. She screamed his name, but her vision was fading, darkening, where was Draco? What was happening?

Hermione sat bolt upright, her heart pounding. The dim moonlight of the room suddenly coming into focus. She could still hear her own screams echoing in her ears, she scrambled back, still feeling the hot wetness of the blood covering her.

She grasped for her wand on her nightstand, uttered a trembling ‘Lumos,’ and shone her wand around the room.

No-one was there, of course they weren’t.

It was a nightmare, a horrible dream. She'd been dreaming of Draco Malfoy- again. She closed her eyes, squeezed them shut, and then leant over and vomited over the side of her bed.

You Will Know What Pain Is

Draco - August 1991

It was finally happening.

The time Draco had spent his whole life waiting for was here.

Just two weeks until he left for Hogwarts.

So why wasn't he excited?

He found it hard to feel much of anything any more.

He felt like sometime over the past year, that he had stopped being a real boy.

He felt that he was like the rocking horse he had had when he was small.

A wooden facade of something real. Eyes unblinking, stood stock still, easy to damage, but with no reaction when you did.

He thought back to when he had carved scratches into the horse with the knife, his initials.

It hadn't reacted, it still kept the same shit-eating expression it had always had.

Wooden, false.

That's what he was now, thought Draco. You could do anything to him, say anything, and his reactions weren't real.

When people spoke to him, Draco had to physically remind himself to arrange his expression into what he thought it should be, what people would expect of him.

A smile? A grimace? What was it you wanted?

Whenever his parents took him out of the manor, to a social gathering with the other pureblood families, or to Hogsmeade, he watched other people, fascinated.

So that's what joy was supposed to look like? or fear or worry or humour.

He tried to mirror his friends expressions, Blaise's easy grin, Theo's sarcastic eyebrow raise, Pansy's arrogant smile. He copied them and then practiced them in the mirror, the same way he practised his father's self-important air.

He wanted to make sure that everyone thought he was a real boy.

He didn't really know what the true Draco Malfoy looked like now, who he was.

He had been alone for so much of his life, ignored unless he was being hurt, or trotted out as the perfect little Malfoy heir.

He felt like he had learned his part perfectly, his facade was immaculately in place, just like the way his mother styled his hair.

He was a living doll.

Draco had spent the last year preparing, always preparing.

He had read every book in the Malfoy library he thought.

He had discovered that what he did when his father tortured him was called 'Occluding,' and he did it well.

His next aim was to learn how to perform 'Legillimens.' But he needed help with that, it was tricky.

Hopefully he could learn it at Hogwarts.

He wasn't allowed a wand due to being under age, and he'd never ask to try one, but he was becoming adept at wandless magic.

He hid his skill from his parents, but he was able to do small things like opening and closing doors or moving things by himself. He even levitated one of the house elves last week.

He thought maybe a real boy would have found that funny.

He had read 'Hogwarts- A History' from cover to cover, several times. He wanted to be prepared before he went, just like his father- always prepared.

And anyway, he liked being in the library, it was peaceful.

He didn't go outside as much any more, it was too tricky.

Draco struggled sometimes now, with moving around too much. He found climbing the trees hard, and he couldn't run the way he used to. His muscles couldn't seem to hold him firm any more. They shook and gave up when he tried anything too strenuous.

His skin had faded from the sun-kissed brown he'd been as a young boy, staying and playing outside all day long. Out of sight and out of mind.

Now he was pale, pointed, with permanent dark circles under his eyes.

Much to Draco's distress, he had developed a stutter and a slight limp over the past year. He thought maybe because of all the times he had been Crucioed.

His mother had tried to convince his father to stop performing the Cruciatus on Draco as often. People would notice, she had said.

Did Lucius want people laughing at his son? They would, if it didn't stop, she told him. What if Draco kept the stutter at school, maybe even as an adult?

What kind of a general couldn't even utter a command without stumbling over each syllable?

His father had ignored her, had said he would beat it out of him when the time came.

Draco had sat at the dinner table between them both and listened to the conversation impassively, he had no reaction to it internally or externally.

It were as if they were talking about someone else, a boy he had never heard of.

He had just continued delicately cutting up his meal and trying to get the pieces into his mouth without his hands shaking too much.

Some of his father's friends had noticed his stutter when they'd been at the manor recently. They had been drinking in the smoking room and he'd been skulking past on his way to the library.

They had called him in, to fuck with him, Draco thought.

Corban Yaxley had called his name, motioned him into the room. He was sat in one of leather wing back chairs with Barty Crouch.

His father had slipped out, probably dealing with his mother and one of her drunken 'episodes' Draco imagined.

They watched him walk towards them, desperately trying to hide his limp, and they took great pleasure in telling him that the great Harry Potter would starting Hogwarts at the same time as he would be.

As if he didn't know, as if his father hadn't told him a hundred times.

The Boy Who Lived.

Who could compete with Harry Potter?
Crouch had asked, his foul tongue darting out.

Did Lucius really think that he, Draco had any chance of standing out in his year with Potter there?

Nothing he did would matter, Yaxley had tittered.

Old Lucius was going to be furious.

They had both laughed, and then Crouch had amused himself by throwing stinging hexes at Draco while he tried to dodge them.

He'd finally had enough, and wandlessly smashed both their glasses, shattering glass shards into their faces and firewhisky into their eyes.

They had been livid. His father had walked back in to see Crouch kicking Draco in the head whilst Yaxley held him in a body bind.

Lucius watched them both casually, waited until their anger was done, then flicked his wand, releasing Draco from the binds.

He scrambled to stand, swaying, unsteady on his feet, dripping more of his blood onto the manor floor. His head was spinning from the force of the kicks. He could tell that his nose was broken, again.

Draco wondered how many times a nose could break without collapsing.

He realised with horror that one of his front teeth was loose.

Thank the gods he could heal himself now.

Draco had been nauseated when he had first learned that there were healing spells and potions.

He had sat in the library, looking down at the simple spells in the book, and rocked with the realisation that his mother could have easily eased his suffering as a small child, used an Epikey to mend small breaks, regrown his bones if she'd really wanted to.

He thought back to his broken shoulder, his arm, the agony he had been in for the best part of a year.

But no one had ever healed him. And now at eleven he was hobbling like a broken old man.

When Crouch had shown his father the smashed glasses, he had demanded an explanation. Draco had tried to come up with a reasonable answer but he couldn't get it out, he was in pain, his jaw clenched, trying to hide it.

He couldn't say the words he needed to say, couldn't get past the first syllable.

Crouch had thought that that was hilarious. He had slapped his knees and looked to Yaxely, a look of gleeful amusement on his face.

'W-w-w- what's the m-m-matter boy?' He asked, his face alight.

'Kn-kn-kneazle got your tongue?'

Crouch and Yaxely had dissolved into fits of laughter until his father had shot violent curses at them both.

Shutting them up.

But Lucius hadn't done it for Draco, he was simply embarrassed.

He made Draco kneel in the glass and pick up every shard by hand, ignoring the blood that smeared on the floor.

He had then allowed Crouch to pour firewhisky into the bleeding slices on Draco's palms and knees as penance for his crimes that day.

But at least he stopped Crucioing him after that.

And now Draco only had a few weeks before he could escape.

He had finally done it.

He had managed to stop himself from stuttering, training himself for hours in the library. He also healed some of the more obvious scars on his face, arms and hands. Places people would see.

There was one exception however, one scar he couldn't get rid of.

His mother had only truly hit him once, and only once.

She had been drunk, he'd been on his way to bed after reading in the library for the best part of twelve hours, when they had passed each other in the hall.

Narcissa had paused on her way to the wine cellar, had stopped and turned her fuzzy eyes to him, calling his name sloppily.

When Draco had looked at her, she'd held her arms out for a hug.

He'd laughed.

The sound had almost scared him as it bubbled out of him. He didn't know what it was, it had been so long since he'd felt a real laugh come up from his stomach.

But the ridiculousness of the fact that she thought he'd want a hug from her made him really, truly laugh.

Her face had changed in an instant, and Narcissa had backhanded him across the face, the large black diamond ring she wore on her index finger caught him on his cheek. At the time it had been a deep slice, it kept bleeding on and off for days.

So as he began healing himself, Draco kept that scar. A small white silver just over his cheekbone.

He needed it as a reminder that really, she was just as bad as Lucius.

She could have helped him so many times, Draco thought, and she didn't.

He never wanted to forget that.

He got up the next morning with his stomach churning. His father was taking him shopping for robes and books, his first wand.

He was dressed early, but refused breakfast, much to the house elves consternation.

One elf in particular, Moddles had started trying to look after Draco. To protect him in her own way. She would cover for him if he accidentally broke something, or made a mess, she'd warn him of his father's whereabouts in the house and try to feed him up, show him the care he wasn't getting from his parents. He appreciated it, but didn't need it.

He was frustrated this morning as she kept trying to encourage him to eat, his stomach was in knots, he couldn't even force down some orange juice.

Narcissa summoned him and sat him down in front of her dresser mirror so that she could use her wand to fix his hair just the way she liked, slicked back, smooth.

Draco's real hair was wild, stuck up everywhere, but that wouldn't do for a Malfoy. When she was done, his blonde hair gleamed, fixed in place, like a seal, sleek and shiny.

She scrubbed his face with a scourgify until his cheeks had some colour, and shined his new designer shoes.

His robes for the outing were new, opulent, screaming that they had money, that he was a perfect, pureblood prince.

There was one last thing he needed before he left, Narcissa told him, and went to get his father.

A signet ring.

The ring bore the letter 'M' for Malfoy. His father removed it from his own pinky finger and handed it to him.

'Wear this,' he said, the familiar look of disdain on his face.

'All the Malfoy men have worn this ring. It is a symbol of status. You, however disappointing you may be, carry my name and my blood and therefore, when you leave this house and enter the world, represent the Malfoy bloodline.

Maybe wearing this ring will give you some sense of pride, some insight as to what's expected of you.'

Draco slid the ring onto his finger and curled his knuckle inwards. He was never going to take the ring off he decided. He'd wear it like he wore his mother's scar. As a reminder of what he had endured, and would continue to endure.

He had a job to do now.

He was going to make everyone proud.

Hermione - May 2006

Hermione's stomach churned as she dressed for work. She couldn't bend down to put on her shoes without feeling like she might faint, she hadn't eaten, had vomited half the night and not slept at all.

She had been terrified to close her eyes again after the dream, feeling and smelling the hot, wet trickle of the blood on her skin for hours afterward. She felt like she could taste the coppery tang of it between her teeth, like the blood had gotten into her mouth.

But that hadn't been the thing that had tortured her most.

Another feeling had stayed with Hermione, a feeling low in her belly.

The feeling she had gotten when she had looked at the dream version of Draco Malfoy- a terrifying lust, a clawing desperation for him.

Snippets of his face played on repeat in her mind, his smile, his lashes splayed across his cheeks, the colour of his eyes.

She closed her own eyes with desire as the thought of him physically pained her, and swallowed down the feeling of utter wanton need that had coursed through her veins.

She couldn't shake the feeling of it. She felt like she knew exactly what he would have felt like, if the dream had progressed and she had undone his belt buckle, she could see it play out

in her mind, it made her clench her legs together, her body responding even when her mind didn't want to.

Hermione felt like she was losing herself somehow.

Draco Malfoy had meant nothing to her for the last few years, other than being a thorn in the DMLE's side and a haunting presence in everyone's subconscious.

Within two days he had entered her life and her dreams. He took over almost every thought she had.

Hermione thought that maybe she was in some sort of shock after seeing him hanging there. It had been such a traumatic death, and having known him as a child, maybe her brain was struggling to come to terms with his life and death after Hogwarts.

That was all it was, she told herself.

He was evil.

He was dead.

She needed to remember it. She looked over at the copy of the Daily Prophet from the day before, laying, folded on her bedside table, the headline screaming 'DRACO MALFOY DEAD.'

He was dead, and it was her job to find out how and why.

She needed to pull herself together, she finally had the first of the memory viewings today, and then she wanted to go in on the autopsy. She didn't want Blaise to do it alone.

Eventually she managed to leave the house and head into the office.

'Jesus Hermione, are you okay?'

Blaise looked at her from his desk, a somewhat shocked expression on his face.

'Sorry to say it, but you look like shit.'

She managed to roll her eyes at him.

'Charming Blaise, I really don't know what Ginny sees in you.' He smiled but came around his desk to her side.

'Seriously, what's up?'

'I'm ok, I'm just not sleeping that's all.'

Blaise, knowing her better, wrapped her in a warm hug. He put his strong arms around her, the comforting smell of him and softness of his blue knit sweater enveloping her.

Hermione relaxed into the embrace of her best friend and tried not to cry.

She took a few deep, steadying breaths whilst still buried in his jumper and then rearranged her face into her usual business-like expression and moved out of his arms.

Blaise had put a coffee on her desk and she sat and sipped it for a moment, using it as a prop to hide the way her throat worked as she swallowed back tears.

Why was she crying again?

She looked down at her notepad.

‘Ok, so we’ve got the viewings 9-12pm, three hours with the Penseive now, and the autopsy is scheduled for 1pm.

Blaise grimaced, and she grimaced back. They were never fun.

They walked down to the Penseive together, Harry was nowhere to be seen, busy in meetings, dealing with the fallout from the day before, but Blaise had the entry password and unlocked the door to the dark room where the memories were kept.

One of the evidence technicians, probably Katie had lined up the vials of Malfoy’s memories in date order along the top of the current evidence cabinet. Each vial was neatly labelled in Malfoys elegant script, much as the books had been.

She thought back to the books, ‘The life of Draco Malfoy’ he’d written on the front of each one, although those had been numbered, rather than dated as the vials were.

She wondered what kind of game he was playing with them, leaving the books there, but unable to be read.

Maybe the memories would be the same, Hermione thought, another red herring. She thought she’d scream if so. She needed some answers, even just a start point.

Blaise selected the vial that showed the earliest date- March 1986
Malfoy would have been about six, she thought.

She was sure he was born the same year as Harry in 1980.

He brought it to the Penseive and uncorked it. Pouring the shimmering liquid in. Hermione watched as the memory formed on the surface of the basin.

This was it. Hermione thought, finally.

She and Blaise both leaned in.

The manor was as bleak as she remembered, wooden floors, dark walls, heavy drapes and heavy overstuffed furniture, mahogany wood and deep emerald greens everywhere.

The portraits on the walls stared down malevolently, the chandeliers glinted in the candlelight.

The manor seemed still, empty.

She suddenly heard the sound of running feet and a small boy came skidding around the corner. He was skinny and wiry, small for his age with skinned knees poking out of a pair of

tweed shorts, long grey socks and black buckle shoes on his feet. He wore a grey shirt, open at the neck and a waistcoat, it all looked quite uncomfortable, but the little boy didn't seem to notice.

His blonde hair was wild, sticking up at all angles. His face was mischievous, alight with excitement as he ran down the halls. His eyes were large in his face, an almost transparent grey.

He was adorable, Hermione thought.

Draco Malfoy, at age six did not look like the pale, hard faced boy he had been when he began at Hogwarts.

He burst into a room now, where his parents were sat, taking tea at a table.

Lucius Malfoy looked the same as ever, long blonde hair, ice cold eyes, flowing robes and his cane in his hand.

Narcissa was wearing a high collared black lace dress, her hair piled up on top of her head. She started as Draco burst into the room, banging the door on its hinges.

'Mother, father, come and see!' The little boy said. Motioning towards them. 'I've caught a sprite! I've got it in the garden, underneath a plant pot right now!' He was excited, bouncing up and down on his feet.

Lucius looked at him, and then looked behind him to the hallway. There was mud tracked into the room, on the bottoms of Draco's shoes and on his socks.

A few seconds later, there was a sudden loud crack. Hermione didn't realise what it was at first, until she saw the small boy fly through the air.

His father had hexed him. Sending the small body flying back. Draco had landed against a side table, the back of his head cracking hard against the wood. He lay, almost dazed, eyes muddled as he brought up a hand to the back of his head, and brought it away red.

'Lucius- ' Narcissa began. 'He didn't know- ' But Lucius paid her no mind. He advanced on his son, staring down at him. The expression on his face enraged, vicious.

'How many times have you been told, you do not run through this manor with mud on your shoes?' He asked, voice like ice.

Draco looked up, stuttering, 'I- I- I'm sorry Dada, I wanted to show you my- ' his words were cut off as the air left him. Lucius had swung a foot into his stomach.

'Lucius—no!' Narcissa shouted. His wand flicked back and she was instantly silenced. Her mouth moving wordlessly.

Lucius Malfoy continued to kick his six year old son, in his stomach, his legs, his chest. Anywhere he could reach as the boy curled into a ball and tried to protect himself.

Draco cried. He cried and cried but it only seemed to enrage Lucius further.

When he had eventually reached the limit of his rage, he stopped kicking. His hair had come over his face, he was sweating.

He leant down and plucked Draco up by his collar. Pulling him into a sitting position.

Hermione looked on in horror. Blaise had taken her hand as they watched the horrific scene play out.

Draco was dazed, his face a mess of blood, snot and tears. He looked up at his father, one eye already closing and purple.

'You will clean up this mess.' Lucius hissed.

Draco's one good eye was huge, glassy with tears. He looked up into his father's face, the terror and pain clear to see.

Lucius bent down further, a cruel smile lighting over his features.

'You will lick every bit of mud from the floor of this manor. Every bit. If find even one smear of mud you will truly feel my wrath, you will know what pain is then my boy.'

Draco nodded, blood dripping from his nose as he did.

His father watched as he knelt onto the floor, his face in the mud. Hermione watched the tears drip from the small boys eyes as he obeyed his father, and then she could watch no more.

She pulled her face out of the Pensieve, a sob wracking her body. Blaise stood up next to her, his face mirroring her own emotions. They stood together, the shock of what they had both seen rendering them speechless.

Hermione felt it coming again. She managed to stumble from the Pensieve to the corner, bending over and pulling her hair back before releasing another hot stream of vomit onto her shoes.

Make Me Proud, Son

Hermione - May 2006

Blaise held Hermione's hair back as she vomited, her stomach contracting over and over again onto the tiled floor, splashing onto her feet and his, the coffee she had sipped earlier refusing to stay in her stomach.

She squeezed her eyes tightly shut, trying to block out what she had just seen.

He had been so small.

So small.

She couldn't stop her mind's eye from replaying the image of Draco's little body crumpling against the side table.

His fingers, how tiny they had been as he drew them back from his head, crimson with blood. His broken nose, the blood running over those rosy, little boy cheeks. The tears that fell so freely from his eyes.

Hermione couldn't bear it. In all the violence she had seen in her life, she'd never seen a child hurt in such a degrading and brutal way.

And it had been by his own father.

Thinking about the added humiliation of him being made to lick the floor of the manor caused another wave of sickness take over her.

She was sweating, tears running over her own cheeks once her stomach had finally stopped clenching, and she could stand up.

Blaise was now leaning against the Pensieve, a hand over his eyes. He flicked his wand at the mess and motioned for her to come to him. He put an arm around her shoulder, allowing her to collapse limply against his side, and smoothed her hair back, waiting for her to calm down.

'Did you know, Blaise?' She asked.

'When you saw him as a child, did you see injuries on him?'

Blaise shook his head. His brown eyes were dark, haunted by Malfoy's memories as well as his own.

'No, I truly had no idea it started when he was that small Hermione, we were kids. I didn't see him often, and I wouldn't have known what to look for.'

'But you knew? As he got older?'

Blaise looked embarrassed.

‘There were some things he said, inadvertently over the years, and once, I think it was second year, he came back from a home visit with a huge bruise along his side, but he said he’d fallen off his broom.’

Blaise shook his head, eyes staring as he thought back.

‘I had no idea it was like that. He was always so proud, proud to be a Malfoy. So much like his father. I thought he was doted on, I thought his parents adored him.’

‘We all did,’ Hermione said bitterly.

‘Maybe it was a one off? Something had gone wrong maybe, to trigger Lucius?

Maybe he just snapped that day and regretted it?

It could be the reason Malfoy left this particular memory.’

A kind of sickly hope had sprung up in Hermione. She looked at the vials. The next one was from 1987.

‘Shall we look at this one?’

Blaise looked hesitant, ‘Are you sure?’

‘It’s our job Blaise. We will need to look at all of them, no matter how difficult it is.

He nodded, looking slightly drained already. ‘Let’s get this done.’

Blaise squeezed Hermione’s hand as she poured the memory in and they dipped their heads again, down into the shimmering liquid.

Back at the manor.

Such a hateful place, Hermione thought looking around again at the large windows, the heavy drapes, the intricately carved woodwork. It was all just so dark.

Draco was seven now. Only slightly older in years but the change in him outwardly was marked.

Already she could see signs of the stiff, closed off Malfoy she had known from school.

In the memory, he stalked through the manor halls, light on his feet, lithe and wary. He didn’t clatter through like he had in the last memory, he moved like a cat.

He was taller, his hair slightly longer and less wild. He was wearing what looked like a pair of dark wool shorts, tweed again. His shirt was a dark green, black braces over his shoulders. His socks were pushed down to his calves, bunched at the top of the black hobnail boots on his feet.

He was still sun-kissed but his eyes didn’t hold the light the way they had previously.

He looked dimmer, sadder, no rosy cheeks and gleeful, little boy smile.

Hermione could see that he had deep purple finger marks across his right wrist, and his bottom lip was split, only half healed.

He massaged the bruised wrist with his other hand absentmindedly as he walked.

Seven year old Draco's attention had been caught by a noise inside the room. He was almost past the gap in the door when he heard it, and doubled back on himself, stopping and peeking in at the door.

He watched for a long moment, his muscles tense, fingers tight on the door handle and his eye pressed to the gap.

Hermione and Blaise couldn't see what he was watching.

Suddenly Draco took a long step back from the door, his face changed, panic setting into his features. In an instant he had turned on the heel of his boot and he was running, sprinting down the long hallway.

The door of the room he had been peering into was yanked forcefully back and Lucius Malfoy appeared in the hallway.

His hair was messy, he wasn't wearing robes, just trousers and a dress shirt, untucked at the waist, his feet were bare. Hermione had never seen Lucius Malfoy without his expensive robes and his wand, encased within the cane. He was flustered, his icy demeanour fallen away, replaced with a hot, black rage.

He now ran too, turning his head, clearly looking for Draco. Hermione wanted to cover her eyes, she willed the chase to end, for Draco to hide, for Lucius not to find him.

But of course, he did.

Hermione had to force herself to watch, this was evidence. She couldn't close her eyes against the images in the memory.

Lucius had found Draco in what looked to be an unused room. Draco had tried to climb underneath a chaise that was covered with a dust sheet, but his father caught him by his ankle and dragged him out. Draco was panicking, apologising, scrabbling at the wooden floor.

Hermione heard Blaise swear at the sound of the child's nails dragging across the wood. She watched as he dug them in, fingers clawed, scrabbling to be free of his father's vice-like grip, his nails tearing away from the beds, blood streaking the floor.

Hermione didn't know how Draco had survived the beating his father gave him then.

It was unbearable to watch. She closed her eyes against the dull thuds, the sounds of Malfoy crying, begging his father to stop, and worst of all, his small voice calling, calling out for a mother that didn't come.

Lucius Malfoy did not stop until there was suddenly a noise, a dull crack. Draco's sobs suddenly turned into a shriek. An anguished, pain filled shriek. He put a hand up to his arm, near to his shoulder and he screamed, rolling on the ground.

Lucius stopped his attack and watched his son for a moment. Appearing to debate what to do.

*Eventually, he seemed to realise that he had gone far enough.
He sneered down at Draco, the icy poison back in his voice again.*

*'You stay in here. Clean yourself up.
If you dare, even think about telling your mother what you saw in there boy, I'll Avada you.'*

And he marched out. Blonde hair flying behind him.

Draco was left on the floor of the room.

Bleeding.

Hermione and Blaise watched him try to get up and collapse back down, crying into the wood.

They watched his tears darken the grain, blood dribbling from between his lips.

He kept trying.

After a time, Draco put one hand on the ground, the other was still holding his shoulder and they watched him finally struggle to a sitting position, looking around him, biting at a ragged nail.

Hermione desperately wanted to go to him. To comfort him, to hold him and wipe the blood from his small, innocent face. She wondered what he could have possibly seen in that room to make his father react so violently.

She thought of Draco Malfoy as an adult, the images of him in the Prophet as he left the manor for the last time, the blood running down his face again, this time his father's blood rather than his own, and she thought she could finally understand it.

Lucius Malfoy deserved to pay for what he'd done to his helpless son.

Draco Malfoy had been a monster, yes, but so had his father. Watching Draco's suffering, she realised that he hadn't become one through choice, he was Frankenstein's monster all along.

Then, they watched him eventually settle, back down onto the floor, curled in on himself, his chest heaving.

He held his shoulder in one hand, swiped at his bloody nose with the other and then relaxed his battered body onto the wood.

They watched as the little boy begin to drift off into sleep. He tucked his little legs underneath him, his socks still pushed down to his boots, his shorts and shirt torn.

Hermione could barely believe her eyes when seven year old Draco's lips curved up as he lay there, a small, bloodied smile.

She wondered what he could have possibly found to keep him hopeful, in his tragic, difficult life.

She and Blaise were silent as they withdrew from the memory. She heard Blaise sniffle a few times and she kept her eyes off him, letting him have his moment of grief.

Instead, she busied herself siphoning the memory back, and putting the two they had watched into the evidence drawer.

She made notes on what they had seen, a sick feeling in her gut at having to go through them again.

She thought back to the Hippogriff once more. About the medical scroll bearing Draco Malfoy's outline, his plethora of injuries, lit up in various colours, different ages, different severities.

She knew now, that Buckbeak had kicked him in the shoulder his own father had broken. She felt a sick rage as she thought of the stink Lucius Malfoy had kicked up about Draco's injury.

How he had insisted on Buckbeak's execution even though he knew, *he knew!* He had done it himself.

She felt the red hot flush of shame as she remembered them all laughing at Malfoy rolling on the ground, then being carried away by Hagrid. He must have been in agony to let his pain show in front of them all, to be so vulnerable, she realised.

Blaise seemed to have gathered himself now, and looked at his watch.

'We've got an hour left, are you up to watching another?'

Hermione nodded. She needed to.

She needed to see more of Malfoy, to understand him more.

Just those two memories had altered what she thought she'd always known about him, that he was spoiled, pampered, had lived a gilded life.

She was blindsided by how well he had hidden it.

Hermione wondered about Narcissa.

Where had she been in all of this? She'd seemed to make some weak attempt to defend him in the first memory, although she had looked scared also.

Hermione wondered whether Narcissa would be capable of an interview.

She had plenty of questions for that woman.

Blaise looked through the vials and selected the next one- September 1991- the year they all started at Hogwarts.

'At least this one hopefully won't be in the manor,' he muttered.

She nodded, still feeling light headed.

He gave her a small encouraging smile, just a slight lifting of the corner of his mouth, he looked pallid. Hermione remembered that this had been his friend, his guilt must be horrendous.

Blaise tipped it in, and they sighed with relief as they watched the memory shimmer. It wasn't in the manor.

Hermione took a deep breath before dipping her head in. She reached for Blaise's fingers again, a grip on something solid, as she felt herself fall into the memory.

Malfoy was stood on platform nine and three quarters, flanked by Lucius and Narcissa.

He looked small, stood in-between them.

His hair shone, his Hogwarts robes were immaculate, his dragon skin shoes polished to perfection.

Hermione realised that you had to look very closely to see the slight tremor in the hands that clenched and unclenched by his sides, the signet ring glinting in the fluorescent lights of the station.

He looked, outwardly to be relaxed, confident.

His mother fussed over him, dusting off his shoulders and straightening his collar. His jaw tensed and he looked away as she brought her face close to his, smoothing his hair down. His chest rose and fell, his face a mask of cool indifference

Eventually, her motherly image firmly in place, Narcissa left him alone and moved back to stand next to Lucius again.

She stepped from foot to foot, her own nerves apparent.

Hermione thought that she looked, to all intents and purposes like a mother who was just anxious to let her young son out of her sight for the first time.

Lucius was still.

He was the only one of them who didn't seem nervous, instead he seemed to be on high alert. Scanning the station, looking for someone.

He clearly hadn't seen whoever he was looking for, as he now lifted his cane and tapped it sharply onto Draco's shoulder who jumped like a gun had gone off.

Lucius leaned in, his mouth close to Draco's ear.

'Harry Potter,' he hissed.

'Messy hair, green eyes, glasses, a scar on his forehead.

You find that boy and you befriend him, do you hear?

He is the key.

One hand gripped Draco's shoulder tightly as he spoke, digging in. This is your first job.

You will not let me down.'

Draco didn't respond but his grey eyes widened.

He swept them around the station.

'You know what will happen to you if you fail.' Another spiteful hiss into the boys ear.

Hermione could hear the venom in Lucius's voice from where she stood.

Draco's knees seemed to collapse inward slightly before he quickly caught himself. He turned to look at his father, grey eyes huge in his face.

'I won't let you down father,' he said, affecting an air of confidence.

His eyes searching Lucius's.

'I'll befriend him, get close to him. I'll tell you everything he does.'

'You'd better.' The command was dripping in spite.

Lucius stood back now and looked down at Draco, giving him a sickly smile, Hermione guessed it was intended to look loving for the benefit of anyone watching.

She watched Draco's Adam's apple bob.

The Hogwarts Express finally arrived, screaming onto the platform.

Narcissa positively sagged with relief. Draco's eyes lit up.

He picked up his case, his owl.

She watched Narcissa hug him to her, his arms stiff by his sides. She cooed, she kissed him, she stroked his face.

Draco smiled and avoided her eyes, pulling gently away.

He finally walked towards the train, his pace urgent.

As he stepped on, Lucius called out, loud and obnoxious, clearly intending everyone to hear- 'Good luck son! I'm sure you will make me proud.'

Hermione couldn't see Draco's expression as he stepped onto the train.

The memory jumped now, to the inside of the train. She heard Blaise's sharp intake of breath next to her as he saw himself and Theodore Nott come bounding into view.

'Malfoy!' Blaise yelled, jumping on him, hands on shoulders.

'Come on! We've got a seat for you,'

Malfoy nodded and followed behind Theo who was bringing up the rear, down the aisle, the blurred outline of his parents passing by the window as the train left the station.

She watched the relief dance across his face, as their image disappeared from view.

The first real smile she'd ever seen from him lit up his face as he entered the booth containing Pansy, Crabbe and Goyle, coming in behind Theo and Blaise.

He dropped his things to the floor and grinned at Pansy who was looking at him like he was made of gold.

'Hi Pans,' he said simply. She smiled widely, glowing under his gaze.

He sat for only a moment before jumping up again.

'Toilet' he offered, and strode quickly out of the booth and down the aisle.

His movements were hurried, he seemed to be barely holding onto control of himself.

Draco reached the toilet door and another wizard- Hermione recognised an eleven year old Dean Thomas, even by the back of his head- approached at the same time as him.

Draco didn't hesitate for a second, didn't even break stride as he put two hands out and shoved Dean, hard, away from the toilet door.

Dean sprawled against the wall, shock evident on his face.

'I was here first. Watch where you're going, idiot.' Malfoy spat out.

Dean had no time to recover himself before the toilet door was slammed shut.

On the inside, Draco slid down onto the floor of the toilet, back to the door.

His chest was heaving, his breathing erratic. He wheezed loudly, chest contracting rapidly in and out, one hand fisting through his hair, the other pressed to his heart. Hermione watched his stomach rise and fall, his feet sliding out in front of him.

His shoulders hitched, his eyes were wide.

Draco was having a panic attack, she realised.

She watched him for a few moments, feeling panic stir in her own chest as she watched him struggle to catch his breath, before she became aware that he was calming, his breathing gradually evening out, his inhales and exhales measured.

She watched his eyes begin to go blank.

He was occluding Hermione realised.

The glassy silver slowly changed from stormy to cloudy.

His breathing slowed, his chest stilled, he allowed his hands to fall limply to the ground.

It was almost frightening the way the light dimmed and went out of his eyes, like he had died there on the toilet floor.

He sat there, disappearing into himself, ignoring the polite knocks that slowly turned frantic.

Hermione recognised Neville's muffled voice, coming from outside the door, shouting that he was about to wet himself.

After a time, Draco stood, a picture of calm, benevolence on his face now.

He opened the door and looked Neville up and down, before yanking hard on his tie, bringing his face close, his forehead pressed against Neville's.

'You'll wait your fucking turn next time,' he drawled, and released the tie, leaving behind him a very flustered Neville, as he stalked back down the aisle.

Hermione watched, marvelling at the control he now had over himself for such a young boy. His occlusion ability was far beyond what she had ever seen in someone so young.

He moved now, elegantly, his nose in the air.

She gasped as she suddenly saw her younger self appear in the memory, well- initially she just saw her bushy hair.

She was coming towards Malfoy down the aisle. She couldn't even remember this, had no memory of it happening.

In the memory, Hermione glanced up at Malfoy, who was a good head taller than her. He stopped dead and looked down his nose at her.

'Oh, sorry!' She said slightly breathless, flattening herself against the seats to give him room. Malfoy's eyes were on her, his grey meeting her brown and holding them for only a moment before he wordlessly passed her.

She saw herself carry on down the aisle, but Malfoy had stopped where he was.

He turned and watched her go, something like a light dancing in the cold flat grey of his eyes for a brief second. He stood a moment more, his eyes on her frizzy head as it bobbed away through to the next carriage.

Then he turned, his eyes blank again and walked, back to his friends and his cabin.

She and Blaise watched him now, sitting quietly in the cabin, amongst the rowdiness of the train.

He didn't say much, a few sarcastic comments here and there, dropped in at the opportune moment.

His eyes studied everyone else closely though, he seemed to be fascinated by them, by the noise and chatter.

Blaise was his usual exuberant self.

Doing impressions of the legendary Dumbledore, releasing chocolate frogs to hop around the next cabin.

Pansy's eyes never left Malfoy as she sat opposite him on the seat.

She looked at his eyes, his hair, his mouth.

Hermione knew infatuation when she saw it.

She didn't ever see Malfoy look back at Pansy though.

Theo sat on her other side, he was quieter, mostly looking out through the window.

When the train began to slow and Hogwarts loomed into view, the cabin hushed into a slightly awed silence.

Most of their parents had attended Hogwarts, they had been waiting for their time to begin, to finally be eleven.

The excitement on the train was palpable.

Hermione watched Malfoy and his friends all gather their belongings and elbow their way to the front of the train.

It was never spoken out loud that Malfoy was the leader of their group, he just seemed to assume that role.

He stood, taller than everyone except Goyle, his face a picture of judgmental disdain as he looked down at the other students, his nose wrinkled as though there was a bad smell.

Hagrid met them at the station, and led them to the boats, Hermione felt positively nostalgic at revisiting what had been one of the most wonderful days of her life. It briefly lifted her

spirits.

The boat journey across the black lake was uneventful.

Malfoy sat with Crabbe and Goyle, mesmerised as they all had been by the sight of Hogwarts looming out of the darkness.

She and Blaise watched him, as they entered the castle and stood at the bottom of the stairs listening to professor McGonagall explain how the sorting hat worked.

Malfoy looked at Crabbe as she mentioned Slytherin house, smirking, but the smile left his face as soon as he turned back around.

She could see his grey eyes scanning the room. They lit upon her frizzy head again for a moment, widening slightly, before sliding off her and onto Harry next to her.

He physically jolted when he recognised him.

Malfoy's eyes narrowed now as he took Harry in, running over his face, his hair, his scar. His eyes didn't leave Harry as McGonagall finished her speech and left.

The second she was gone, he moved purposefully across the room, Crabbe and Goyle followed, ever the loyal lapdogs. Totally in awe of Malfoy's self important air.

She watched him physically arrange his features into a smile, an attempt at looking friendly she thought, but Malfoy had very little experience of friendliness, and it came off looking cruel, sly.

'So it's true then, what they were saying on the train?' His voice was tight, pompous, so different to how it had sounded when he was younger.

'Harry Potter has come to Hogwarts.'

He affected to look casual, his hand resting on the banister, but one fist was tight at his side.

At Malfoy's words, there was hushed burst of speculation and chatter amongst the group of students. They all knew who Harry was too.

Draco indicated to his friends.

'This is Crabbe, and Goyle.' He looked uncomfortable then, unsure.

'And I'm Malfoy. Draco Malfoy.'

At this, Ron, who had been standing next to Harry, sniggered.

She saw the tips of Malfoy's ears turn pink, his jaw clench.

He turned on Ron, a nasty look in his eye.

'Think my names funny do you? No need to ask yours. Red hair, and a hand me down robe? You must be a Weasley.'

Hermione remembered how Ron had looked at Malfoy then, it still hurt her to see it now.

Malfoy turned to Harry, looking at him imploringly, this wasn't going to plan, she could see it in his eyes.

He was floundering, he fell back on what his father had taught him, what he thought was important.

He didn't know Harry, didn't know anything other than what had been forced down his throat since birth, and would continue to be thrown down his throat until his early death at the age of twenty five.

*'You'll find out that some wizarding families are better than others. You don't want to go making friends with the wrong sort.
I can help you there.'*

Hermione and Blaise watched as Malfoy extended one, small, ever so slightly shaking hand out to Harry.

They watched Harry's eyes move to the palm, Malfoy following his eyes, staring at him, willing him to take his hand.

Harry's eyes narrowed in disdain.

*'I think I can tell the wrong sort for myself, thanks.' Harry's green eyes glared into Malfoy's grey ones.
Ron stood next to him, his own shoulders tense.*

Hermione saw then, the flicker of emotion across Malfoy's indolent face, the brief moment of panic in his eyes, the small flinch as McGonagall tapped him on his shoulder with her scroll.

*The group moved away then. She saw herself, Ron and Harry talking excitedly.
Blaise had an arm slung around Theo's shoulders, Pansy was scowling around her.*

*None of them saw Malfoy, stood as still as if he'd been petrified.
His eyes still cast down onto his own, empty outstretched hand.
He looked frantic, panicked. He was frozen, unsure what to do. He looked after Harry, towards the back of their heads, moved slightly in their direction and then stopped.*

He took a few calming breaths in and out.

Then, the walls came slamming down and he was Malfoy again. Cock-sure, arrogant.

His mask was back in place.

The memory ended there and Hermione and Blaise both pulled their faces out. Blaise was shaking his head, disbelieving.

*Hermione couldn't get the final expression on Malfoy's face out of her head.
He knew, she realised, even then, that he had failed on his promise to his father, fallen at the first hurdle, and it wasn't even day one.*

Flying

Chapter Notes

Just a little note:

All of Hermione's current sections are plain text, with the date in bold.

Draco's POVs from before his death are also plain text, with the date in bold along the top.

Draco's memories that Hermione views in the Pensieve are always in italics.

Hopefully it's not too confusing!

Thank you for all the feedback so far!

Draco - August 1992

Draco loved flying.

There had been nothing in his life up to the age of twelve, that had given him anywhere near as much joy as the feeling of swooping high above everything else on his broom.

He soared up into the open sky and felt free in a way he never thought he could, like he could escape from everything and anything.

Draco thought he would never need to feel trapped again, because if it all got too much, he could just get on his broom and fly upwards, like Icarus, towards the sun. He didn't mind getting too close, it would be better than falling back down into his own life.

The first time, as he had stood in flying lessons, muttering the requisite 'up!' and felt the broom slam into his palm, his heart had jumped, shuddered in his chest.

The pride Draco had felt when the broom responded to his touch was like nothing he had ever experienced, he had to fight so hard not to let his overwhelming excitement show, to keep the Malfoy smugness on his face, as though it would have been what he expected all along.

For the first time in his whole life, Draco was in control.

He had seen Potter show the same easy command over his own broom, and felt the familiar desperate need to win take over him.

It was the same feeling he had had when chasing Blaise at the manor.

It was more than being competitive, it was as if, if he didn't win it was another failure, something else he could not do.

It was the reason he had taunted Potter with the Remembrall. He'd wanted to make Potter feel bad, to see him fail.

Someone else for once.

The first summer holidays had nearly killed Draco.

Whilst at Hogwarts Draco could pretend.

He could maintain the image he had cultivated so carefully.

He was pompous, he was a bully, he was a perfect, pampered, prince.

He made sure no one would ever suspect the truth about him, how weak he was, what his life at the manor was really like, the pain, the blood and the shame.

At Hogwarts Draco was safe from spiteful words, muttered curses and swinging fists.

He was happier than he had ever thought possible.

His rivalry with Potter was a worry, but after Potter had rejected his offer of friendship he hadn't known what to do. He didn't have the social skills to overcome conflict.

The only way Draco had ever been shown, was with fists, with anger and with pain.

Over the past year he had discovered, that those things weren't always the norm.

Not everyone got hexed when they made a mess, or had their nose broken for answering back.

It was just him.

And Theo, actually. Theo had said a few times about his own father. Draco didn't think Nott Senior was quite as cruel as Lucius, but he knew that Theo didn't want to go home for the holidays either.

Draco didn't say anything.

At Hogwarts, he kept his jibes to mostly words, keeping inside the black rage he felt when he saw Potter with Weasley and Granger.

They didn't want to know him, and it hurt, it caused him a physical pain, the jealousy a living beast in his gut.

Draco and his friends had unbreakable bond, he cared deeply for all of them.

But their friendship would always be forced down into the darkness, down in the Slytherin dungeon.

As a little boy, laying on the floor of the manor, he had dreamed of a friendship just like Potter had with Weasley and Granger.

One that was out in the sun.

He had wanted to be the hero.

Draco almost laughed at how naive he had been. His father was a Death Eater for gods sake. He was scum to them, because of who he was, who his family were, just like he was scum to his father because of who he wasn't.

When he was forced to go home, he lied to Lucius, he pretended that they were his friends. He told him lies about things they had done together, integrated himself into stories he had heard about them, things they had done.

Draco was so grateful that his father was not a Legillimens, not even close. Somehow, Lucius bought the lie, asked him questions, gave him more spy jobs.

Draco pretended not to notice that many of the stories he made up to his father heavily involved Granger.

Granger.

From the moment he had seen her, something in Draco had twisted.

He didn't know what the feeling was. He had watched her bushy head bob down the train aisle and initially had just been mildly interested, mainly by the hair.

But when she had looked up at him, with her kind, honey coloured eyes, he had felt something in him melt.

It was the kindness there that did it. That began chipping some of the ice from his heart. She had apologised to him and gone on her way, but Draco had stood, paralysed, concerned by the feeling in his chest. It had knocked his occlumency walls down, crumbled them for a moment. He hastily rebuilt them and carried on back to his friends.

As he had gotten to know her throughout first year, she both fascinated and irritated him in equal measure.

He secretly thrilled to hear her clipped voice recite the excessive level of knowledge she had on even the most obscure of subjects.

She knew things he thought only he had had the time to research, during his agonisingly long days in the manor library.

As he watched her, Draco saw how she was fiercely loyal to her friends and realised that she would truly do anything, if she thought it would protect someone she cared about.

She was also bossy, short tempered and blunt. He loved it.

Draco had even began pretending that he didn't know things, so that she could be the one to get the answer right first. He knew he would pay for not having the best grades in his year when his father found out, but he just didn't care.

The sight of her freckled cheeks rising up as she tried to hide that small, proud smile she had, made Draco's heart flip over in his chest, another physically painful feeling.

He would feel his eyes magnetise to her soft pink lips, travelling over her face, to her eyes, that reminded him of the deer that lived in the manor forest, and then to the wildness of her hair.

He wanted to touch it, to see what it felt like in his fingers.

Obviously, the only thing he could do in response to the feelings he had for Granger was to make sure he made her life hell.

That's what love was after all.

His mother told him she loved him, and look at where that had gotten him.

At the start of their second year, the first time he'd called her 'Mudblood' he had almost gagged with it.

He had forced the word through his lips, and made sure he looked like he meant it.

'You filthy little Mudblood.'

He'd spat the words out like they were venom, and he watched them hit the target.

He practically saw his arrow pierce her heart.

Draco willed his occlumency walls to stay up, for his face not to betray him. He felt so much like his father, hurting people just because he could, he could taste the words in his mouth afterwards, a foul, bitter taste.

He watched Weasley come towards him, wand raised and easily deflected his weak spell wandlessly, back onto Weasley himself.

He hoped the others couldn't see his heart pounding through his quidditch shirt.

He hoped he looked like he hated her.

He wanted to hate her, but the only person he hated more than his parents, was himself.

When Draco had gone home that summer he had braced himself, waited for the pain to resume.

But he was almost as tall as Lucius now and his father had mostly left him alone.

Whilst he'd been away, his mother's little 'problem' had become a big problem.

She was constantly drunk, shouting and screaming, falling about the manor.

Lucius had turned his attentions to Narcissa, slapping her around when she got sloppy, saying things she shouldn't say about Draco, about the mistakes they had made.

Lucius had gotten into trading on the black market, rare stones, jewellery and artefacts. He used it as an excuse to stay away from the manor.

Draco was unbelievably grateful for the respite. He hid in his room, mostly communicating with the house elves.

But when Lucius was back, they made him sit with them, his mother swaying, glassy eyed in her chair, occasionally crying, huge, wet gulping sobs. Talking about her regrets, about her little boy, about how much she had missed him whilst he was at school.

Draco watched his father slap her face and tried to feel indifference, the way she had seemed to when it was him, but he couldn't.

He couldn't sit by and watch his father bully anyone else.

He had drawn his wand and stood, scraping his chair back.

Lucius had looked at him, incredulous.

Twelve year old Draco had turned his wand on his father, stared into his hateful face and demanded, 'Enough'.

He was so angry, sick of the pain, the worry, the endless suffering at Malfoy manor.

It had ended in a duel.

Lucius had no problem sending hexes and curses towards his son.

Draco had finally given as good as he had gotten, using everything he had learned in the books from the library, everything he had learned in school.

He wanted to hurt his father, it burned in him, took away his sanity, left him screaming with rage.

Lucius had laughed and laughed as he had sent sparks of red, blue and black towards his only son. Hitting him in his ankle, his knee, his side, dancing out of the way of Draco's ever increasingly violent curses back.

Narcissa huddled in the corner and it was only when she heard Draco begin

'AVADA-' that she had shrieked, breaking every glass, chandelier and ornament in the room. Showering her husband and son with flying shards of glass.

'NO DRACO!' She had screamed.

'Not that. You can never come back from that.'

Lucius walked over to Draco, who had fallen to his knees, the force of his own hatred for his father weighing down on his young shoulders. He used his cane to lift Draco's chin. His own icy eyes boring into Draco's silver ones.

'Finally,' he said.

So quiet that Draco could barely hear him.

'Finally, you have made me proud.'

The next week he had bought new brooms for everyone on the Slytherin Quidditch team and a new ring for Narcissa.

Hermione- May -2006

Hermione and Blaise made their way silently back to the office.

They were both lost in thought, after watching Malfoy's first memories. Both dealing with their own feelings of guilt and regret.

When they got back to the office, Jacob Simons, one of their colleagues was waiting for them.

'Zabini, you've been called out of the office. You're with me. Potter needs more hands down at the Hogs Head. Apparently some witch says she saw something the night Malfoy died.'

Blaise nodded.

'No problem, except I was meant to be in on Malfoy's autopsy at one.'

Blaise looked at his watch, it was ten past one.

'Yeah, that's just you now Granger,' Simons indicated to her. 'We're stretched thin at the moment, with everything going on. You'd better get down to the autopsy room, they won't wait.'

She looked to Blaise, pleading slightly with her eyes, she had thought she would be there with him.

He shrugged apologetically and shot her a rueful smile before opening his desk drawer and handing her the prelim report.

She looked down at the images of Draco Malfoy, looked again at all of his injuries.

This autopsy was not going to be a simple one.

Blaise waved her a quick goodbye and disappeared immediately. She realised how keen he really was to avoid the autopsy, he couldn't have left any quicker.

As she walked, Hermione opened the report and looked down again at the lit up areas on Draco Malfoy's body.

There were countless minor injuries, all various shades of green to account for the length of time since they were received.

His shoulder was lit up dark red, along with his humerus, several of his ribs, both ankles, most of his fingers and his nose.

Those were all breaks.

The area around his neck lit up with a dark purple light. Indicating cause of death.

There were also several blue areas, curse wounds. His Sectumsempra scars a vivid cobalt. Hermione didn't want to look any more.

She closed the file.

She paused as she reached the door to the morgue and looked through the glass panel, she could see they had taken Malfoy out.

He lay, flat on his back on a steel table, she could see the top of his head, his white blonde hair, bright against the grey pallor of his skin.

Next to him, on a tray were an array of magical tools and instruments that would be used to complete the procedure.

She closed her eyes briefly and headed to the wash area, where one of the medical witches were there, waiting for her to scrub in.

‘You’re late,’ Padma said.

‘Sorry, there’s so much going on up top this week,’ Hermione replied. ‘Lunch tomorrow?’

‘Most definitely,’

Padma helped Hermione to get into her scrubs and then transfigured her a pair of gloves and a mask.

‘Do you want to go to the viewing box or will you come in?’ She asked.

‘I’ll come in.’

Padma nodded and pushed her way through the adjoining door into where Draco lay. Another medical wizard, John Mayhew joined them a moment later.

Padma conjured a scroll with which to record her findings, and Hermione’s charmed quill and notebook came out also.

‘Ok,’ John began.

‘We are here today for the autopsy of one Draco Lucius Malfoy.’ Hermione could see the way John’s lip curled as he said the name Malfoy.

He was vermin, another dark wizard, who had met a deserving end.

John looked down on him with distain.

Hermione hadn’t managed to lower her eyes yet. She could see the body in her peripheral vision. But she was avoiding focusing on it.

Padma conjured the preliminary report and took them all through it. It took a long time to detail the amount of injuries he had sustained in his short life.

Hermione finally allowed herself to look down.

Her eyes tracing the wounds as they were described.

She looked at his ankles, following Padma’s pointing wand as she indicated each place he had been hurt.

Both ankles broken at various times- left one was from a particularly violent Afflicto.

She pointed out various scars, flesh wounds only.

‘His hip here, slight chip in the bone- this appears to have been sustained in childhood.’

Hermione swallowed.

She pointed to his ribs- ‘He fractured his ribs here, again, looks to have been cursed. But there’s also evidence that the right vertebral rib was cracked through force- again in childhood.’

‘Shoulder break, and humerus here. The shoulder was broken more than once.’

Her wand indicated the point of the break.

Hermione’s mind flashed to Lucius’s boot, the dull crack of seven year old Draco’s bones, his agonised shriek.

She felt her breathing begin to falter slightly.

Padma didn’t notice. She indicated the Sectumsempra scars now criss crossing his body. The slashed silver across his grey skin.

‘These are, obviously, um, he was cursed here aged around sixteen’. Padma was embarrassed. It was strange to know that their boss had been the one to inflict these on him.

It was unavoidable now. Hermione raised her eyes to Malfoy’s neck. Now the rope had been removed the welts were a deep purple, almost black. The pattern of the rope was burned into his skin, the lividity making it stand out.

‘This is, ah, the cause of death,’ Padma said, her eyes on Hermione. Hermione was aware she was swaying slightly. She knew she was going to have to look at his face soon.

Padma was still speaking, going through his various broken fingers, knuckles.

Hermione glanced down at the short, neatly cut nails again. His rings had been removed, cut off of his clawed fingers.

Her head was beginning to hurt. This was too much, too soon after viewing his childhood memories, seeing the lasting effects of those injuries on his body.

She didn’t want to look at his face.

Padma said, ‘His nose looks to have been broken several times, some of them were healed, many of them weren’t, he had a deviated septum that wasn’t visible outwardly’.

She moved onto his jaw, his teeth, the times he had had head injuries, fractured eye sockets.

Hermione felt like she was floating. Her head was pounding.

‘Hermione?’ John said, from a distance.

‘Are you ready for us to begin with the incision in a moment?’

She brought her eyes up now, to Draco’s face.

To his once beautiful face.

His eyes were still open.

No.

She let her eyes travel over him, over his bloodless lips, his nose, his cheekbones, she moved towards him, as if in a daze, she needed to close his eyes.

She vaguely heard Padma calling her but she couldn't respond. Her fingers touched his cold cheek, and suddenly.

He breathed.

He took in a huge, shuddering breath.

Hermione screamed.

His staring eyes blinked. Warmth came flooding back into his body, his skin turned from blue/ grey to pink, the blood flowed in his veins again, lips turning a rosy shade, eyes coming to life.

He flicked them to her,

'Hermione-'

She went to move towards him, but she couldn't. She tried to put out a hand, but she couldn't. She fell forward.

Hermione was vaguely aware of Padma screaming for help and the pops of apparition around her as she fell to the floor.

Hermione lay on the floor of the morgue, Draco Malfoy's body on the table, and she convulsed, she bit her tongue, blood came from her nose, her limbs locked and her head hit the floor.

All around her people entered the room. They conjured a pillow under her head until her seizure had stopped.

When she eventually regained consciousness, laying on the cold floor of the morgue, her first thought was Draco- He was alive.

The sight of his body, still stiff and dead left her bereft. She had to be taken to hospital, sedated with dreamless sleep.

Blaise and Ginny sat by her side.

Blaise chewing his lip, his knee bouncing.

Draco Malfoy remained where he was, cold and still on the table in the morgue.

He Wants To Hurt Her

Draco - September 1992

Draco was counting down the hours, minutes and seconds until he could go back to school.

He spent all of his time flying around the skies outside the manor.

He couldn't go any further due to the wards his father had placed, but he practised, turns, drops, loops, sailing over the turrets, skimming the spikes on the top of the entry way gates, scaring the crows that nested in the eaves, watching them fly up in a black cloud of feathers, ominous, like the manor itself.

He felt the wind take his breath away as he swooped, taking risks, seeing how close he could get to the ground, feeling the wards shudder as he brushed against them in the sky.

His hands wrapped around the broom, knuckles white, thighs clenched as he pushed himself as hard as he could to go faster, turn quicker.

Draco wanted to become as adept on a broom as he was with his spell work. He wanted to be the best, and he wasn't going to hide it for anyone.

As he flew, Draco thought back to the duel he had had with his father the week before.

He still felt the echoes of the white hot fury that had burned through him as he stood, his wand pointed between his father's eyes. He thought about the lack of control he had had over his rage, as he had looked at Lucius's hateful face. He had been blinded by it and that scared him.

Would he have said the words? Used the unforgivable, if his mother hadn't stopped him?

He didn't know.

All he knew was that, in that moment, had wanted his father dead. More than he had ever wanted anything in his life.

Draco knew now, that he needed to do a lot more work on duelling.

He would practice in his room each night as he counted down the days left before they went back to Hogwarts.

His father had experience of duelling, he knew how to dodge hexes, how to aim for the weak spots a person had.

Draco needed to work on his dodging, his movements, needed to work on being more graceful.

Currently he could only practice his spell work, his shielding spells.

He couldn't focus on footwork yet.

Draco's ankle had been shattered by the Afflicto his father had shot at him during the confrontation, and with the limited supplies he had, he'd only been able to half heal it. It was still giving him such an immense amount of pain, that the pain relief potion he had preemptively made, and brought home in preparation for the summer break wasn't really touching it.

Flying took the pressure off his ankle and gave him time to think, without the sickening pain throbbing and distracting him as he tried to put any weight on it.

He dipped down to the ground in a particularly daring loop, and was just on his way swiftly back up, when he felt himself suddenly, forcefully yanked backwards off his broom. The spell caused him to let go, and the broom continued upwards while Draco fell, the unexpectedness of it not giving him time to react, as he tumbled the seven or eight feet to the ground and landed hard on his ribs.

Draco felt all the air leave him in a forced exhale, his head smacked hard into the ground, jolting him, dazing him. He bit down on his tongue and his broken ankle connected with the hard earth.

If he could have taken in a breath, he would have screamed.

But he couldn't.

He lay face down in the mud, wondering if he was going to lose consciousness, trying not to.

Draco grit his teeth and fought against the encroaching blackness.

As he did he became aware of the crunching of footsteps, moving over the gravel path, approaching him. He flicked his eyes to the side to see a pair of pointed dragon skin boots.

The boots stopped next to where his head rested on the ground, and then there was silence.

When he felt he could lift his head without his vision slipping, he looked up. Lucius was stood, a look of amusement on his face, looking down at him.

'I thought you said you were good on a broom?' He drawled.

Draco couldn't answer.

He focused on breathing, on forcing his ribs to allow his lungs to fill. He heard a slight whistling sound and realised it was him, inhaling and exhaling.

'When you've stopped being pathetic. Get up and come to the east wing parlour,' Lucius snapped, looking disdainfully at him, the toe of his boot edging towards Draco's fingers as he pushed himself out of the mud.

'I want to talk to you about Hermione Granger.'

Draco limped into the parlour half an hour later. He held a hand over his side, he had managed to repair the break in his rib, he thought, but a large bruise was blooming, a purple

black cloud, like smoke, over his chest and side.

His ankle felt like it had broken again, he'd fix that later, for now he just limped, favouring it as much as he could.

He had taken the rest of the pain relief potion he had, and in desperation, had quietly asked Moddles to see if she could procure some more, hoping she knew to keep it a secret.

His father was sitting in the parlour, reclining in a wingback chair, his legs crossed at the ankles. Sat with him was Amycus Carrow.

'Draco, good of you to finally join us.' He said tauntingly, curling a lip.

Draco said nothing, focusing on occluding, hiding the pain he was in. Walking purposefully.

He collapsed gratefully into one of the chairs and waited, what did his father want? What on earth could he possibly have to ask him about Granger?

His father looked at him for a long time, the usual game of drawing out a silence, aiming to make the other person uncomfortable.

Well Draco was an expert in that now, he used it on people in school all the time.

He sat and looked back at Lucius. Keeping his mask firmly in place, not showing his nerves around the mention of Hermione Granger.

'Granger,' Lucius drawled eventually.

'She's bright no? Clever?'

Draco felt himself frown, confused.

'Some might say that,' he replied. 'For a mudblood anyway.'

'Ahh, that's not what I've heard.' Lucius replied, his voice becoming sly, 'I've heard she's beating you in every subject. Test scores and assignments.'

Draco felt wary now, the cold fingers of fear beginning to very slightly wheedle their way into his chest.

Lucius was keeping tabs on him in school, he knew he wasn't doing what he should be. Did he know that Potter hated him? That he wasn't his friend, the way he had made out?

'Yes, I've heard she's embarrassing you, putting you to shame Draco,' the words were teasing, but there was an unmistakable edge, Draco tensed his fingers on the arm of the chair.

'We want her.'

Carrow spoke for the first time since Draco had entered the room, seemingly bored of watching Lucius play cat and mouse with a child.

Want her?

What did he mean?

Draco didn't understand what he could mean by 'want her'. Who wanted her? Why?

'What Amycus was trying to say,' Lucius murmured, 'Was that we can make use of Granger. Of her many 'talents'. I'm aware Draco, that Potter and Weasley aren't exactly enamoured with you.'

He looked pointedly at Draco, who felt his stomach drop into his knees.

'But the girl may be different. She has demonstrated exceptional magical ability. Strength of character and grit. More than I can say for you.' He looked down his nose at Draco. 'There are several- uses- for a person like that.'

He smiled now, his teeth glinting like a sharks before it attacked.

'She's too well protected by Dumbledore at present but there will be a time when she is vulnerable. She's not a true witch, she's a Mudblood so I doubt any of them would care too much if she were to- disappear let's say.

She can be entrusted to the care of one of my associates and used for her strengths while she has them, and, if she proves to be not as lucrative as I hope,

Well, she can be disposed of and no one will go looking for her.

The ministry won't care about a missing Mudblood.'

Draco looked at his father, stopping his mouth from falling open in disbelief.

He couldn't be serious.

He shook his head, it was a joke, it must be. One at his expense, that he just didn't understand.

Did his father somehow know about the way she made his stomach feel?

About the fact that he had thought about her most nights before bed, imagined what her lips would feel like if he were to kiss them gently, whether there was some way he ever could?

He was fucking with him, this was a game, it had to be.

'Potter's Mudblood?' He said, injecting as much derision into his tone as he could.

'What would anyone want with her? Polluting us all with her dirty blood. She's nothing special, riding off Potters glory more like.'

Lucius looked at him then, a glint in his eye.

'You don't like Granger? You've mentioned her enough. You tried to make me believe she was your friend Draco. Have you been lying to me?'

Draco slammed his walls into place quickly, before the first Cruciatus hit him.

But he was too late and he dropped, feeling the blood red agony of the curse as it crippled him, forcing his hands to clench, his muscles to tighten, tears of agony to threaten at the

corners of his eyes.

He groaned through a locked jaw as he fought against the curse, but he didn't cry out.

When Lucius finally released him, he vomited copiously onto his front as he fought to sit up. The pain was unbearable and made him sick every time. Now it had been longer since the last time, it felt worse.

Lucius and Carrow smirked, Carrow raising his eyebrows as he watched Lucius Malfoy torture his twelve year old son. Draco saw something like respect there in his eyes.

Lucius stood now, bent over looking down at Draco once again.

'You will befriend the Mudblood. I don't care how you do it.

You make her think you like her, make her think she's pretty for all I care. But you get her to trust you.

You've failed once, fail a second time I'll make it so you never fly on that infernal broom again.

I'll make it so your mother needs to spoon feed you for the rest of your life while you piss your pants and dribble.

Do you understand?

This year, you make Granger your friend.'

And, to ensure his point was driven home, he flicked his wand again.

'Crucio,'

Ten minutes later Draco limped from the room, his twelve year old mind imagining, but not fully equipped to grasp what on earth the Death Eaters wanted with Granger.

He thought, as he made his way gingerly to the sanctuary of his bedroom, that he would do everything in his power to stop them getting her, no matter what it cost him.

Hermione - May 2006

Hermione lay in the hospital bed and sighed. She huffed and groaned, making sure that everyone around her knew how annoyed she was to be stuck where she was.

'I'm absolutely fine, Ginny,' she said as Ginny came back in from the corridor of St Mungo's, where she had been speaking to the healer.

'Honestly, everyone is making such a fuss. I'm ready to go, I just want to get back to work.'

Ginny didn't even bother looking at Hermione. This was the tenth time they had had the same conversation.

Blaise came back with snacks, some Every Flavour beans and a cup of soup. He sat next to Ginny, his eyes darting over towards Hermione.

He looked guilty for some reason her brain was too scrambled to even try and decipher.

'Blaise, I'm fine. And whatever happened would have happened whether you were there or not.' She said, hoping her voice sounded stronger to them than it had for her.

He didn't meet her eye. Just blew on his soup, cupped between his hands.

'You had a seizure Hermione,' Ginny said, the worry clear in her voice.

'Padma said you were acting really odd and then you just collapsed. That's not fine. That's really worrying.'

'In what way was I acting odd?' Hermione asked, hoping no one knew what she thought she'd seen. If they knew that she thought she'd watched Draco Malfoy come back to life after being dead for almost a week they'd never let her out.

They'd put her up on the psych ward with Narcissa Malfoy.

She wondered whether she could get up to that floor, to maybe try and speak to Narcissa, to interview her.

But she had a feeling Ginny would be on her case before she even got to the lift.

'You were saying some weird stuff, stuff about Malfoy, saying you were sorry.'
Ginny said.

Hermione flashed her eyes to her. She couldn't remember doing that at all.

'Saying sorry?'

'Yes, you kept saying sorry to bloody Malfoy.' Ginny looked briefly furious but then glanced to Blaise sat beside her and stopped herself from really letting loose.

Hermione's mind raced to find a reason for her collapse. She just wanted to get back down to Malfoy's memories. She couldn't be stuck here now.

'I've been so busy, haven't really eaten for a few days,' she said. 'It's been so full on, I think I'd forgotten. I've had fluids now, I'll go home and have dinner and I'll be fine.'

'The healers have said you can go, but they're going to make some images of your brain first, check there's nothing going on.'

'I can go?'

'After they check you over and complete all the tests,' Ginny warned.

Hermione turned her eyes to Blaise. He looked as though he were about to say something, when suddenly, movement outside the room caught his eye and he jumped up from the blue plastic chair where he'd been sitting.

Hermione peered through the smudged glass window to where he was looking.

Theodore Nott and Pansy Parkinson were stood in the hospital corridor.

She watched Blaise hurry out to them, his brow furrowed, he was flustered.

Blaise must have cast a Muffliato, as she could hear nothing from the corridor, but both Blaise and Pansy looked angry.

Pansy was waving her arms around slightly wildly, and indicating into Hermione's room. Theo had his hands on her shoulders, looking into her face, his mouth moving with words Hermione couldn't hear, clearly trying to calm her down.

Blaise was also gesticulating, arguing back with whatever Pansy was saying. They both kept pointing towards her.

Ginny's eyes narrowed.

'What the hell are they doing here?' She said, and she stood and marched out into the hallway.

Instantly the three of them stopped speaking, their mouths closed abruptly and they turned to Ginny.

Hermione silently watched something spiteful come from Pansy's mouth, aimed at Ginny. She could tell by the set of Pansy's face and the way her lips twisted as she spoke. Ginny instantly reacted, there was a lot of arm waving and angry faces.

Theo stood in the middle of them all looking in towards Hermione, a resigned look on his face.

Eventually, Ginny stomped back in.

'Stupid bitch,' she said, flouncing over and sitting down hard.

'What are they doing here?' Hermione asked.

'They said they're here visiting family members and had no idea you were here.'

Ginny replied, 'But that's utter bullshit. I bet they've come to get information out of Blaise about the Malfoy case. Probably worried his memories will get them into trouble and they might lose their precious millions. I don't want either of them near Blaise. He left them once, he saw sense, I don't want them coming around, risking his job, trying to use their past to get information out of him.'

Hermione felt like Ginny had got the totally wrong end of the stick as she looked out into the corridor but she didn't say so.

Pansy looked upset now. Blaise was speaking calmly to her, his hands out in front of him in an appeasing gesture. She accepted Theo's arms as they came around her and Hermione could see she was sobbing.

Eventually, they both turned and left. He watched them go for a minute, looking deflated and then Blaise came back into the room and shut the door with a soft snick.

Hermione felt too weak to pump him for information she knew wouldn't come in front of Ginny, so she just lay back on her pillow and waited for them to release her.

After several hours and a battery of tests later, they allowed Blaise to leave with Hermione. It was 1am.

Ginny had had to go, her ministry job was relatively new and she couldn't afford to be sloppy.

She was working in the same department as her father, much to his immense pride.

Hermione and Blaise had convinced her to leave at midnight.

'Let's get you home,' Blaise said wearily, he looked like he'd had an even tougher day than she had.

They walked down the corridor, Blaise supporting Hermione gently.

'If I ask, are you going to tell me what Pansy and Theo were doing here?' She said as they reached the main doors.

Hermione didn't trust herself to apparate alone yet. Her head still hurt and she felt shaky.

She hadn't wanted to admit to anyone how much the seizure had taken out of her incase they stopped her going in to work.

'They were visiting family,' Blaise replied flatly.

His face was blank and he didn't meet her eyes.

Hermione couldn't argue with him, she just wanted to get home to bed.

They stood together and Blaise put an arm gently around her side, she felt the usual dizzying sensation of apparition and closed her eyes against the nausea as they arrived at her house.

Harry was sat on her doorstep.

'Hermione! Are you ok?' He exclaimed standing as they moved towards the step.

'I'm fine Harry.' She replied, feeling exhausted now.

'I'm so sorry,' he said, looking stricken. 'I was stuck in a meeting with Kingsley and I just couldn't leave. Ginny has been keeping me updated.'

'Honestly Harry, I'm fine,' she muttered again.

'I just need to get to bed now.'

Harry looked to Blaise, worry in his eyes.

'The healers said she's good to go,' Blaise said, she thought he looked shifty again.

Hermione frowned. Was she imagining it? She couldn't make sense of what she was seeing, she didn't trust herself. How could she?

She had imagined a dead body saying her name.

Eventually she convinced both Harry and Blaise to leave her in peace and she collapsed, relieved, into her own bed.

It was only then she let the tears come. She sobbed, letting all the emotion of the day come out. She couldn't tell anyone how much Draco Malfoy was under her skin. No one in her life

would understand.

Ginny, Ron and Harry all hated him, she had hated him. Until he had gone and died. And now she just wanted to speak to him. To ask him so many questions.

She couldn't match up the little boy she was seeing in the memories, with the evil man he had become, but she was beginning to see now how every action had a reaction.

Draco had been hurt, and so he hurt.

There was no one to save him, to show him a better way.

Maybe he could have been steered away from the life of death and suffering he chose.

Hermione wished he'd had the chance to know life wasn't all as bleak as his had seemed to be.

Now it was too late, as much as her subconscious seemed to be wishing for another chance for him, he was dead.

He had chosen to end his life and there was nothing anyone could do to change it.

She didn't know whether she wanted to fall asleep or not. She was scared she would see his face if she did, but she was also scared that she wouldn't. She craved him, and it hurt her to know that the only way she'd ever find him was in memories or in a fantasy.

Because Draco Malfoy was dead, and it was still her job to find out why.

She didn't dream of him.

She dreamed a black, dreamless sleep, brought on through exhaustion and the plethora of potions she'd ingested at the hospital.

She awoke, her head pounding but desperate to get to work. She forced herself to drink a large glass of water and swallow down some toast before showering, dressing and apparating to the DMLE.

'No, no, no chance!' The first words out of Harry's mouth as he saw her.

'Go home Hermione. Go and get some rest, you aren't needed here today.'

Hermione stood at her desk, her stance defensive.

She had known the reaction she would get before she went anywhere near the office, but she was determined she was staying.

Thankfully Blaise was out, conducting further interviews with the patrons of the Hogs Head so she didn't have to deal with him too.

'Harry, don't even bother. I'm here and I'm not going home. This investigation is taking long enough. I've got time with the Penseive booked and that's what I'll be doing,' she blustered, ignoring the open mouthed stares of her colleagues.

She forgot sometimes that they hadn't all been friends with the boss since they were eleven.

Harry, however, was fully aware of it.

And he knew her well enough to know that it was pointless to argue with her. He pressed his lips together, and before he could do or say anything further, his secretary came to tell him his 9am appointment had arrived.

He grimaced in her general direction and left.

Hermione felt her shoulders relax. She thought that if he had tried to stop her going down to look at the memories she might have really lost her temper.

She was desperate to see more, to spend more time in Draco's life.

She didn't know why she was so drawn to him. She knew it was the wrong feeling to be having, unprofessional.

But she was going to keep telling herself it was simply the urge to do her job, that kept him so firmly in her mind.

She walked down to the Pensieve room, the businesslike heels she'd chosen to wear clicking on the tiles. She was anxious to get there, before something else endeavoured to stop her.

She muttered the unlocking charm she'd been given by the technician the day before, and slipped into the room, closing the door firmly behind her.

Hermione didn't hesitate before selecting the next memory- September 1992

She poured it into the Pensieve, ignoring the headache she felt beginning at the base of her skull. As the memory swirled into view she took a deep breath and lowered her face in.

Draco was stood in Flourish and Blotts.

He was stood at the balcony on the top floor, frowning down at the gaggle of witches all gathered around that prat, Gilderoy Lockhart.

Hermione remembered Draco at this age. He was tall for twelve, his self important air even more apparent than when he had started Hogwarts the year before.

His hair was styled in his trademark slick back, robes tailored to perfection as always, crisp and new.

Hermione watched him as he loomed above everyone else, crowding below to see Lockhart.

He gave a disdainful smirk and then resumed browsing the books.

Hermione thought he looked shift. He cast his eyes around the book titles, clearly looking for something.

She watched him kneel now, at a small pile of books, encased in black leather.

His eyes widened as he apparently found the one he wanted and he slipped it out of the pile furtively.

She squinted her eyes to get a look at the name of the book, finally seeing as he flipped it over that it was a book on protective wards.

He looked at the back cover; his eyes flashing over the words there, and then he slipped the book into his robes, just as his father entered the shop below him.

Lucius Malfoy spotted Draco straight away and took the stairs two at a time to reach his son.

'Draco, where have you been?' He asked, a forced air of casualness. 'I thought I told you to wait at Borgin and Burkes while I completed my valuation?' Lucius looked around, and when satisfied he didn't need to continue the charade, he hissed at Draco.

'Have you seen her yet? Where is she?'

'I haven't.' Draco replied, 'I don't think she's here.'

Hermione wondered who they were talking about.

Lucius didn't utter another word, he snarled at Draco and flounced down the stairs, mingling with the other wizards in the shop.

Hermione watched now, as the bell above the door tinkled and she entered, along with a very disheveled Harry.

Malfoy's eyes widened and he looked over the banister, seemingly checking for his father.

He grimaced as he saw that he was still in the shop.

He looked slightly panicked.

His eyes followed her and Harry around the shop. Hermione was momentarily confused by Malfoy's reaction until she remembered his father's words on the train platform in the last memory. Lucius wanted Draco to spy on Harry.

But his eyes weren't on Harry. They were on her.

She watched as twelve year old Draco leant over the banister, his eyes never leaving the top of her head.

He looked pained.

He suddenly snatched up a book from one of the many piles along the floor.

He knelt down and took out his wand. He used his wand to quickly transfigure another book into a quill and retreated further back into the shadows.

Hermione watched as his elegant cursive script appeared on the page as he wrote,

'Keep Granger away from Draco Malfoy. He is dangerous. He wants to hurt her.'

She saw Harry in the background, being accosted by Gilderoy Lockhart.

But Malfoy wasn't focused on that, he was looking, checking where his father was.

He quickly stood as Lockhart released Harry and ripped the page from the book, stuffing it into his pocket.

Then he scowled and descended the stairs.

Hermione watched as he approached Harry.

'Bet you loved that didn't you Potter.' He sneered.

'Can't even go into a book shop without making the front page.'

He was right up in Harry's face, intimidating him, smirking with satisfaction when Ginny stepped in to defend Harry.

Draco in the memory, couldn't see his father approach behind him, but Hermione could.

She watched the head of Lucius Malfoy's snake head cane fall onto Draco's shoulder.

Unnecessarily hard.

'Now, now Draco, play nicely,' the words were like ice.

Draco's face fell, his eyes flew open wide and he let his nasty sneer drop, a look of panic lighting on his features for just a moment, as his father pushed him out of the way to introduce himself to Harry.

Hermione watched Lucius speak to Harry, watched herself interject to defend Harry's use of Voldemort's name.

As Lucius rounded on her, she saw, behind her, Draco step immediately forward, so he was by her side.

His hand shot out for a moment, but paused just shy of grabbing her hand.

She watched a sly smile light up Lucius Malfoy's face as he looked at her.

'And you must be,' his eyes flicked to Draco now. A cruel glint there 'Miss Granger,'

He raised an eyebrow at Draco, Hermione watched him tense, his face hard as he nodded. His hand was still reaching for the back of her robes, inches away from her, as though he wanted to pull her back. Instead, he took an infinitely small step towards her.

'Ah yes,' Lucius's voice was a hiss, like a snake about to devour a meal.

'Draco has told me all about you,'

He smiled over her head at Draco, a vicious smile. He knew what he was doing was affecting Draco, she realised.

'And your parents, muggles aren't they?' His words dripped with venom.

She watched herself narrow her eyes at Lucius, remembered how much she hadn't wanted to show him her fear.

Draco stood, still and tense behind her. The second his father's attention was off her, he stepped in front of her.

Blocking her from his father's view.

He looked frantic, his hands by his sides clenching into fists.

She was so focused on what Draco was doing that she missed the rest of the confrontation between Malfoy and Weasley senior.

As Lucius swept from the shop, she watched as Draco stepped towards Harry, a spiteful look on his face.

'See you in school,' he bit out, and Hermione thought, no one would have ever noticed Draco Malfoy's hand dart out and push the note into Harry's pocket, before looking round once more at Hermione, and then following his father from the shop.

She withdrew from the memory, her mind racing. What on earth had that note been about. Why had he written it? Did he want to hurt her? And more to the point, had Harry ever seen it?

Hermione was so confused by the memory. Malfoy had never tried to hurt her, not physically anyway. He'd barely given her the time of day, other than to tease her except for... the one time in seventh year that she tried to forget. They'd all been drunk and she doubted he would remember.

She didn't think she'd been anyone to Draco Malfoy.

But his memory clearly showed different.

Power

Draco - February 1994

Draco spent the best part of the next year making sure that Granger hated him.

He didn't have to try very hard.

He was a hateful person.

Every time he looked in the mirror and saw his own face, he was reminded of how hateful he was.

He looked at his hair, at his ice cold eyes, so much like his father's, and he wanted to put his fist through the glass.

However, he didn't and couldn't show any kind of weakness, so he kept his self loathing inside. He maintained the arrogant air, his trademark now.

He made sure he spent his time making everyone else's life hell, boasting to anyone who could hear, about his manor, his inheritance, his father's influence. Taunting people, pushing them around.

He was good at looking for people's weaknesses and exploiting them. He wanted people to hate him, the way he hated himself.

Draco was exceptionally good at hurting people, he'd found out.

He'd learned from the best after all.

The only place he ever let his guard down, was down in the Slytherin common room. When he was down there, in the dark, he felt more like himself, like he was a cockroach, comfortable down in the sewer.

He had developed a close friendship with Theodore Nott, there was an unspoken bond between them, they never talked about it, but they understood that the other suffered, they could smell it on each other.

Draco had been down in the Slytherin dormitories at the beginning of second year, just after coming back from that agonisingly long summer holiday.

He'd been pulling his robes over his head and his shirt had risen up, Theo had been stood in the dorm, also changing, they were on their way to Quidditch practice.

He'd heard Theo's sharp intake of breath and looked over.

Theo's blue eyes were on him, taking in the black and purple swirling bruise over his ribs. The injury looked brutal he realised. It wrapped around his side from his hip to under his arm, various malevolent shades of purple.

He'd not bothered to heal it past the broken rib, thinking that it was hidden, it was only a bruise. He'd been too busy focusing on his ankle.

'Draco,-' Theo began. 'What the fuck?'

Their eyes met, he saw understanding dawn in Nott's eyes, he didn't know how he knew, but he did.

Blaise came skidding in then too,
'Woah Malfoy, got into a fight with the whomping willow did you?' He said, his eyebrows raised at the injury.

'No, fucking fell off my broom didn't I?' He said, trying to smile, to laugh it off.

Theo and Blaise both knew he wouldn't have fallen off his broom. They'd seen him in action, knew he was exceptionally talented at flying. They both just looked at him for a moment. he busied himself changing, not meeting their eye.

The thing was, he actually had fallen off, but it was only because he'd been pulled off.

When he was with his real friends, he didn't goad, he didn't tease.
He let them all talk, joke, bounce off each other, he mostly just watched. He didn't feel like he had much to say that anyone would ever want to hear.
He'd spent so much time alone, he didn't think he'd quite learned how to be a real boy yet.

Pansy didn't seem to mind. He'd noticed how she always came to stand or sit next to him, he saw her eyes always trying to catch his, he was aware that when they were walking anywhere, she'd pretend to stumble, grab his arm, or let her fingers brush against his.

He saw it all, but he had no idea what to do with it. He liked Pansy, she always had his back, hissing at people as he taunted them, laughing when they stumbled as he pushed them, but he didn't really like her.

Not like that.

His eyes still searched out Granger in every room. Draco loved how big her hair was, it made her easy to spot.

The pleasure he felt as she eviscerated Weasley during lessons, or put her hand up to answer the most obscure of questions, warmed him.

It made him feel something other than hate.

But then, that feeling soured in his stomach as he thought of his father, of Carrow's leering face. She wasn't safe, there was more than one Malfoy with his cold eyes on her.

Now they were a few months into third year, he didn't understand how the term went so fast when the holidays seemed to go so slowly.

It was a few weeks after the horrific episode with the Hippogriff, that he'd realised he really was in trouble when it came to Granger.

His arm was mostly healed again now, but he wore the sling to rest it in, when the pain became too much. He was embarrassed by how much he'd revealed his agony that day, glad his father hadn't been there to watch him roll around on the floor, he would have found it hilarious.

But, the feeling of those bones breaking again, the visceral memories they brought up, taking him back to those nightmarish days at the manor when he was small, when there was no Hogwarts to hide at- Those had been the feelings that had stopped him occluding, stopped him being able to keep his pain inside.

He'd screamed as much out of mental anguish, as he had from physical pain.

He was used to physical pain- an expert.

He had sat next to her in class, the day Lupin was absent.

Clearly it was a full moon and he was off screaming somewhere, tearing at his skin, Draco felt like he knew the feeling.

Snape was teaching the class.

He had sat down next to Goyle, and felt a disappointed relief when she wasn't there.

Snape had stormed through the room, like an old crow, eyeballing Potter, gunning for him. He'd just told them the page number to turn to, when suddenly Draco became aware of the gentle, sweet aroma he associated with Granger, like the honeysuckle that grew in the manor gardens.

His head jerked up and to his consternation, she was sat at the desk next to him, Potter on her other side.

Their eyes met for only a second. He felt his stomach drop. The warmth that was always there made his insides feel weird. It hurt, in a different way to the pain he was used to, but a pain all the same.

Snape was jibbering on about werewolves, Granger was reeling off facts. She finished with 'it only responds to the call of its own kind,' and, he didn't know what came over him, he wanted to get her attention somehow, even though he'd vowed to keep away from her.

He howled-a loud wolf sound, obnoxious.

Her eyes flashed to his, and she glared at him. It did something to Draco, that flash of angry eye contact. His stomach clenched.

She held his eyes for a fraction of a second longer than was comfortable, and he wondered if she could see that his walls crumbled when he looked at her.

But she turned her eyes away again, her face flushed, her chest rising and falling, she looked down again at her book as Snape chastised her, before flicking her eyes to his once again.

He'd forgotten to stop looking at her, and the warm honey brown poured, thick and hot over the ice in his heart again.

Gods he hated her. Hated her for putting herself in his firing line. Why couldn't she just stay under the radar, why did she have to be so- there- all the time?

He distracted himself by drawing a nasty picture of Potter and making it into a paper crane. He sent it over towards them, putting his hands out and blowing it. As he did he met her eyes again. She was watching him, her eyes on his lips as he blew.

He needed to leave, to get out of that class. She was making him crazy.

He had spent a lot of time that year learning how to make wards, protection charms that could be directed at a person, a charm to make you forget them, forget what their face looked like, if only for a few hours, so that they could escape from somewhere.

Charms that could be thrown over a person, like a net, protecting them from curses, or stopping them from being hexed.

It would also work on someone trying to force their way into the person's mind, if it was strong enough.

He worked on performing the charms, making sure that he could do them wandlessly, as well as with his wand in his hand.

He'd realised over the past few months, that his magic was becoming more powerful, he was having to hide it in class now.

He felt it, pushing out of his skin as he sat, he felt like he could explode sometimes, with the tingle of magic under his skin.

If he felt anger, or fear, it nipped at him, teeth snapping, it wanted to be set free.

He wasn't sure if his brand of magic was one that he should be letting out into the world. Even at thirteen, he felt it. His magic had been borne from hatred, fear and loneliness. It was dark, cultivated in the black, cold world of Malfoy manor, and it reflected who he was, who he would always be.

He just hoped that if he ever really needed it, he could control it, harness it. He wasn't sure that he could.

Hermione - May 2006

Hermione stood in the Penseive room, her mind racing. Draco Malfoy had seemed scared that his father would talk to her. What could possibly be the reason?

Harry had never said a word to her about the note, could it be that he'd never seen it? She hadn't voluntarily gone near Malfoy for much of the next few years anyway. There had been so much going on.

She tried to think back to whether he'd gone near her, but her memories of school were hazy. It had been a while and a lot had happened.

She avoided thinking about that one brief incident in sixth year.

She'd get to that, when she came to it.

She wondered if it would appear in his memory archives anywhere, wondered if his recollection would be better than her own, Firewhisky addled one.

Her head was hurting, she couldn't think too much.

She siphoned the 1992 memory back out carefully and selected the next one, February 1994-their third year.

She poured the memory in, watched it swirl, then dipped her face in.

Malfoy was down in the Slytherin common room, he was sat with Blaise and Theo, his arm in a sling.

They were asking him about the Hippogriff.

He gave short, one word answers.

'Your father's coming to Hogwarts today then Malfoy?'

Blaise asked.

'To make sure the job is done on the big chicken,'

The corner of Malfoy's mouth quirked up, but he didn't look like he found it particularly funny.

'Yes, he's coming for a meeting with Dumbledore. He wants to make sure everyone knows he won't put up with anyone hurting his precious son,'

The sarcasm dripped from his voice, Blaise seemed utterly unaware of it, but Theo gave him a sidelong glance.

She watched them then, doing some homework, Malfoy giving both Blaise and Theo the answers to everything.

He had been so much more intelligent than she realised.

She was fascinated by how different Draco was down here in the common room, when he wasn't seemingly putting on a show.

His face looked different, less pointy. His eyes lost that cruel edge, the grey seemed more of a pale silvery blue.

She watched as they dressed in their winter robes and left the common room, all around them was talk of Buckbeak's imminent execution. As Draco walked, Slytherins were clambering, calling his name, congratulating him and telling him that Buckbeak deserved it.

Hermione didn't see him respond.

She watched as he agreed to go and watch the execution from the hilltop, observing the instant arrogant swagger he affected, the change in him startling.

He stood with Goyle and Theodore Nott, looking down at Hagrid's cottage. Hermione thought that Draco didn't look glad, he looked angry.

His face was pale, his eyes hard. His jaw was clenched as he looked down.

She saw then, in the memory, herself, Harry and Ron heading down the hill towards him, he had seen them coming.

She could see the rage in her own eyes.

She remembered how she had seen this situation play out, how angry she had been with him, for his spite, for his lack of regard for anyone.

'Ah, come to see the show?' He had goaded. His mask back on.

She had spat hateful words at him, called him all the names she could think of, she heard the venom in her own voice, watched his eyes darken as she hissed into his face. Her wand came out now, pressed under his chin.

Malfoy didn't fight back, he didn't do anything.

He let her point her wand at him, and he just closed his eyes and waited, his face screwed up as though he were terrified.

She had thought it was cowardice at the time, but now she wasn't so sure.

She watched herself, take her wand away at Ron's insistence, and then bring her hand back, before she slapped him, as hard as she could.

She remembered the way his cheek had felt under her palm, remembered the red hot anger, turning to satisfaction as she connected with the soft skin of his face.

She had thought at the time that she was the first person to hurt him. She knew now how terribly wrong she was.

She watched herself walk away, and Malfoy turn from his friends, and head in the opposite direction.

He had a smile on his face.

Hermione followed him now, into the toilets. He made his way to a cubicle, slamming the door.

She watched him put a hand to the place where she had slapped him and smile again. It was the strangest smile she'd ever seen, satisfied, sad and hungry all at once.

He looked up to the sky, and closed his eyes.

She watched him clench his fists, his chest heave.

He was still for a long moment.

She couldn't tell what emotion he was feeling, until suddenly, he opened his eyes.

He shot his hands out and the toilet cubicle suddenly exploded out from him, the noise deafening.

He looked at the main toilet door, it slammed shut. The door shuddering in the frame with the force.

He cast his eyes now to each sink, they shattered one by one.

Porcelain flying up into the air, the taps exploding, water shooting several feet into the air, soaking him, his hair plastered to his face, dripping into his eyes, his robes sticking to him.

He turned his head, hands darting forwards, every mirror cracked, exploding violently, shards showered down on him, but he didn't seem to notice.

Everywhere Draco looked there was more destruction.

He stood in the middle, a thirteen year old boy, his eyes blank with rage and he screamed as he destroyed the bathroom.

Then, abruptly, he stopped.

He raked his nails down his face, his chest heaving.

She watched his eyes cool again, the shutters come down. His fists unclenched and he breathed, slow and easy.

Bit by bit, piece by piece, the toilet rebuilt its self. Every shard of glass finding its way back to where it had come from, the cubicle rising back up around him. He waved his wand, drying himself.

He sat now, calm in the cubicle as only moments later, Nott entered, apparently none the wiser.

'Malfoy, your dad's just come out of Dumbledore's office. He wants to see you before he leaves.'

She watched as Draco left the cubicle, calm and cold as ice. He washed his hands and left, good naturedly bumping into Theo as he passed, Theo shoving him back and them both laughing.

He looked totally relaxed as he walked to Dumbledore's office. Nonchalant.

His eyes narrowed as he saw his father, half out of the door, his back to Draco, speaking to Dumbledore.

'Yes well, I'm glad to see it's been dealt with appropriately,' Lucius was saying.

Dumbledore mumbled an incoherent response before going back in and shutting the door firmly.

'Ah Draco, how is your arm son?' Lucius asked as he approached.

*Malfoy didn't react. Just stood and looked at his father, who glanced around before hissing.
'Are you doing as you've been told? Have you got her on side yet?'
Draco looked evasive.*

Who?

Who was Lucius talking about?

*He leaned in towards Draco now,
'Tick tock Draco, I'd better hear of progress in the next few months, or I don't need to remind
you of the consequences.
You befriend Granger.
You make her trust you.
We want her, and you are going to bring her to us, understand?'*

*Draco's eyes remained blank, occluded, as he nodded. 'Yes father.' Hermione wondered how
Lucius couldn't see it. His eyes were completely different. Did he not know his own son well
enough? She supposed not.*

*Hermione jumped, as the memory version of Malfoy did, when suddenly the doors at the end
of the corridor slammed open and a stream of students began filing through.*

*She became aware of herself in the crowd, just as Malfoy also saw her. His eyes flicked to her,
then back to his father, and as Hermione watched, in front of her eyes, she disappeared from
the crowd, just vanished. She wasn't there any more, she'd been disillusioned.*

Ron still seemed to be having a conversation, but it was with thin air.

*Malfoy's eyes were on the spot where she had been, his lips moving silently.
His father's eyes were also roving the crowd, he hadn't seen Draco uttering the spell.
'Shes not here,' Malfoy said. 'Must be in a different class,'*

*Lucius looked at him, disdainfully one last time, then swept away, his final words to his son.
'Do not fail Draco, make me proud.'*

*As the memory faded and Hermione drew her face up from the water, the last thing she saw
was herself reappear in the crowd, back, walking with her friends.*

*Her headache was bad now. Her brain just couldn't comprehend what she was seeing. Lucius
Malfoy had been looking for her, Draco Malfoy was hiding her.*

Why?

*She thought of Draco in the boys bathroom. It made her stomach feel weak with a sick sort of
fascination.*

The level of power he had demonstrated in that one moment was absolutely terrifying.

He had been just thirteen.

She had watched as he destroyed an entire room, effortlessly.
Hermione didn't need to know now how he had defeated Voldemort as an adult. If he was that powerful as a teenager, she couldn't imagine what he would have been capable of by twenty.

She almost didn't want to watch another memory, but she knew she needed to make the most of her time with the Penseive.

The way things were going, she needed to make the most of some uninterrupted time checking over the memories.

She chose the next memory by date, December 1994.

She knew before she even tipped the memory in that it would be the Yule Ball.

Draco was stood, awkwardly in the great hall. Hermione could see that he was uncomfortable immediately.

All around him people were discussing the Yule Ball, who they would be taking, what they would be wearing.

He was in a group with Blaise and Theo.

Blaise was animated, he had secured a date with one of the Beauxbatons girls, Mariella Junip.

He was describing his game plan to Draco and Theo who both stood, clearly not listening to him, their eyes elsewhere.

'And if I keep speaking French, telling her everything she wants to hear, I think she'll definitely kiss me,' Blaise was saying.

Hermione rolled her eyes. Ginny went wild for him when he spoke French to her even now.

Draco was studiously avoiding the eyes of Pansy Parkinson who hovered, just outside of the group. She kept looking over to Draco, a hopeful expression on her face.

Theo's eyes also kept sliding towards Pansy.

Neither boy answered any of Blaise's inane questions about what colour silk handkerchief he should put into his breast pocket, or if they thought she'd prefer him to conjure lilies or roses.

It took Blaise a good five minutes before he became aware of the fact that he was essentially speaking to two brick walls.

That made Hermione smile, he had always been a talker, then.

Eventually he looked between the two of them, glanced back at Pansy, and said, 'Oh for gods sake, one of you needs to ask her. Who's it going to be?'

Theo immediately looked to Draco, there was hope in his eyes.

Draco looked resigned, he chewed the inside of his lip, seeming to be trying to make some sort of decision. He looked stressed.

Hermione almost marvelled at how much worry this caused him, when she'd seen the carnage he had caused in mere seconds in the toilet, during the previous memory.

'I'll ask her,' he said eventually, although he looked like he were going to the gallows.

Theo visibly sagged. Hermione guessed he knew back then, that Draco would definitely be Pansy's first choice.

The light went out of his blue eyes slightly, and he began scanning the room.

'Well, go on then,' Blaise said, 'Do it now before she goes mad and hexes anyone you look at. She said she was going to get whoever you asked with the Bat Bogey curse.'

She watched Draco purse his lips at that. He put his head down and headed over to where Pansy was sitting.

Pansy's eyes lit up as Draco approached.

Hermione almost felt sorry for Pansy in that moment, almost saw the human underneath the viper like personality.

'Draco, hi,' Pansy had breathed.

Her eyes twinkled as he sat on the bench next to her, she seemed to almost hold her breath.

Hermione looked at him, closely, and she could see what Pansy saw, she wondered how she never had back then.

He was tall and broad now, his shoulders and arms filling out the grey v-neck jumper he wore over his white shirt. His green Slytherin tie was loosened at his neck, his hair spiked up at the front, falling over his face slightly.

There was none of the arrogant swagger she had detested so much in school, and without it, his face was softer, his eyes gentler.

She saw, that although he clearly didn't want to be asking Pansy to the ball, that he cared about her.

He didn't want to hurt her.

She thought back to the note he had scribbled in the book- 'Draco Malfoy is dangerous. He wants to hurt her.'

So far, she'd seen no evidence of him particularly wanting to hurt anyone.

'So, Pans,' he began. His voice was so different without the awful pompousness he forced into it.

'I, ah.. I was wondering, if you didn't, umm, if you don't already have a date, whether you'd-'

'Yes!' Pansy practically squealed.

'I'll go with you Draco.' She leaned over and pecked him on the cheek, a wide smile on her face.

Dracos face flamed and he looked hideously embarrassed.

Hermione watched Pansy stand up and walk away, smiling. She broke into a run the second she got past the table, grabbing hold of some of her girlfriends and pulling them out of the great hall, her abject excitement evident.

Pansy didn't see Theo, watching her enviously from across the hall.

Draco for his part, hung his head for a moment. Twisting his signet ring around his finger. Then, he took a deep breath and stood up to leave the great hall, looking like he had just been sentenced to death, rather than a date.

The memory jumped now, to the night of the Yule ball.

Hermione watched Draco and Blaise, attempting to put their bow ties on. Her heart melted slightly at the sight of them laughing, their teenaged boy fingers fumbling with the complex knot of silk, and she wondered whether either of them had realised they just could just do it magically.

Eventually they were both done.

Draco slipped into an ivory waistcoat and did up the small buttons along his front, before shrugging into the black jacket of his dress robes. Hermione remembered the breathless whispers of the girls as he had walked in that night. There was no denying he looked incredibly handsome.

The ivory should have clashed with his hair and his skin, but it didn't. It made him look like a pale, dangerous angel, a fallen angel of sorts, Hermione thought now.

She remembered rolling her eyes as she'd listened to the girls around her, and remembered how she'd tried to tell herself that he did not in-fact look as handsome as everyone made out. But even she had had to let her eyes drift over him for a second longer than she should have.

Blaise and Theo both also looked gorgeous in their suits, she wondered whether Ginny had noticed Blaise that night, his suit moulded to his athletic body, brown eyes shining with excitement.

Theo was less obvious about it than Blaise, but Hermione thought the blue of his bow tie looked lovely against the blue of his eyes.

Pansy came gliding into the room, her dress was floaty, a pink frilly affair, her hair was styled into a sleek updo, she had make up on, her lips were pink and glittering and her heels were high.

She looked to Draco, waiting for his reaction, Hermione could see the effort she had gone to. How hard she had tried to get him to see her the way she wanted him to.

Her eyes looked towards him shyly, she smiled a coy smile.

Hermione watched as Draco swallowed hard, a hand came up and he fiddled with his bow tie.

'Ah, um, you look- nice Pans, nice- skirt? Um dress. Shall we go?'

He was uncomfortable, and so was Blaise.

He'd always been good at reading people, Hermione knew, it was what made him good at his job.

Theo didn't say anything, he was looking at Pansy, looking the way she wanted Draco to.

But Pansy hadn't noticed. Her shoulders had slumped, she looked dejected. She hadn't had the response she wanted.

Hermione watched the Slytherins all put on their masks as they left the common room. Pansy's spiteful expression, side eyes at the other girls, eyebrow raises, sneers at their outfits. She held the arm of Draco proudly, possessively, as he led their group to the table, his own matching sneer in place.

Blaise had bounded off to his Beauxbatons date and Theo was reluctantly dancing with his, a Slytherin girl Hermione couldn't quite place.

Theo's eyes never left Pansy though.

Hermione thought, he was down bad, if she didn't know how things had panned out for them, she would have thought he was going to get his heart broken.

She watched now, and felt her stomach clench as she saw herself enter with Viktor. She had felt so grown up at the time, she realised now that she had had no idea how to do her hair, her make up, she felt she looked ridiculous.

Draco however, was watching her.

His eyes had widened, he had gone stock still.

She watched his grey eyes follow her, and only her as she walked with Viktor and the other champions with their own partners, ready for the first dance.

She could see her own nerves, not surprising as one, she couldn't dance, and two, at the time she had been so overwhelmed by Viktor, so enamoured by him.

She could see Ron in the background, he looked jealous. She wondered now, had it been Harry all along that he had been jealous of? Had he known, even then?

Pansy had also seen Draco looking at her, she thought. Pansy's eyes were on Draco's tracking their movements. She seemed to set her jaw as she took his hand, pulling him in to join the dance at the requisite time.

They'd all been taught the dance, so Draco after looking briefly like he wanted to die, joined in.

Hermione watched the elegance with which he moved, clearly a sign of his breeding but also, reminiscent of the way she'd seen him duel, later on, sure footed, confident.

Pansy clung to him, pulling his body close to hers, she attempted to look up into his face but he kept his eyes resolutely forward, and yes, Hermione could see, they kept darting to her.

Hermione watched, she thought back to the note, did he want to hurt her? Was this what the looks were about? Was he waiting to get her alone?

She knew that he hadn't. He hadn't gone near her other than during this dance.

But still, as they all changed partners and he was paired with a Beauxbatons girl, he smiled politely at her and spun her round skilfully, his eyes still found Hermione.

She saw herself, two left feet, her hair beginning to frizz already, what was he looking at so intently?

She watched as the dance spun her towards Malfoy. She remembered her irritation at the time, he had held her too closely, she had felt it was a power game but as she watched him now, she saw their few seconds of dancing in a new light.

Draco's hand was on her waist, it was firm, but there was a slight tremble there, she watched him, dip his head very slightly to her hair, and he inhaled deeply, his eyes closing briefly and his hand tightening at her waist.

His face was tense, he looked almost pained.

His eyes were down, casting over her bare shoulder, her arms, to their joined fingers.

She remembered waiting for it to end, relieved when it did, his expression as she spun away was different. He looked disappointed, his shoulders sagging as he took his next partner.

He now looked away, disinterested.

As the night drew on, Hermione saw herself, dancing with Viktor.

Ron and Harry sat glumly in the corner.

Blaise was wooing his Beauxbatons girl, grinning and smiling. Theo was nowhere to be seen.

Draco was sat, in a corner. His eyes glittered as he followed her around the room. Pansy sat leaning against him. Occasionally darting her eyes up to him.

'Shall we dance, Draco?' She asked hopefully.

'Ahh, I'm not really a dancer Pans,' he replied.

Her face fell, and she sat for another moment, before she suddenly let out a strangled sound, a cry of frustration.

Hermione watched as Pansy stood, tears beginning to stream down her face, and she ran, as best she could on her high heels out of the great hall.

Draco watched her go, his face a picture of confusion and guilt. He brought his ringed hands up to scrub at his face. He fisted a hand through his hair.

Blaise had noticed. He left his girl on the dance floor, motioning to her that he would be back.

'You need to go after her Malfoy.'

'What?'

'You need to tell her, let her know, gently, that it's never going to happen. You're breaking her heart Draco, and it's not fair.'

She watched Draco look at Blaise, surprise turning to resignation, he chewed on his lip. Eventually he nodded. Blaise clapped him on the shoulder.

'Good luck.' He said. 'I'll pray for you.'

*'If I'm not back in an hour, she's drowned me in the black lake.' Draco replied.
'Tell Theo he's still not having my bed.'*

Blaise winked at him, and headed back to his date.

She watched Draco look up to where she was, getting a drink with Viktor once more, before sighing and heading out of the castle.

He was right, and Pansy was down by the black lake.

*She was sat, on Draco's black jacket, her arms wrapped around her knees.
There were tears drying on her face as she looked out to the lake.*

She looked up with a gasp as Draco approached.

'Draco,' her voice was hopeful. She rubbed a hand over her face.

'You came after me.'

He sat down heavily next to her, also looking out to the lake, but he didn't say anything.

Pansy watched him, the hope in her face fading slowly.

'You're never going to want me, are you?'

She asked him, her voice soft. So different to any voice Hermione had ever heard her use.

Draco looked to her, his eyes finally meeting hers. He looked sad.

Hermione felt like she was seeing these people for the first time in her life. They were so incredibly far removed from her own memories of them.

'I'm so sorry Pans,' he said eventually, and Hermione thought she was watching Pansy's heart break.

'Why not?' She asked, her voice raw.

'I love you Draco. I always have. You know I'd be there for you always. I'll have your back through anything!'

She was beginning to shout now, 'I'll do anything for you Draco! You know it! So why? Why won't you love me back? Is it someone else?'

He shook his head, his mouth pressed into a thin line.

Pansy dropped her head to her hands.

'It's not you.' Draco said after a time. 'Its me. I'm not sure- I'm not sure I'm capable of love, not like you want.'

'Is it your father?' She asked.

'I know he's horrible, I-'

'No!' Draco shouted. 'Don't bring him into this, it's got nothing to do with anything.'

He looked furious, as he rose to stand.

'I'm sorry, I-I'm sorry Draco,' Pansy was panicking. She knew she'd said the wrong thing.

Draco stopped, all the air seemed to leave him and he sagged back down to sit on his jacket again.

He turned to her, his eyes almost pleading.

'Theo though Pans, he does like you- a lot.'

Pansy stopped, mid sob.

'He does? Really?'

'Yes, really.'

'Oh' Pansy said, as though she'd never really considered Theo at all.

'He loves you the way you want. The way I can't. I care about you so much, but it will never, ever be more than that. I'm so sorry.'

Pansy didn't reply. She sat next to him, and let silent tears roll down her face, then she leaned into him.

He brought an arm up around her shoulder.

'But, I'll always be your friend Pansy. I'll always be here for you too. I'll fight for you, I'd hurt people for you.'

They both grinned.

They sat then, looking out to the lake, neither saying anything.

After a time Pansy stood.

'I'm going to go back in.' She said.

'Can't let this dress go to waste!' She pasted a sad smile on her face.

'Coming?'

'No, I'm going to stay out here for a bit,' Draco replied.

'No more dancing for me.'

She smiled, bent down and kissed the top of his head, her eyes closing, her face a picture of pain, and she turned and left.

Hermione felt like she could cry herself watching them. She had only felt a fraction of what Pansy seemed to, when she broke up with Ron, but she remembered the pain well. Pansy looked like she was in agony.

Draco remained, sat on his jacket at the black lake for a long time. He focused on the water, sending ripple after ripple over the surface, his eyes on the black depths.

He stood up then, and Hermione cried out with shock as he suddenly turned, faced the tree he'd been sat under and roared, an angry, rage filled shout.

She watched him, punch at the trunk of the tree, angry, brutal punches, his knuckles ripping almost instantly, blood flicking from them onto the white of his shirt.

He kept punching, not seeming to be aware of the damage to his fists until he suddenly raised his arms and the tree groaned as it raised from the ground, its roots screaming, protesting, mud and grass falling down around Draco as he stood.

He kept going until the tree was fully free from the ground, and then he let it drop with a deafening crash.

His shoulders were heaving, his eyes black, pupils blown.

He stood, calm now, his whole body shaking, as he stood and surveyed his destruction.

'For fucks sake Granger,' he muttered as he stood, blood covering his white shirt, eyes already beginning to go blank, the emotion leaving them.

The memory began to fade, as she saw him begin to replant the tree, the ground shuddering as he did so.

The last shreds of the memory dimmed away, and Hermione lifted her head, she felt a lance of pain in the base of her skull and stumbled, sitting down on the floor against the Penseive.

She felt like these memories were driving her mad. Like he was driving her mad. The more she saw of the real Draco Malfoy, the less she could bring herself to hate him. She didn't know what she was feeling, she was confused.

She was suddenly brought out of her reverie though, by the sound of a hard rap on the door of the Penseive room.

She scrambled to her feet, heels sliding on the floor and opened the door.

Simons was stood there.

'Granger, your times up with the Pensieve,' he said.

'And you'd better get up top. Potter wants to talk to you. Apparently one of the witnesses has been saying something weird, and it involves you.'

The Witness

Draco - July 1995

Voldemort had returned.

Draco had felt the dread mounting in his stomach since the horrific aftermath of the Triwizard cup.

He'd seen Potter return with the Portkey, then kneel, bent over Diggory's lifeless body and he had known, despite what everyone was saying, that Potter was right, his father had been right.

It was happening.

He'd listened to Diggory's father's anguished screams, the pain in his voice, and he had thought, what must it have been like?

To be loved like that?

Diggory had been a good person, he had been worthy of love, and look where it had gotten him.

Dead on the Quidditch pitch, a school full of people, cheering for your competitor, until they realised that you were dead, that you weren't competing any more.

Cedric had lain there, his father's tears dripping onto his motionless chest, and Draco had known as he looked at him, that there was never any hope for himself.
That he was truly his own father's son.

Evil to the bone.

Because all he had thought, as he'd looked at Diggory's cold, grey corpse, was that he was lucky.

He had been loved.

And now he got to be dead, he'd died knowing he was loved, and Draco didn't think he would ever get that privilege.

He sometimes wished he was dead.

But if he was, who would look after Granger?
Keep her out of the hands of the Death Eaters?

He didn't know if Potter ever got his note, Potter's hatred of him increased with every year they were at Hogwarts, but did Potter think he was dangerous? Or did he believe the version of Draco Malfoy that he put forward?
The pathetic, pampered prince?

He couldn't even ask him, because then he would know it was him who put the note in his pocket.

He didn't know what was better, Potter's ignorance or if he needed to know, that Draco *was*, in fact dangerous.

He was finding it harder to keep his rage inside, it kept escaping, in small ways.

It was harder to control, the dragon as he now thought of it, that lived inside him- his namesake.

The vicious, angry, inner part of him, it wanted to be set free, its smoke curled around him when he sat in class, burned in his gut, trying to force its way past his throat.

He sat, feeling himself smoulder, but he kept it pushed down, kept the fire inside him.

He had to.

He had to keep it in check for her, Granger.

He had to be close by, to make sure that Potter and Dumbledore were doing their job, protecting her- if he got expelled, who knew what might happen? They didn't know the danger she was in.

The train journey back from Hogwarts had been horrendous.

He had struggled to occlude more than he ever had before, the cold fingers of panic had wrapped themselves around Draco's throat, and he was suffocating.

He spent half the journey in the toilet, sat on the floor, a hand clutched to his chest.

The closer they got, the more he could picture that godsforsaken part of Wiltshire he was forced to call home, and the more he thought that he was going to lose it, and blow the entire train to smithereens.

He wouldn't see Granger over the whole summer- anything could happen to her.

He was in such a state that he was almost relieved when the train got to London.

Almost.

His mother was there to greet him as he came off the train.

He'd almost vomited when he saw her.

She was stood on the platform like a black raven, a bad omen.

Draco had hugged his friends goodbye, a moment longer for Theo.

They looked each other in the eye, a silent show of support, a shoulder squeeze- *'be strong.'*

And then he turned, back to hell on earth- and best look happy about it.

He looked for Granger as they disembarked, one last glance, but she wasn't there, she had already left with her friends.

His mother didn't even pretend this time, to be glad to see him.

She had been crying, he saw the second he approached her with his suitcase in hand.

She knew what he was coming home to.

He could smell the alcohol on her breath, see the way she swayed as they walked towards the apparition point.

It was a wonder she hadn't splinched herself on the way there, he thought.

He insisted on side- along apparition on the way back. He didn't trust her to get herself home in one piece.

As they began the long trudge up the gravel path, the manor looming, dark and ominous before them, she stopped.

'Draco,' she whispered.

He looked back at her.

'Please be careful. Now he's back, your father has plans for you.

I know Draco, I know that you hate me, but I'm scared.

I'm scared for you and I'm scared for me.

Just do what he says, please, don't fight against him now.'

Draco looked at her, at the redness of her eyes, the weakness he saw there, and he felt disgust rise in his throat.

It was too late for warnings from Narcissa.

Far too late.

The manor was busy, frantic.

Voldemort was back, sequestered away somewhere, top secret, the Dark Marks on the Death Eater's arms were pulsing, burning, black as coal again, and they had work to do.

Draco knew his father had been present at Little Hangleton graveyard.

He had made sure he put himself firmly back in Voldemort's good graces, secured himself at the top of the pecking order.

His father strode about the manor, making more plans.

His last one had been successful. Barty Crouch Jr had been under cover at Hogwarts, posing as Mad Eye Moody in order to ensure that Potter had won the Triwizard Cup and Portkey him to the graveyard. He'd been in hiding since his escape from Azkaban, being harboured by various Death Eaters.

Draco wondering if Crouch had been feeding information back to his father.

Had he told him that he was actively keeping Granger at arms length, not the other way around?

Draco knew that his father and Crouch had hated each other at one point.

Crouch was angry that Lucius had escaped being sent to Azkaban, as he himself had been.

Lucius had been part of the plot to free Barty, hiding him afterwards, but Crouch was a loose cannon.

He didn't think his father had known that he would send the dark mark into the sky that day at the World Cup.

He was impulsive, he wasn't sly and controlled like his father. They were now cordial, but Draco knew, there was no trust there between Lucius and Crouch. He hoped they weren't close enough to have spoken in depth about him.

Draco assumed that Snape had been the one to bring Crouch back to the manor.

Crouch kept his beady eyes on Draco as he walked in the door, suitcase in hand. Draco was sure he had not forgotten the incident with the firewhisky glasses, but neither had he. He realised that 'Moody' turning him into a ferret had been another way for Crouch to humiliate him.

He looked at Crouch, and he hoped he felt every dagger of his hate.

He knew he would need to find a way to protect Granger from him, the man had no shame. He had tortured Draco himself, at only eleven, in front of his own father. He'd have no problem hurting Granger if he ever got his hands on her. He shuddered at the thought of how close Crouch had been to her during the past school year, and Draco had had no idea.

'Ah Draco, welcome home,' Lucius's voice was silky smooth. 'I'm sure you've been looking forward to it since Christmas.'

'Counting down the days Father,' he replied and turned down towards his room, ignoring the muttered greetings of the portraits.

He reached his bedroom and dropped his case on the floor.

Moddles instantly popped into existence.

'Master Draco, is you ok?' She asked, her voice quavering.

'I've got the potions ready, they are in your drawer,' she was shaking slightly.

He knew she was bending the rules, although, as a Malfoy, he was still her master too.

'Thank you Moddles,' he said.

'Master?'

'Yes?'

'Be careful.'

And with another pop, she disappeared.

Draco knew that everyone at the manor thought he was weak, his mother, the elves, they had seen the violence he had been subjected to, knew the violence he was likely to be subjected to again.

But he wasn't seven anymore, wandless, powerless.

Draco wanted to keep his magic a secret, he had to. It was his only weapon now.

Over the following weeks, the manor was a hive of activity.

Cornelius Fudge was a regular visitor, as well as Severus Snape.

Draco tried his best to stay under the radar, grateful for his father's distraction.

He saw the way Snape looked at him as he skulked through the house, his dark eyes following him, I see you, he thought, I know you.

Snape was a master at keeping things a secret too, he knew.

Dumbledore trusted him, had no idea he was here, helping his father facilitate the return of the Dark Lord.

He had a few weeks of respite, there were too many eyes for Lucius to fully drop the caring father routine, however, he knew, the second Moddles popped into his room early one morning, that that respite was over.

‘Master Lucius has requested you, immediately,’ she said, her large ears quivering with the force of her shaking body.

‘Ok, thank you Moddles,’ he replied.

He dressed himself slowly, not willing to rush, to give his father the satisfaction of him jumping to his command.

As he entered the drawing room, he saw that his father was alone, his mother nowhere in sight, and his breathing paused momentarily.

‘You called for me?’ He asked, keeping his voice level.

‘Yes, I did.’ His father prowled towards him, the look on his face like a shark, before it attacked, his white teeth glinting.

‘It’s been a few weeks since you’ve been home Draco, and I have the feeling you’ve been avoiding me?’ His father drawled.

‘No, I haven’t. I just know you’ve been busy father.’

‘Busy?’ Lucius’s voice was taunting.

‘Yes, I have been. I’ve been busy, ensuring a future for this family, strengthening our position, our connections. Have you been busy Draco? Have you been doing what you’ve been told?’

His mind worked, how could he keep the truth from his father a little longer, it had been over a year, with barely any mention of Granger, why was he asking him now?

‘I- ah, I..’

‘Your professor tells me that it’s going very well.

He says she’s practically eating out of the palm of your hand, that you are in a secret courtship with her.

He even provided me with a very nice description of you dancing with her at that little ball you had at Christmas.

Well done Draco, he said that you managed to look positively enamoured with the foul little Mudblood, despite the fact that she looked like a broomstick in a dress.’

It took Draco a second to realise what was happening. Snape had covered for him. Why? Why had he done that?

He couldn't be seen to be hesitating.

'Oh yes, she's desperate for it.

All I had to do was give her a little taste of what it's like to be a Malfoy, and she flipped straight away. Turns out Mudbloods like money too.

She's pathetic.'

He made sure he sounded as disgusted by her as possible.

'Very good. She will be useful now, the Dark Lord is aware of her. He will want to use her, to use her brain, her closeness to Potter. You are to continue your courtship of her. Ensure that she trusts you fully. There is a plan, to get rid of Dumbledore, and when he is gone, we can strike.'

Draco was so relieved, that he initially couldn't fully take his father's words in.

Then he realised what Lucius was saying- She was now on Voldemorts radar, she was in even more danger.

'In the meantime, you now need to begin your training in earnest.

I have told the Dark Lord of your devotion to him, that you live to serve him.

He will want to meet with you soon, and you must be ready.

You will spend the rest of the summer learning how to duel, footwork, how to cast the dark curses, hexes.

You will receive your dark mark as soon as our Lord believes you to be ready.

You will become the youngest Death Eater he has ever had, a protege.

Your name will inspire fear, as his right hand man.

This is the plan Draco. All of my preparations have lead to this.

I have ensured that you will be ready when this time came. You won't let me down, will you?'

He looked at his father then, really looked at him.

He realised that Lucius truly believed, despite it all, that Draco still wanted to please him.

His arrogance, his utter self belief meant, that after everything he had done to him, he still believed that he had him where he wanted him.

'You'll make me proud, won't you son?

I have given you the world, this manor, your name. And now, I'm giving you this- the chance to be powerful, influential over the world's most deadly dark wizard. I've done it all for you son.'

He stopped dead at his father's words.

Make him proud.

When he was young, that was all he'd ever wanted to do. He had thought, once, that he could do it.

That he could please him, by being strong, by not showing weakness. Maybe he still could.

Maybe this was the way to protect Granger, by being enough.

If he could be, then they wouldn't need her, would they?

He couldn't move. He looked up at Lucius.
Why? Why did some part of him still care?
He nodded.

‘Yes Father.’

Hermione - May 2006

Hermione followed Simons up from the Pensieve room silently, her mind whirling.

What on earth could any witness have to say about her?
She'd barely been in the Hogs Head, other than on the day she'd been sent to investigate the body.

She thought back to that version of herself, she felt like that was a completely different Hermione, as though there were now two of her.
The Hermione before she saw Draco Malfoy hanging there, and the Hermione after.

The ‘before’ Hermione was professional, level headed.

The misery she had seen since having her eyes opened to Draco Malfoy's life, had seeped under her skin like a poison, the darkness infiltrating her soul.

She felt like the only way to rid herself of it, would have been to change things, to be able to help that little boy, crying on the floor with a broken arm.
To cuddle him tight and show him what love was, before he grew up to be a cold, shell of a man, who killed with no remorse because he'd never been loved.

But that was the problem with memories, they were gone, past. There was nothing you could do to change them.

She made her notes as she walked, including details of what she had seen in the memories, from that day, adding it to her copious notes from the previous week.
Hermione liked to be thorough with her notes, they helped her organise her thoughts.

When they finally got back to the office, the first thing she noticed was the tense atmosphere.

Blaise was at his desk, but he didn't look up at her as she entered, he was massaging his temples, looking down at a scroll, the stress coming off him in waves.

Harry was deep in conversation with one of the Aurors from the memory retrieval department, their conversation seemed heated.
As Hermione approached, they both fell silent.
Harry turned to her, she could not read his eyes at all, he wouldn't look at her properly either.

‘Harry? What's going on?’ She asked, beginning to feel a little uneasy.

He looked at her then, a stricken expression on his face, and her mild unease grew- sprouted wings, something was wrong, why would no one talk to her?

‘Hermione, um, ah, yes, can you come to my office a sec?’ Harry said, and she could read the discomfort in every aspect of his body language.

She followed him to his office, feeling the headache start up again, she looked towards Blaise, he was watching them go into the office, his eyes troubled.

Harry closed the door tightly behind them both, and motioned for Hermione to sit down, she didn’t want to sit, but she did it anyway, her legs feeling slightly weak.

‘Harry, you’re scaring me,’ she said, ‘What’s going on? Why is everyone being weird?’

Harry rested his elbows on the large oak desk and steepled his fingers in front of his face, she looked at his bright green eyes, anxious behind the black, thick rimmed glasses he wore now, waiting, until finally he spoke.

‘So, as you know, we’ve been conducting interviews with everyone from the Hogs Head? Patrons, regulars, those who were known to have been there the night Malfoy died.’

‘Yes?’ she said, impatient for him to get to the point.

‘Well, most of them said they didn’t see anything, a lot of them didn’t want to be interviewed.’

‘Makes sense.’

‘Yes, but one woman, a Squib.

She consented to interview, she said she was at the pub most nights, was there the night Malfoy went in, and the next day when the body was found.’

‘Yes? And?’

Harry looked mortified now.

‘Well, she said...’ Infuriatingly, he paused again.

‘Harry! What?’

‘She said Hermione, that she’d seen you.’

‘Me? What going to the pub to investigate the body?’

‘Well, yes,’ he looked sick.

‘But she said she recognised you that day, because she’d seen you there, several times before, last year, when Aberforth still owned it.

She said she saw you there, with Draco Malfoy.’

Hermione laughed then, it was so ridiculous. She felt the warmth of relief flow through her. She had been worried for nothing.

Just some old, drunk Squib making things up, she'd clearly recognised Hermione and wanted her five minutes of fame.

'Oh for gods sake Harry,-'

'She's providing a memory,'

'What?'

'She's being brought in, to provide her memories, of you. With Draco Malfoy, at the Hogs head.

Hermione, is there anything you need to tell me? Now? Before it's too late.'

Hermione looked at Harry in horror. Was he truly asking her that question?

'Harry,'

'I'm so sorry Hermione, but I have to ask. He could have Imperiused you, had you there under duress, I don't know!

We both know how fucking ruthless Draco Malfoy was.

I've just got to check, because what this woman is saying is crazy.

She said she saw you kissing him, crying, pulling at him. If she provides those types of memories then-'

'She won't Harry! Because those memories don't exist!

I haven't seen Draco Malfoy since school, except briefly at his trial. You must see that what you are saying is ridiculous?'

She felt tears pricking her eyes.

She felt like she were in some sort of awful dream.

Harry reached out a hand, patted her on the top of hers,

'I believe you Hermione, I'm sure the memories won't show anything.'

He looked like he had aged ten years since the start of the conversation.

'Simons is going to collect her at 3pm.

Is it ok if you just stay here until then? I can't be seen to be treating you any different to anyone else.'

Hermione snatched her hand away.

'You aren't asking me Harry, are you? You're telling me.'

She realised, that she was effectively being held, on suspicion of colluding with a murderer and lying about it. She felt like she was dreaming again, an awful nightmare.

This couldn't be happening.

Harry sighed.

'I'm telling you.' He said. He could barely look at her.

‘Robards is on his way in. We’ve got to deal with this properly Hermione, until we see the memories and rule it out. We can’t be seen to be treating one of our Aurors any differently to anyone else who has been accused of lying about their connection to a wanted murderer.’

Hermione felt the headache pounding in her temples. She felt sick.

‘Of course. You need to do what you need to do.’

She hoped that the look that she gave him then would haunt him. This was her oldest friend. He knew her. How could he even be giving this the time of day?

She left his office and returned to her desk, needing to keep busy.

She glanced up at the clock, 1pm.

Two hours until everyone would realise how ridiculous this was, and she could get on with her job.

She wanted to get back down to the memories.

She looked over to Blaise’s desk, wanting to let off some steam, but he wasn’t there.

To kill time she updated her notes, then decided to look through the case photos that she hadn’t been able to face previously.

There were photos of him, hanging.

She forced herself to look at them, as she read the accompanying notes.

Case Notes- Draco Lucius Malfoy

The deceased has been positively identified by Senior Auror Hermione Jean Granger as one Draco Lucius Malfoy

DOB: 05.06.1980

Height: 189cm

Weight: 174lbs

Hair: Blonde

Eyes: Grey/ blue

Distinguishing features: Tattoo on left forearm (Dark Mark), scar approx 1 Inch on left cheekbone, missing two molars(back left) further scars on various parts of trunk and extremities (see page 1-3 of additional notes).

Clothing: one black Gucci shirt, black suit trousers, black boxer shorts, black socks, one green velvet lined, black cloak, black dragonskin lace up shoes.

One silver cufflink (shaped like a Clavicula Nox) the matching cufflink not found on body, or in room.

One silver signet ring- bearing the initial M

One silver ring in the shape of a skull

One silver ring in the shape of a snake

One silver Rolex watch (Oysterdate Precision)

Preliminary cause of death: Asphyxiation by hanging

Date of Death: 13.05.2005

Approx time of death: 23:00

Next of kin: Narcissa Malfoy Nee Black/ Lucius Malfoy (deceased)

She looked at the photos, of his clothes, the cufflink, his watch, rings.
She knew he had had those teeth knocked out when he was young, they clearly hadn't grown back, possibly due to trauma in the jaw.
She didn't look at the photos of the rope around his neck again. She couldn't.

She made notes and waited for 3pm.

By the time she looked up, Blaise was back at his desk.
She rubbed her eyes and headed over to see him.

'Hi,'

He looked up at her, but didn't smile.

'Hi,'

'Have you heard? About what the Squib is saying about me?'

'I have. Don't worry, it's nonsense.'

'I know it is Blaise, but it's being taken seriously, I can't believe it.'

He gave her a tired attempt as a reassuring smile, 'Don't worry at all, nothing will come from it.'

He looked incredibly stressed again. Hermione couldn't ever remember seeing Blaise like this.

'Blaise, what's going on? You need to talk to me. I know Malfoy's death has gotten to you, more than you are letting on. You're like a stranger at the moment, I don't know what you're thinking, we're meant to be partners.'

Blaise looked at her, and opened his mouth like he was about to answer, when suddenly they heard a loud bout of swearing coming from the corridor.

Simons burst in through the door. Hermione looked at the clock, 3.15pm, he would have the witness with him. She wanted to see her, to see if she recognised her.

But Simons strode through the office alone. His partner Jameson followed behind a moment later.

Hermione watched Simons burst into Harry's office, more shouting ensued and she heard Harry begin swearing too.

'What's happened?' She asked Jameson.

'Where's the witness?'

'Dead.' He replied, a rueful expression on his face.

'Someone Avada Kedavra'd her, looks like it wasn't long before we got there.'

'What? She's dead?' Blaise rose from his desk, just as Harry came marching out of his office, closely followed by Robards, both of them positively thrumming with anxiety and stress.

The rest of the afternoon went by in a blur. Harry had meeting after meeting with Simons, Robards, Kingsley.

She felt all of their eyes on her as they passed through the office.

She looked back at them, refusing to feel cowed.

None of this was her doing.

The woman had made up lies about her, and now she was dead. Whether it was related or not wasn't her problem.

Eventually, she was called into the office, where she was told by a very uncomfortable Robard's that, since they could no longer corroborate the woman's evidence, they were letting the case drop.

There was no evidence at all to back up what she had been saying, and no one else at the pub claimed to have seen her.

Hermione was free to go.

She left the office with a sigh of relief. Blaise remained, he said he had filing to do. He was being sent to secure the scene and look for witnesses. Another new death linked to Draco Malfoy.

She left him there and headed home, feeling relieved, hurt, confused and angry all at once. She couldn't believe that her colleagues had listened to a drunken old Squib, and now she was dead.

Who had killed her and why? How was Malfoy still managing to leave carnage behind him, even after his death?

She got in, and made herself some hot buttered toast, too tired to do any more.

Then she showered, and slipped gratefully into bed.

She felt like she was still in shock after the events of the day. She was furious with Harry, even though she knew, logically that he was just doing his job.

As she let her heavy eyes close, she wondered what would happen the next day. She had a slot with the Pensieve she desperately hoped could still go ahead.

She dreamed of Draco Malfoy again that night.

She dreamed that they were in the room, at the Hogs Head.

She entered that dingy room again, the smell of apples and dark magic sparking in her nose. A smell she remembered from bonfire night when she was a young girl, toffee sweet, fire and gunpowder.

But this time Draco wasn't hanging from the rafters.

He was alive, sat on the bed. He turned as she entered, and she wanted to cry at the beauty of his face.

His eyes, a clear silver blue framed by long lashes, his lips were the rosy colour she'd seen before her seizure, full and inviting.

He was wearing the black shirt she had read about, unbuttoned at the neck, only one cufflink.

His hands weren't purple and clawed. They were resting on his long, muscular thighs, she looked down at his legs, clad in black, and somehow she knew those muscles were from clenching around a broom.

She felt her pulse move lower, into her stomach.

He smiled at her as she approached him, but he didn't say her name this time.

He didn't say anything, and neither did she.

As she reached him, she didn't hesitate, she stepped between his legs and kissed him, a slow, sensual kiss, full of all the desire she had felt, the last time she'd seen him, in her dream.

She let her lips press softly against his, barely touching to begin, just the gentlest brush and then as she felt him gently suck on her bottom lip, the kiss became firmer.

She brought up her hands to his face, and felt his strong arms tighten around her waist.

She pressed herself up against him, and let her tongue slide, wet and hot into his mouth. In the dream she heard him take a sharp breath in, and she pressed herself against him harder.

He brought a hand up now, to graze against the side of her breast and she felt her breathing increase, she leaned into him, pushing against him and he began to lay back, onto the pillow, pulling her with him, and suddenly she was on top of him, straddling him, her thighs either side of his hips, looking down at his face.

She could hear him panting.

'Draco,' she whispered, 'Stay. Please don't go this time.'

He didn't answer, just kissed her harder. She could feel him again, pressing at her center, hard and insistent.

She suddenly felt herself being flipped around, so that she was laying on her back. He leant over her, his blonde hair falling into his eyes, which were open wide, trained on her. She whispered his name again, pulling him to her, kissing him desperately.

In the dream she felt then, his fingers, lightly dancing over the exposed skin of her stomach, where her top had come up slightly. She arched towards him, desperate for him to move his fingers lower.

She was enveloped by the sweet toffee apple smell in the room, by the intoxication of the kiss, her breath was shuddering in and out of her as she felt his fingers then, slip down lower, past the hem of her skirt, and begin travelling slowly up her thigh.

'Oh Draco, please,'

She heard herself almost begging.

When his fingers finally met the material of her underwear, she thought she might scream.

She writhed underneath him, as his fingers gently moved her underwear to the side, and then suddenly, they were expertly sliding in and out of her.

She cried out, clenching around his fingers, looking into his beautiful face, lost in the exquisite ecstasy of the feeling of his fingers, dipping, slowly in and out, running over the sensitive bud at her center.

She awoke to the feeling of herself, convulsing with pleasure as she shuddered to a climax, the feeling of his fingers on her still echoing, even as she opened her eyes and realised where she was.

She was alone in her bedroom, and Draco Malfoy was still dead.

She was sweating, her hair wild, spread over her pillow.

She pulled the blanket up to her face and held it over her mouth while she screamed into the material, embarrassed and wanting. Wishing desperately that he were there, and that it had been real.

No one was there to see, a few moments later when Hermione began seizing. Her body shook, her limbs went rigid, her eyes rolled back into her head. Blood poured from her nose and her teeth clattered together. She lay like that, jerking and spasming for several minutes.

When she finally reached the end of her seizure a few moments later, she swam back into consciousness, her head pounding, tasting blood in her mouth, and she knew, it had happened again.

She lay there, feeling the pain in her head, lancing and pulsing, and she realised that she could not tell anyone, they would stop her working.

She waited until her legs felt strong enough to hold her up, then got up to wash the blood off her face.

Good Boy

Draco - July 1995

Draco's duelling training began that summer.

He attended four hourly training sessions daily with either his father, Corban Yaxley, or sometimes whichever of the other Death Eaters was most skilled in the particular brand of suffering they were teaching him.

They taught him terrible curses, a hundred different ways to hurt someone.

He learned how to make someone bleed internally, to cause their eyeballs to explode, to make their insides boil, burning them from the inside out, and the worst one, a curse which forced them to pull their own teeth out, one by one.

He was even shown how to cast the Cruciatus curse, being made to use it on various animals collected from the manor grounds.

Draco had done it, but his heart had hurt slightly when he had been made to do it to a hedgehog they had found wandering the gardens.

It had made him think of the hedgehog he had rescued when he was small, and he didn't like to think of that boy, who had still had some shred of hope for his future in his heart.

He watched the hedgehog squealing in pain as he pointed his wand at it, and he knew, that if he could curse an innocent animal, he'd have no problem cursing someone who deserved it.

Draco was taught how to move correctly to avoid being hit in his extremities, how to dodge ricochets, and how to protect himself from several attackers at once.

He was shown how to cast a full body shield effectively, to counter curse whilst spinning away from an aggressor.

He was told, proudly, that his fighting style was reminiscent of his Aunt Bellatrix, graceful and nimble.

His father was so dedicated to training Draco, that he had even made sure not to injure him in ways that could prevent him from fighting, instead putting him on a strict diet and enforcing an exercise routine for him, to be undertaken twice daily, when he wasn't practicing his duelling.

Draco was under no illusions as to why there was a change in the way his father treated him. He was no longer just there to be taunted and tortured for amusement.

Lucius didn't want him weak any more, he didn't want him hurt, and beaten down, he wanted him strong.

His father's plan, was to make him indispensable to Voldemort- his right-hand man.

Now that Voldemort was back, Draco was to be utilised, honed- he was a commodity.

As hard as he tried to hide the true power of his magic from his father, as the summer wore on, it was clear that he was becoming a talented duelist, graceful and accurate, demonstrating an ability far beyond his years.

Draco was careful though. He ensured that he only let the dragon inside him out in increments, he only let his father see what he wanted him to see.

Draco was only fifteen but already, he was thinking in terms of strategy.

Draco thought about the way he felt like a cockroach in the sewers when he was down in the Slytherin dorm, and he still felt like he was a cockroach now, despised by everyone around him, but strong, hard-shelled, bomb-proof.

When you are abused and neglected from a young age- survival becomes a necessity.

The more Draco's talent became apparent, the more Lucius strode around the manor, arrogance overflowing.

He was cocksure in his belief that all along, his parenting method had been correct.

It had all been for this purpose, to create his boy soldier- and he had succeeded.

Draco was tall, strong, he was emotionless, and impenetrable, relentless and cruel. Lucius looked at the shell that was left of his son, and he felt vindicated.

He was a good father.

Whilst Draco undertook his training, Lucius was busy ensuring that his sway within the ministry remained.

He pumped money into Cornelius Fudge's policies, made donations to charities and hospitals and even got Narcissa to hold parties at the manor, inviting anyone with any political standing who would be seen, within ten feet of a known 'ex' Death Eater.

Draco skulked in the background of the parties, staying under the radar, as he'd been instructed to, remaining by his mother's side, smiling silently and making sure that she didn't drink too much and embarrass herself.

Draco watched, and he learned.

He was amazed at what money could do.

Who it could buy.

He met Delores Umbridge for the first time at one of his father's parties.

She had made his skin crawl as she had looked him up and down, an insipid smile on her face.

She had asked him question after question about Hogwarts, trying to find holes in the quality of his education.

Draco had answered every question she had eloquently and intelligently, frustrating her slightly, he could tell.

He was counting down the days to the end of the holidays, with only a week to go when, he received the news he had been dreading.

He was to meet Voldemort.

He wasn't trusted enough to know the location of where Voldemort was sequestered, so Voldemort was to make a top secret visit to the manor.

He was told just a day in advance, Moddles brought him the news, along with a smart black suit for him to wear.

She was crying, fat tears trickling out of her blue eyes as she stood and watched him hang up the suit and begin preparing for the meeting.

He had to force Moddles to leave him, insisting that he would be fine, and encouraging her to get back to his mother, who was apparently drunk and crying somewhere in the manor and needed to be controlled before Voldemort's arrival.

Draco had just left his room and was on his way outside to practice on his broom, which was allowed as part of his training.

He looked up as he saw Severus Snape, leaving his father's office.

He could hear the rumble of conversation and the odd burst of laughter coming from the office, letting him know his father was still entertaining within.

Snape marched towards him, robes billowing, and suddenly, Draco was yanked, forcefully into one of the other rooms along the hallway.

Draco realised with dismay, as Snape shut the door quietly behind them, that it was the room where he had had his arm broken several years before.

He stood and looked at Snape, his eyes wide, wondering what on earth was going on.

Snape said nothing for a moment, just surveyed Draco with his fathomless, dark eyes, his thin lips pressed tightly together.

'Are you alright, ?' He asked eventually, his voice quiet. 'Are you injured, at present?' Draco frowned, and shook his head.

'You are unhurt?' Snape asked again, and Draco nodded.

He looked at Snape, wondered what he wanted. Was it regarding the help he'd given him a few weeks before?

'Thank you, professor,' he said. 'For covering for me, with my father- about Granger.'

It was Snape's turn to nod now. He was looking at Draco intently, dark eyes boring into his own silver ones.

'Miss Granger,' Snape said after a time.

'She will need to be protected from your father, the plans he has for her- they cannot be allowed to happen.'

Draco's eyes widened. Snape knew of the plan for Granger.

'I sense- you do not want that to happen either?' He steepled his fingers together and looked at Draco inquiringly.

Draco stared back at Snape, his mind working. How much could he say? Admit to?

In the end, he just shook his head and looked down at his feet.

'I don't.'

Snape nodded, knowingly.

'I will help you, Draco. I will help you to protect Miss Granger, but you need to know, that if you breathe any word of this to your father, you will kill all three of us.'

If he finds out that I have helped you, none of us will survive, not you, not me, and definitely not Hermione Granger.'

Draco nodded. His mind was reeling.

He had thought Snape was his father's friend. Why was he helping Draco keep a secret from him?

'I know, Draco, about your- life experiences up to now.' Snape's voice was quiet.

'I have been informed, by many other Death Eaters, that you have suffered greatly at the hands of your father. Is that correct?'

Draco didn't answer. He couldn't.

He'd never told a soul about what happened to him here, and he'd promised himself that he never would.

'I'm surprised,' Snape said now, taking his silence as confirmation.

'That your mother would allow it.'

Narcissa was always fearsome in school. Your father's influence over her must be great?'

He waited, looking at Draco now, who could only nod. He could barely breathe.

Someone had come, at last, someone was maybe, finally going to help him.

For a moment, he allowed himself to be fifteen, to admit to himself that he was scared, lonely, he had been fighting, alone for so long.

He was glad to be admitting things to Snape, to share the burden of his torment.

For the first time in years, Draco thought that he might cry. He swallowed rapidly, blinking back the tears before Snape could see them.

‘You are to meet with Voldemort tomorrow?’

Draco nodded again, still struck dumb.

‘You will need to be extremely careful Draco. I have seen, from your behaviour in my class, that you are able to occlude.

You must do this at all times when you are with the Dark Lord. Do you understand?

He will be looking for signs of weakness, and for information on Miss Granger.

He is highly interested in her.

After Potter, she is the next most pressing matter.

You must hide her away in your mind.

Do not let the dark Lord see that you have feelings for her.’

He raised an eyebrow as Draco opened his mouth to deny this.

‘He will use any weakness he finds in you, against you, Draco.

You must practice, tonight. He will try to look inside your mind using Legilimency.

Keep it closed.

Hide what you do not want him to see.’

Draco understood what he needed to do. He realised that Snape was not fully on board with his father’s plans.

But why was that?

Was he planning something of his own?

Draco didn’t trust Snape. He’d never been given a reason to trust anyone other than his friends.

But he desperately wanted to.

He wanted an adult, for once that he could go to, to ask advice from, someone who wouldn’t hurt him, or ignore him.

He tried to not feel gratitude to Snape, but he did, he felt immense gratitude to be able to share the load he had carried on his young shoulders for so long.

He nodded determinedly at Snape, muttered ‘Thank you, Professor,’ and left, heading back to his room to practice his occlusion.

Draco spent the next twelve hours practicing. He barely slept. He ignored the food that the house elves brought him, throwing it out of the window so that Moddles didn’t panic.

He worked on separating his mind.

He viewed it like a set of scrolls.

On the one scroll, he mentally recorded all the times he'd been hurt by his father, recorded every punch, kick, slap, and curse. He recorded broken bones, lost teeth, torn skin, and blackening bruises.

On the next, he recorded his mother, her alcohol problems, her failure to protect him as a small child, and the feeling of calling out to her, to hear silence in response.

One more, containing the knowledge of his magical ability, the abnormal level of strength his hatred had formed.

He hid away on the scroll every time he had destroyed and repaired things, the times he had moved things with his mind, the spells he had learned secretly as he rotted away at the manor.

The next scroll, was for Hermione Granger. He locked away every image of her soft brown eyes, her bushy hair, her rosebud lips, and the freckles he loved so much.

He locked away the sound of her voice, impressing him with her knowledge, the feel of her hard slap to his cheek that had thrilled him so very much, her ferocity, her loyalty, her kindness.

He put them all onto the scroll and then he rolled it up tightly, with all the other memories that he had accrued in his fifteen years that he wanted to protect.

Then he focused, hard, and pushed those scrolls to into the farthest recesses of his mind.

Now, he brought forward new scrolls. On to these, he added his rigorous training, his duelling skills, his ability to cast hexes and curses with no hesitation, after only being shown once or twice.

He brought forward the praise he was receiving from the Death Eaters, making sure to include the image of their faces, looking at him with reverence as he twirled away gracefully from a bolt of light that flew towards him from Yaxley's wand.

He included his father's praise of him after Snape's lie about the dance, his mother fussing over him the first time on the train platform, ensuring that it looked like his parents loved him.

He included himself pushing and shoving the other students, his horrible words, his sneers, his taunts.

Pansy, Theo, and Blaise laughing along with him as he made the other student's lives hell.

This was the Draco he needed Voldemort to see.

His father might have a plan, but so did he.

He could barely sleep that night. He tossed and turned, dreaming of Granger, of Voldemort, torturing her, of her body cold and still, like Cedric's had been.

He awoke early and got to work practicing his occlusion again.

When he heard his father's short rap at the door at eleven AM, he was ready. His suit was on, collar straight and cufflinks in place, his shoes were shined, and he had styled his hair just as well as he thought his mother ever did, a slick side parting.

He looked at himself in the mirror, ensured his face was calm, and confident, then he walked into the bathroom and cast a Muffliato.

He bent over the toilet and vomited up everything in his stomach, his abdominal muscles contracting violently.

Once he had stopped retching, he stood up, washed his hands, and splashed some cold water on his face.

Then he strolled out of his bedroom to meet his father, hands firmly in his pockets.

'Shall we go?' He asked levelly.

His father led him to the East wing where Voldemort was waiting, and Draco saw that Lucius's nerves were palpable.

He was sweating.

'You don't speak unless he speaks to you; you are polite and deferential.

You are to tell him how much I have done for the cause while he was away, how hard I looked for him.

You do not mention Dumbledore or Potter unless he does. Do you understand?'

Lucius was practically wringing his hands.

Draco walked next to his father, his shoulders loose, a beatific look on his face, he was there, physically, but Draco was far away.

He pushed every emotion he had deep, deep down inside himself. Not allowing his fear to even register.

Eventually, they came to the portrait, which led down to a part of the manor Draco had never been to.

Lucius motioned to him to take off the signet ring bearing the letter M for Malfoy.

Draco did so and handed it to his father, shuddering as their palms touched.

His father then placed the ring into a small key in the bottom right hand corner of the painting, and Draco heard him mutter 'Ad Mortem Occultam' and suddenly, a door began sliding open in the wooden floor underneath their feet.

Lucius smiled cruelly as he watched Draco stumble, unaware of where the door would open.

'Down there,' Lucius said, and his eyes twinkled with a vicious triumph as he sent his son down alone to meet the most deadly wizard on Earth.

Draco didn't hesitate. He descended the stairs, keeping his heart rate level.

The first thing Draco noticed when he entered the room where Voldemort was, was the smell. It made him almost gag.

It was the smell of rotting flesh.

He looked to the shrivelled man sitting in a wingback chair, his face illuminated by the dim candlelight in the dank underground room.

Draco squinted his eyes to make him out as he approached.

Voldemort looked and smelled like he was half dead, which Draco supposed he was.

His foul snake Nagini, slithered around Draco's feet as he walked, the sound of its heavy body sliding over the wooden floor the only noise, other than Dracos echoing footsteps, his calm, measured breathing and Voldemort's own more laboured wheezes.

'Sit, boy,' Voldemort said as Draco finally reached the chair opposite him.

Up close, the smell was worse.

Draco looked at his skin, the snakelike scaly texture, his withered lips, and his glittering, beady eyes.

He felt his stomach revolt again, and he was glad that he had vomited up everything in him before he'd come.

'So, you are the boy who is going to help me to defeat Harry Potter?' Voldemort's voice was high, thin.

'Your father says you are a slippery snake, worming your way into Potter's inner circle, that you have got his Mudblood primed and ready to turn on him at any given moment?'

Now Draco felt fear.

He felt it begin in his chest and spread its icy fingers outward, he felt himself freeze.

He'd thought he was coming to talk about his fighting ability. Not his relationship with Potter and Granger.

'I won't need her to like me, when the time comes,' he said, ensuring he sounded as confident as possible.

'She won't have a choice; if I decide I want her, then she will come.'

Voldemort's eyes shone then, and he laughed a high, screeching sound, like nails on a blackboard. It hurt Draco's ears.

'Cocky, like your father, I see.' Draco made sure he didn't drop eye contact, and stood tall.

‘Let’s see if it’s all bravado in the offspring as well then shall we?’ Voldemort hissed, and before Draco even knew what was happening, he heard Voldemort mutter, ‘Legillimens,’ and suddenly, his head felt like it was breaking open.

Voldemort blasted into his skull like a wrecking ball; he couldn’t have prevented it even with a warning, Draco realised.

As quick as a flash, he brought all his scrolls forward, his duelling, his mother, his father, his schoolwork, his life at Hogwarts.

He pushed it as hard as he could towards the grabbing fingers that invaded his mind.

He didn’t know if the screaming he could hear was him, or not.

His ears were ringing, he was blind, his body was trying to expel the invader, bucking and fighting, fingers clawed.

Voldemort ripped through each scroll violently, and Draco heard him murmuring as he did so, ‘Good. Yes, good boy’.

He focused, only on the scrolls he sent forward, putting every bit of him that wasn’t consumed with agony into thinking about them.

Eventually- it may have been five minutes later or five hours, Voldemort withdrew.

Draco lay, panting on the floor, he was aware that he was bleeding, he could feel it running from his ears and from his eyes, red watery tears tracking slowly down his face. He swiped them away quickly with the back of his hand

He thought that he had succeeded. He could feel the secret scrolls, still intact at the back of his mind.

Voldemort didn’t ask him any more questions as he slowly brought himself up to standing.

He watched Draco as he squared his shoulders and then bowed low, his head almost to his knees.

‘I only live to serve you my Lord,’ Draco said, before straightening and looking at Voldemort in the eyes.

Voldemort surveyed him, a look of vicious glee on his snakelike face.

‘Yes.’ Voldemort said.

‘You will do.’

Hermione - May 2006

Hermione awoke to the sound of banging at her door.

She flung herself out of bed, unable to quite stand up straight with the agony of her headache and the muscle pain in her arms and legs.

Her eyes hurt in the light.

When she finally wrenched the door open, she saw Harry and Ron standing there.

‘Hermione,’ Harry breathed.

She just stood and looked at him; she couldn’t bring herself to speak to him yet.

‘Are you ok, Mione?’ Ron asked, peering at her, his blue eyes full of concern.

‘No, I’m not actually, Ronald,’ she replied, looking at Harry and injecting as much indignation as she could muster into her voice.

‘My best friend accused me of colluding with a murderer yesterday.’

Harry looked abashed as Ron produced a huge bouquet of roses from behind his back with a flourish, and Harry bent down to pick up a large cake box.

‘Can we please come in?’ He asked.

Hermione sighed and opened the door. She stiffly accepted a hug from Ron, but walked away before Harry could try it.

He walked in and put the cake box on the table.

‘Hermione, you can’t be angry with me,’ he said, voice pleading.

‘It was taken out of my hands. Whatever the old hag said to Simons, he was gunning for you. He went straight to Robards with it.’

He looked so apologetic, so worried, that Hermione softened slightly.

Hermione did understand the position Harry had been put in, it was hard being the boss. But he had known her since she was just eleven. How could he think that of her?

He seemed to be reading her thoughts as he said, ‘I’d never think you’d go with him voluntarily, Hermione, but Draco Malfoy was dangerous; what if he wanted to hurt you?’

His wording, so similar to the one in the note Draco had written all those years ago, stopped her in her tracks.

‘Why do you say that Harry? Did he ever indicate he was a risk to me specifically, or even that he knew I existed outside of being your best friend.’

‘No,’ Harry said firmly, and Hermione thought then that he couldn’t have seen Draco’s note. She would have seen it on his face.

‘But he was a lunatic at the end, Hermione.

If you’d seen the crime scenes from the manor, or some of the ways he tortured people, you’d panic at the thought of someone you love being around him too.’

Hermione didn’t say anything.

She realised, that she should be telling Harry about Draco, about what she was seeing in the memories.

She should tell him how badly abused he had been, and how he had seemed to be trying to protect her, so why wasn't she?

Something was stopping her.

Blaise already knew that Draco had been hurt by his father, but he didn't know that Draco had been protecting her.

She was the only one to have seen those memories so far.

She knew, eventually she would need to turn in her notes, but, for now. She wanted to keep her version of Draco to herself.

Hers.

The thought formed before she'd even realised.

He wasn't hers, she made herself remember. He had been nobodies, and certainly not hers.

She opened her mouth to say something, then shut it again.

If she said anything in support of Draco Malfoy now, it would only go against her insistence that the squib had been wrong about her.

She pushed the thought of the crime scenes Harry had mentioned to the back of her mind.

'Please, Hermione, forgive me,' Harry said again, moving towards the cake box and opening it to reveal a huge Coffee Walnut cake—her favourite.

Ron had left them to it, while they talked and now re-entered the room, levitating three hot coffees before him.

Hermione sighed and finally let Harry hug her.

'I know you were just doing your job, Harry,' she said, 'But I'm still cross with you.'

'Cross enough to say no to cake?'

She smiled now. 'No'.

Ron smiled through his own mouthful of cake, he'd already gotten started.

'See Harry,' he mumbled. 'I told you she'd get over it.'

An hour later, Hermione was dressed and ready for work.

Harry and Ron had left, Harry to get to the office early and Ron to head into Hogwarts.

Hermione tried not to let what had happened yesterday play on her mind, but she couldn't help feeling anxious as she apparated to the office.

The looks she got as she strode through the door of the DMLE didn't help her feeling of paranoia. She made her way to her floor quickly.

Blaise was at his desk when she arrived, he had a set of interview notes out in front of him.

'Hey,' he greeted her 'How are you feeling?'

'I'm ok,' she replied, although she felt peaky, her head hurt and she felt achy and tired.

She hadn't slept again after her seizure. She had been worried that she wouldn't wake up.

Instead, she had just lay there and thought back to her dream of Draco Malfoy.

She knew it was wrong, but she did it anyway.

She thought about the colour of his eyes, the shape of his lips, the feel of his skin.

Most of all, she thought about how it had felt to be pressed underneath his strong body, about his hands, so skillful and gentle as they had touched her, when she knew they were capable of such brutality.

It made her shiver with lust.

She wished she could stop thinking about him, to stop these duplicitous feelings, but she couldn't.

She tried to remind herself that he was a killer. These were dreams, nothing more.

She shook her head to clear the thoughts of him that rose in her mind again, and approached Blaise's desk.

'Are those the transcripts from the Squib?' She asked him.

He closed the file with a snap, 'No, these are from the witnesses yesterday.

'Apparently, the squib- Damilda Crease, was last seen at the Hogs Head around twelve pm, lunch time, telling anyone who would listen that she was going to meet Harry Potter.'

'Harry? But that's not who was going to interview her?'

'No, but for some reason, she thought she was going to get to meet him, she was a fan, apparently.'

He rolled his eyes.

Hermione frowned. First her, then Harry. What was going on with that woman?

She wished she were alive to ask her, but she was just another person who was dead before they could answer any of Hermione's questions.

'Are you coming down to the Pensieve today?' She asked Blaise.

'No can do. I'm swamped,' he indicated, the other ten files piled up on his desk.

‘Ok, good luck,’ she said, feeling relieved.

She wanted to view the memories alone, but couldn’t be seen to be being anything other than transparent at the moment.

Simons flung the door open and marched through the office, just as she was on her way down to the Pensieve.

‘Granger? What are you doing here?’ He snapped as he saw her, his face incredulous.

‘I’m working, Simons,’ she snapped back, with just as much vitriol, ‘what else would I be doing?’

As you know, there was no evidence to back up the squib’s claims that she saw me with Malfoy, and even you must know how ridiculous the things she was saying were.’

‘She seemed pretty sure to me, Granger.’ He retorted. ‘She was willing to give us the memories, too. Seems a bit suspect to me that she suddenly winds up dead before she got the chance.’

Simons had stepped towards her.

Blaise stood up at his desk.

‘You’d better be fucking kidding, Simons,’ he growled.

‘You’ve read the transcripts, Zabini, you tell me,’ Simons shot back.

The two men were now both moving towards each other, Hermione stood in the middle, unsure how it had escalated so quickly.

‘We all know you were his Death Eater buddy Zabini,’ Simons spat out now.

‘Might have been too much of a pussy to get your own mark, but you still sucked Malfoy’s ass until he got too big and scary for you.

Maybe you can’t be trusted on this case either. I’ve heard you were crying over his dead body last week, that doesn’t sound like someone who’s moved away from the dark side to me.’

Blaise’s face was hardening, his fists clenched at his sides. Simons backed away but kept talking.

‘Maybe they need to put someone who’ll do the job properly on the case, because you two are clearly hiding something.’

Hermione didn’t see Blaise move from beside his desk, but Simons was suddenly pinned against the wall. Blaise’s elbow at his throat.

‘Blaise! What are you doing?’ She cried, moving towards him and pulling him off before anyone else saw.

She'd never seen Blaise react so instantaneously to provocation. He looked taut, like he was hanging on by a thread. He was furious, breathing hard.

'This is my fucking case,' he hissed at Simons through gritted teeth.

'Mine, and Granger's, and if you do anything to jeopardise that again. I'll fucking kill you.' Simons eyes widened.

'You'll kill me? Hear that, did you?' He looked at Hermione.

'I'm getting death threats from Malfoy's old mate over here.'

Hermione scowled at Simons.

'I didn't hear a word,' she said. 'And there's no one else here, so if I were you, I'd listen to Blaise and keep your damn nose out.'

She stormed out of the office then, trying to hide how much she was shaking.

Simons couldn't get her taken off the case. She needed to see more memories, she had to know why Draco Malfoy had been so focused on her.

She didn't want to admit it to herself but she wanted to see more of herself in his memories, the way he had viewed her. She needed to see more.

Hermione hurried down to the Pensieve before there was any more trouble.

When she finally closed the heavy door of the Pensieve room behind her, she sighed with relief.

She felt like her time was running out. She still had several more vials, she needed to see them before something else went wrong and she couldn't finish them.

She selected Draco's next memory, January 1996, halfway through their fifth year.

Hermione thought back. Umbridge was instated as High Inquisitor at Hogwarts, and Arthur Weasley had not long been attacked by Nagini, Voldemort's snake.

Hermione poured it into the Pensieve and dipped her face in.

In the memory, Draco was back at the manor.

He was in a dungeon-like room, his father was standing there, and was that? It couldn't be.

Hermione felt sick.

It was.

Voldemort.

Fifteen year old Draco was stood talking to his father and Voldemort.

'We will send the boy Lucius,' Voldemort was saying.

'He can be the lookout. Corban has the plan in order, the breakout will go smoothly.

This is a test of your son's suitability to be a Death Eater. He will stand as lookout whilst the others release our acolytes from Azkaban.

This is a simple task, if he cannot be trusted to do this, then he is of very little use to me.'

Hermione could see Lucius looking at Draco, he looked worried.

Was he actually worried for his son? Hermione wondered, or just worried that he would fail.

'My Lord, Draco is more than ready to complete this task, he would be honoured to accompany those facilitating the breakout.'

Lucius was deferential, simpering.

'Go, boy,' Voldemort said to Draco now, 'go and prepare. You leave in an hour.'

Draco nodded and left the room without a word.

His father followed behind him, close on his heels.

Hermione watched as they climbed several sets of stairs. Draco muttered an incantation, and a trap door opened above their heads.

Draco seemed to take huge gulps of air as he exited the trapdoor, his pale face gaining more colour the longer he was above ground.

She noticed that Lucius didn't look particularly great either.

She watched as Lucius gripped Draco by his arm and pulled him into another room.

As the door closed, he grabbed Draco by his face and pushed him against the wall.

'Are you ready for this boy?' He asked, eyeballing Draco, pushing his sweaty face right up into Draco's own.

'Do you realise how important this is? The Dark Lord is allowing you to take part in a mission. He is testing you, testing us. This is it boy. You cannot fail.'

Draco brought up a hand and smacked his father's away.

'I'm ready.' He said, and Hermione was shocked at how cold and hard he looked. He was only fifteen.

She watched as Draco returned to his room and dressed, all in black, combat boots, robes and a black knitted hat to cover his blonde hair.

He was taken, along with the Death Eaters, all on brooms, flying high above the dark clouds that had gathered in the night sky.

She watched Draco swooping effortlessly on his broom, travelling the distance over the dark ocean below them, then being disillusioned by Theodore Nott senior, who flew in front, along with Yaxley, Crouch, and several others that Hermione didn't recognise.

Hermione watched as their barely visible forms descended on a rocky outcrop, in the roiling sea of the island that housed Azkaban, all four of them slowly bleeding back into view as they moved into a cave, stashing their brooms in the craggy rock of the cavern.

Draco looked so young in amongst them all, so much like the child he was.

His face betrayed no emotion as he stood, shivering in the wind, waiting for his instructions.

'Come on then, boy,' Crouch said, his tongue flicking towards Draco's face.

'Let's see what you're made of.'

Crouch began pushing Draco forward, towards the gates.

'You can be the one to make the deal.'

Hermione watched as Draco strode forward, with no apparent fear to be seen and approached the Dementors at the gate.

The other three disappeared from view, before leaving the cave, disillusioned again.

The Dementors immediately sensed him coming and turned to Draco, she watched as one moved towards him and, almost instantly, Draco was on his knees.

He just crumpled.

She watched all the bravado drain out of his face, and the most heartbreaking expression flit across his young features.

Hermione remembered what Dumbledore had told Harry about the dementors.

They fed off misery and heartache which was why they affected Harry so much at Hogwarts.

Draco must have been like a lamb to the slaughter.

Why hadn't he questioned what they were telling him to do? She wondered, was it fear? A lack of fear? Or was he just so conditioned to cruelty, was it the only thing he knew?

She watched as the barely visible forms of Crouch, Yaxley and Nott paused for a moment, then just left him there, on his knees at the gate, distracting the Dementors while they separated as they snuck past, through the gates to the inner part of the prison.

She couldn't see what happened inside the prison, she could only see Draco, sacrificed outside it.

The dementors were on top of him now, one was laying him down, its face over his, the hood closing down onto him. The other approached also, swooping down over him.

Tears streamed down Draco's pale face, and she could hear the quiet words he panted as he lay on the ground.

'Mama, please. Come for me. Help me, Mama, please.'

It was an echo of the words she'd heard him cry in the memories she'd seen of him as a seven-year-old, he'd been left alone, broken and crying then too.

He repeated it over and over again, as the dementor moved closer to his face, it was going to kiss him, she realised.

Had the Death Eaters had brought him simply to leave as a distraction?

Did they have any intention of bringing him back?

Hermione almost cried out as she saw the dementor's face touch Draco's and the kiss begin, she closed her eyes.

Suddenly, a deafening noise caused her to open them again.

The side of the building had been blown away. Rubble rained down as the Bombarda curse vibrated in the air.

Crouch exited from the hole, his wand in his hand, his eyes wild. Following closely behind him was Bellatrix Lestrange, her husband Rodolphus and his brother Rabastan and Antonin Dolahov, as well as several others Hermione couldn't place.

Crouch reached into his pocket and threw them all wands as they strode forwards, shooting curses into the air.

The Dementor brought its face up from Draco's and immediately moved towards the prison. Draco was still and pale on the ground.

Huge swarms of dementors flew up into the sky, out of the hole.

The Death eaters shot curse after curse as they moved quickly now, towards where they had hidden their brooms.

She heard Crouch shout- 'The Dark Lord is Risen! He calls you now, to the place where you came from. Go to him and you will be repaid!'

And he aimed his wand into the sky, illuminating the shining green skull once more into the air.

The dementors all seemed to pause momentarily, then swooped back into the prison, out of sight.

'Is he dead?' Yaxley called to Crouch, looking panicked, as they ran over the rocky terrain of the beach, indicating to Draco's prone body on the ground.

'Looks like it. We'll have to tell Malfoy that he was grabbed as we tried to escape.' Crouch replied, not giving Draco a second glance.

'We were supposed to bring him back,' Yaxley said. 'The Dark Lord has a use for him.'

Hermione watched Bellatrix leave the group and hop nimbly over the stones towards where Draco lay.

She held a filthy finger to the soft skin of his neck for a moment.

'He's alive,' she said.

'We must take him back to his mother. Cissy will never recover, and Malfoy needs an heir.'

It took a few shouted 'Rennervate' spells to wake Draco up but eventually, he was conscious, draped over the back of a broom, and taken, half dead, back to the manor.

Hermione watched in horror as Draco was levitated in and dropped unceremoniously onto the floor.

His father knelt by his side, just long enough to check that he was not actually going to die, and then he was lifted carelessly, taken to his bed and left to recover, Lucius snapping at the house elves to take care of him.

His father looked in on him briefly later that day, but after that, he was left alone whilst the Death Eaters met to discuss strategy.

Hermione wondered whether Narcissa even knew what had happened to him. How could he be so thoroughly neglected?

Hermione felt heartbroken as she watched Draco suffer the after-effects of the kiss.

He looked as though he had the weight of the world on his shoulders.

The feeling of abject sorrow that the Dementors caused was clear to see on his face.

He didn't eat or drink, he worried and fretted, wringing his hands and muttering to himself. He lay there, pale and listless, and she watched him dream fitfully, seemingly going through terrible nightmares.

She heard her own name muttered several times.

A female elf tended to him, her own face tight with worry. Hermione heard him call her 'Moddles'.

Hermione wondered how long he was going to be left there, when finally, she saw his bedroom door click open one morning.

She was expecting it to be Narcissa or Lucius but was surprised to see that it was Snape.

Snape looked worried as he approached Draco's bed.

He stood over the sleeping boy, and Hermione was shocked to see the concern on his face. He put out a hand and gently shook him awake.

'Draco, how are you feeling?' Snape asked quietly, 'I heard you had a close call with a dementor.'

Draco said nothing, just looked at Snape blankly.

'Does Voldemort know?' He croaked.

'He does. The Dark Lord was not happy to hear of how things played out.' The look Snape gave him then was pitying.

Snape spoke quickly now, glancing towards the door.

'You need to be aware, Draco, that there is talk in the manor, of taking Hermione Granger during this school year.'

A Ministry official, Delores Umbridge, will begin at Hogwarts with a plan to destabilise Dumbledore.

Once he is out of the picture, she will be vulnerable.

I told you I'd help you keep her safe, Draco, but I can only do it to a point: I have to keep my position within the school.

Crouch is planning to Polyjuice again. This time as you. He will be coming, tonight, to get hair from you in order to use it during the term. He has plans for Granger, and he is intent on getting her, he's playing a game, and you are one of the pieces whether you like it or not.'

Draco's eyes widened as he lay there.

'I will do my best to stop it, Draco,' Snape said.

'But Voldemort is on board with the plan. He wants Granger too.

He thinks he can turn her as a spy, make her a double agent. Torture her until she does it if necessary, although Voldemort is under the impression she will come to our side to be with you.

I cannot risk blowing my own cover. There is too much going on with Potter.'

Hermione listened to the conversation, trying to make sense of it. Snape was helping Draco? To protect her?

Draco sat up now, panic lining his face.

'What can I do?'

But, before Snape could answer, there was the sound of a door opening and there were voices in the corridor. Snape instantly Disapparated.

Hermione watched Draco now, in the memory. He seemed to be making a Herculean effort to sit up.

He got up weakly and peered out into the hallway.

Then he crept over to the wardrobe and found his wand, getting back into the bed, tucking it in next to him.

Snape was right, and as she watched the memory, Draco's bedroom door opened again not long later.

Hermione watched as Draco lay in the bed, eyes shut.

Barty Crouch entered the room. He looked at him with utter disdain as he approached the bed.

'You little shit.' He hissed, to Draco's apparently sleeping form.

'Couldn't have just died, could you. Let the dementor take you. Do you really think you'll survive these next few years? Merlin, you're a kid!

Voldemort's next general, my ass.

Your father's an idiot if he thinks you stand a chance as a Death Eater- Pampered little Malfoy scum.'

Draco opened his eyes now, the silver burning, he lay flat on his back and scowled at Crouch.

'Ah, awake I see, well good. You can hear my plan for your little Mudblood.' Crouch's tongue darted out, Hermione felt sick as she watched it.

Crouch leaned over the bed now, and brought out his wand, sticking it hard under Draco's chin.

'Don't think I don't know you've been protecting her. I saw you, last year, you little ferret. Making moony eyes at her all the time, whilst she looks at you like you're a piece of shit on her shoe.

The only reason I haven't told your father yet is because I want to watch you suffer.

I want to bring her here and make you watch as she's passed around us all, used and abused. I can't wait to have my turn on that.'

She watched Draco's eyes flare.

They were planning on taking her, from Hogwarts. Hermione felt sick, even though she knew it hadn't happened. She'd had no idea of any of it.

'You're a little pussy Malfoy, just like your father, he's a coward, he hid, using his galleons to stay wandering freely while the rest of us rotted in Azkaban. I want him to suffer, I want you to suffer.'

Crouch looked unhinged, Hermione realised. She was sweating watching him lean over fifteen-year-old Draco.

Draco said nothing, just looked back at him, his eyes ablaze.

Crouch opened his foul mouth again.

'I wonder if the Dark Lord will let you have a go on her Malfoy?'

He said. 'She'll need to be broken in. Or maybe he'll want to do it himself-' Crouch's words were cut off then, as he suddenly flew, six feet in the air, back from the bed.

His back hit the wall with a sickening crack, and he lay on the floor, screaming and writhing in pain.

Draco sprang from the bed, all traces of the broken boy he had been an hour ago gone.

He stalked to where Crouch was laying, his wand in his hand and he looked down at Crouch as he tried to scrabble for his wand.

'Immobulus'.

Crouch was frozen, his eyes unblinking, staring up at Draco.

'See, that's where you're wrong,' Draco croaked, bending so his face was close to Crouch's. 'I'm nothing like my father.'

Crouch stared at him in shock, his eyes frozen open. Draco kicked his wand away.

'None of you have any idea, what I'm capable of,' Draco said, and now his voice was vicious, terrifying.

He smiled as he stood on Crouch's fingers, frozen in place as they had stretched for his wand.

Then, he looked Crouch in his face, and grinned again as he pointed his own wand at Crouch.

'Crucio,'

Hermione thought he sounded so much like his father as he said it.

Crouch's voice came from behind frozen lips, a muffled wail of pain.

The sound was pure agony.

Draco laughed as he then began kicking Crouch as he lay contracted in agony from the curse.

He kicked Crouch in the head, in the face. And as he did it he spat down at Crouch.

'That's for what you did to me, I was eleven, you bastard. How does it feel? You fucking prick? How does it feel?'

Eventually, he stopped, he brought his wand down, and released Crouch from the spell. He was a bleeding, blubbing mess.

Draco bent down again, his face close to Crouch's.

'Granger does not get touched, do you understand?' Crouch nodded.

'You say that she was too well protected by Dumbledore, that you couldn't get into Hogwarts. I don't care what you say, you keep away from her.'

He flicked his wand again, and Crouch's fingers began snapping one, by one. He screamed and screamed, and eventually stammered out.

'Yes, ok. I'll change the plan. I'll find a reason. Please stop!'

Draco continued for several minutes more before finally releasing Crouch.

He looked at him then muttered, 'Bracio Emendum' and Hermione heard a terrible sound, Crouch began screaming as his broken fingers began repairing themselves, his back jerked and spasmed, the colour left his face, and he appeared to faint from the pain several times as his bones knitted back together.

Eventually, Crouch lay, panting on the ground, looking up at Draco.

'Do you know, now who I am? What I am capable of?' The teenage boy asked him.

Crouch nodded.

'Good,' Draco said.

'Then you will keep your word, Granger is to be left alone.'

Hermione watched as Crouch left the room.

Draco sat on the bed, his shoulders hunched, and she watched as he began to cry.

His whole body shook with the force of his silent tears.

They streamed down his face as he clapped a hand over his mouth.

As she watched him, her heart breaking for him, Hermione realised that despite his power, his ability to be ruthless, underneath it all, he was still that small, broken boy she had seen the first time in the Pensieve.

The memory faded, and Hermione pulled herself back up out of the swirling liquid, shaking.

She realised that Draco was still hiding his power. He had healed Crouch for a reason, he hadn't wanted the others to know yet.

What on earth could the reason be? She wondered as she siphoned the memory out.

She thought of Draco during that school year. He had been part of Umbridge's Inquisitorial Squad, a nuisance, a perfectly ordinary school bully.

There had been so signs at all of the huge amount of power he held. What was the reason? She wondered, why did he hide it so deeply.

She took a deep breath before reaching for the next memory.

Narcissa (Part 1)

Chapter Summary

This chapter was suuuper long so I've decided to cut it in half. There's lots to come in the next half, so I'm planning on releasing it tomorrow at some point. Thank you to everyone who's read so far and for the lovely comments! They make it all worth it!

Draco - September 1996

Draco didn't think he had ever been so happy.

His father was gone.

He was rotting in Azkaban, and Draco didn't need to look at him, hear him, or think about him any more.

Draco had only heard snippets of what had happened down in the Department of Mysteries, but he knew that his father had fucked up.

Voldemort was enraged, his father had been arrested, the Death Eaters were uneasy.

They would be meeting at the manor next week to discuss their strategy going forward, but for now, it was just him, the house-elves, and his mother.

He had returned home for the summer holidays and he had walked in through the door like it was the first time he had ever stepped foot inside Malfoy manor.

No Lucius.

Draco had dropped his suitcase and wandered around his home like an animal that had been set free and didn't quite know what to expect.

He had sat in the parlour, looking around at the portraits, at the ornaments and the priceless works of art.

He didn't think he'd ever looked at much other than the floor.

Draco walked every inch of the manor. Every single inch, except the foul, dank room below the trap door.

He poked his head into disused bedrooms, strolled the manor gardens, and even paid a visit to the house-elf quarters.

He had been stood, looking up at a portrait that had been done of the three of them when he was a baby, trying to figure out when exactly it was that his life went to shit, when he heard a set of echoing footsteps behind him, sharp heels.

It was his mother.

She, too, looked like a weight had been lifted, her shoulders weren't bowed, her hair was styled, lipstick in place.

He could see she had only had a little bit to drink, just to take the edge off.

She approached him, again, like he was a skittish animal, one you had to avoid startling. Her face was a picture of anxiety. Narcissa moved slowly towards him, so as not to scare him off.

'Draco,'

He looked at her, waiting. What could she possibly have to say to him that she thought he would want to hear?

She tried again, 'My son-'

'DON'T,' he shouted it, loudly, making Narcissa jump.

His anger had flashed to the surface the second she had said that traitorous word.

'Do not call me your son.' Draco said to her now.

'Because that would make you a mother, and the last thing you have ever been to me is a mother.'

Narcissa couldn't reply. She bowed her head. Draco turned his cool grey eyes to her and waited.

After a moment, she spoke.

'You're right, Draco, and I will never ever forgive myself for it.' She said, tears forming on her lower lashes.

'If you knew how hard I tried to fight for you in the beginning... He was just so brutal, Draco. He hurt me, in so many ways, ways that you can't comprehend at your age.'

Narcissa shook her head.

'Sometimes I felt like the more I fought against him, the angrier he got, and the more he hurt you afterwards.'

Draco looked at her, stood there crying, and all he felt was disbelief. He frowned, his young mind playing over her words, trying to process them.

'You let him stamp my teeth out.' He said eventually, his voice soft, barely audible.

Narcissa flinched.

‘You let him break my bones with his boots’

His mother began backing away, she put her hands up, as if to ward off Draco’s words.

‘You let him burn me with a candle, you let him choke me with paper, you let him force my face into the embers of the fire!’ Draco had begun to shout.

‘You let him punch me until my eye socket fractured, you let him draw his wand down my skin, and you both watched as I FUCKING bled out onto the floor. ‘YOU FUCKING LET HIM!’

Draco was positively screaming now, he had pushed his face right up into his mother’s who had huddled into a corner of the room, her hands over her ears. She had tears flowing freely down her face, matching the ones that Draco didn’t even realise were tracking down his own cheeks.

He pressed his forehead against hers, pushing her back into the wall, and he screamed, his salty tears mingling with hers as their faces touched.

Narcissa cowered as Draco towered over her, his hands fisted by his sides. He was blinded by tears of despair and fury as he screamed and raged, and poured out all of his anguish and bitterness.

Draco didn’t know why he let his mother slowly bring her hands up and gently, tentatively, put them on his shoulders.

He tried not to, but he let her slide her arms lightly around him and pull him to her. When she realised he hadn’t moved away, she let out a wracking, huge sob, and she pulled him tighter, her hands clutching at him, gripping onto him for dear life.

The first hug she had given to him since he was six years old.

Draco allowed himself to give into it, to close his eyes, rest his tired head on her shoulder, and feel the warmth of his mother’s arms for only a moment before he put out his two hands and pushed himself violently away from the wall.

‘No.’ He whispered, eyes still squeezed shut.

Narcissa reached back out for him, he opened his eyes now, and looked at her.

‘NO!’ Draco screamed, and with that, he made every picture on the wall fall violently to the ground. The frames splintering, glass shattering.

Narcissa let go.

Draco turned from his mother and held his hands out to the chandeliers, which exploded into a million pieces. He overturned furniture, ripped cushions, and destroyed every ornament, statue, and heirloom he cast his eyes over.

Narcissa shrieked, her eyes wide open as she watched her young son wreak utter havoc from his place in front of her.

Draco felt his eyes fill with more tears, and he couldn't stop a desperate, hoarse cry coming from somewhere in the back of his throat as he thoroughly destroyed the room. Letting every bitter emotion he had ever had flow out through his hands.

He obliterated every single thing he could see in the room, until there was nothing left to break.

Eventually, Draco wore himself out, and he dropped to his knees on the floor in front of his mother, who was still cowering in the corner.

He knelt on the wooden boards, the roughness of them so familiar to his knees, and he raised his eyes to look up into Narcissa's face.

For a moment, he wasn't the child soldier he was being trained to be, he wasn't a talented and skilled duellist, he wasn't the wielder of an untamed enormous magical power.

He was just a traumatised and overwhelmed sixteen year old boy.

'Why didn't you come?' He asked her, his voice small now, breaking on his words, 'Why didn't you help me?'

Narcissa Malfoy stood in the middle of the ruined room. She looked in awed horror at the chaos he had wrought, and then she looked down at her son.

Her beautiful, damaged son.

Draco thought she must have seen then, how truly beyond saving he was, that he was broken in a way that could never be repaired.

There was no hope for him - for them.

He bowed his head and closed his eyes; he couldn't look at his mother anymore.

'I'm so sorry, Draco.' He heard her quiet apology as she placed a hand gently on his back.

'I will be sorry for as long as I live, and even though you don't need me or want me, I will spend the rest of my life loving you and giving everything I have, anything I have, to show you how truly sorry I am, and that I have been every time I failed you. I'm so sorry I've been so weak.' Her voice was full of regret. 'I'm so proud of you Draco,' she said.

Narcissa didn't wait for a reply, and Draco didn't lift his head as he felt her hand leave his shoulder and heard her heels click away down the hallway to the wine cellar.

Eventually, he picked himself up and went back to his bedroom; he didn't bother to put the room back together.

They had plenty more.

He spent the first week of the holidays living the life that he thought maybe he would have had, if his father had been someone else.

Blaise, Theo, and Pansy came to stay at the manor with him. He didn't really see Narcissa, so it was like he had the place to himself.

Theo and Pansy were now an item.

Draco loved seeing Theo smile as he watched Pansy talk, his face mirroring her expression as she told a story, laughing at her anecdotes about the other people at Hogwarts.

Pansy was growing to really like Theo too. Draco could tell. He felt her eyes on him much less than they had used to be. They turned to Theo now instead.

She kissed Theo, up on her tiptoes with her hands on his shoulders and looked into his eyes, and Draco could practically see Theo's head exploding.

As the week went on, they kept sneaking off to dark places in the manor. It made Draco feel jealous, not of them, but just the fact that he knew he would never be able to do what they were doing, with the person he most wanted to do it with.

That didn't stop him from imagining it though.

Now that he was older, his thoughts of Hermione Granger weren't just about her hair, her eyes, her brain.

They were about the curve of her waist when she wore the muggle clothes he sometimes saw her in, the glimpses of her legs in the long socks she wore as she sat at her desk.

His mind wandered. If he were to follow the curve of her knee, up past the hem of her skirt where he couldn't see, what would he find? What would she be wearing under there?

He thought about it often.

He imagined her in a different universe, wearing a Slytherin green tie, his hands tangled in her hair as he pushed her up against the wall and slipped his hand under that skirt. He imagined her quick breaths, the feel of her tongue in his mouth, her soft moans as he touched her, and maybe she even touched him.

Draco drove himself half mad with those thoughts.

He'd get up in the mornings, frustrated and aching.

He was sixteen, and he felt every single one of those years.

Blaise was off to France the following week. He was going to see his Beauxbatons girl. Blaise was sure he was going to come back a changed person- a man.

He told them all how French girls were much more forward in the bedroom, experienced. He would tell Draco all about it, he promised.

They spent the week eating the delicious food prepared by Moddles, sitting on the patio furniture, walking the grounds, riding on their brooms, and just being teenagers. They raided his father's drinks cabinet by night and fell about, laughing until they started feeling sick, then, they all traipsed to bed, just to do it all again the next day.

Draco had wished that the week would never end, but obviously it did.

Much too soon.

He waved goodbye to them as they all Apparated away, and he watched his happiness fly out of the manor door with them, a white dove, sailing up into the sky to be ripped to shreds by the talons of the black crow that was the rest of his life.

Voldemort was returning to the manor tomorrow. He was coming back to the dungeon.

Bellatrix had come to inform his mother that she and Draco were requested downstairs tomorrow morning at nine.

Draco swallowed at the thought of the vile smell, the dank rotting aroma, the sounds of Nagini's body running over the floor, and the flickering of her tongue as she slithered over his shoes.

He went back to his room to Occlude and to prepare. He had already been told he would have a job this year.

He hoped and prayed it didn't involve Granger. He'd do anything as long as it wasn't her.

Hermione - June 2006

Hermione looked over the shelf of memories.

The next one was their sixth year. The year that Malfoy had attempted to kill Dumbledore.

She thought about what she now knew about Draco.

There was no way that he wouldn't have been able to kill Dumbledore if he'd wanted to, she thought, the image of him laughing as he broke Barty Crouch's fingers in her mind.

He didn't kill Dumbledore because he didn't want to. Plain and simple.

He had gone on to kill plenty more after that, in the war that followed and since the war. But he hadn't killed Dumbledore.

She thought about their sixth year, about that one drunken episode, about Draco's injuries, sustained at the hands of her best friend.

Harry had hurt him so badly with that curse. She remembered Harry afterwards, hands shaking as he described the amount of blood that had poured from Malfoy's body. She remembered looking into the toilet, seeing it, running in red rivulets in the water on the floor.

Snape had healed him, she thought. He had been there for him. She was so glad that someone had.

They had known at the time that the Sectumsempra had been bad, but knowing what she knew now, about how much of Draco's blood had been spilled by other people in his short life, it made Hermione want to scream.

She'd seen the scars it had left- Draco had suffered.

Again.

Hermione wondered why he hadn't hurt Harry. He could have- easily.

He was still so much of a mystery.

Hermione wished, so badly, that she could ask him why. Tell him that she knew it wasn't all his fault.

She wanted to go back and change Draco's past, to show him that there was light in the world, all he had ever seen was dark.

She wished she had her time turner, but they'd all been destroyed by Kingsley.

Hermione didn't think there were any other ways, she half thought that she wanted to research if there were.

Just out of curiosity.

But for now, she selected the memory from the shelf and took it to the Penseive. She poured it and prepared, once again, to find out more of Draco Malfoy's secrets.

Draco was in the basement again.

In that horrible dark room, she had seen him in before.

This time, as well as Voldemort and Draco, Bellatrix Lestrange was there, along with Rodolphus and Antonin Dolohov. Narcissa was huddled near the door.

Voldemort was hunched in a wingback chair, the others were stood around him in the dim candlelight.

Draco was closest to Voldemort. He looked sick, Hermione thought. His face was pale and pallid, he was slightly sweaty, his eyes were glassy.

'The boy will fix the vanishing cabinet, and this will grant you entry.'

Voldemort was saying.

'Draco, boy. You are to dispose of Dumbledore swiftly, don't wait on it. The sooner he is gone, the better. Harry Potter will be vulnerable.

He has people protecting him, and the Order is gaining in strength, gaining numbers, their intelligence must be coming from somewhere. They seem to know far too much about our

plans.

Disposing of Dumbledore sooner rather than later will weaken them.

They will already struggle with the loss of Black, Potter is devastated, he will be unpredictable this year.'

'What can we do to help, Dark Lord?' Bellatrix asked, the adoration clear in her wild eyes.

'You will work on weakening the order members, trail Arthur Weasley, find out what he knows. Look into Lupin, see if you can get to him. And, when Draco is ready, you will enter Hogwarts, ensure Dumbledore is dead, and attack the school when it is weakest.'

Hermione watched Draco swallow, he looked overwhelmed, but also, was that- relief she saw on his face?

Dolohov suddenly spoke from the corner.

'And what of the Mudblood, my lord? Is the plan still to snatch her from Hogsmeade?' Draco whipped his head to Dolohov.

'Yes, it is. Hogwarts has tightened security after last year. Barty has informed me that it is nigh on impenetrable this year.

'Come to think of it, where is old Barty?' Lestrage asked now. His voice gravelly.

'No bloody idea,' Dolohov replied. 'None of us can find him. Probably hiding out somewhere, worried about his failure to get into Hogwarts.'

Hermione looked at Draco. There was no emotion on his face whatsoever at the mention of Barty Crouch. Gods, he was good, she thought. His Occlumency was second to none.

The conversation moved on, cursed necklaces, poison. Hermione could see Draco was distracted now. She looked at his face, studied his eyes.

'Draco!' Bellatrix's voice was sharp.

'The Dark Lord is addressing you!'

Draco's eyes flashed, and he looked up.

'I said, dear boy,' Voldemort's voice was laced with venom. 'That I believe it is time.'

She could see Draco was confused. In the corner, Narcissa's face was one of pure panic. She clutched at the material of her dress, looking over at Bellatrix, pleading silently with her.

Bellatrix met her eyes and then looked away.

'Now? My Lord?' Asked Rodolphus.

'Why wait?' Asked Voldemort. 'His useless father is out of the picture now, he will need to replace him.'

She heard Dolohov laugh then, a cruel sound.

'Wonder if the pampered prince will squeal like his father did.' He sniggered.

She watched Draco look between Voldemort, his mother, and Bellatrix. He clearly had no idea what was going on.

'Come here, boy.' Voldemort hissed the words. Dolohov moved behind Draco and physically pushed him towards Voldemort.

'Roll up your sleeve.'

Hermione saw understanding dawn in Draco's eyes now. Something flared there for a moment, regret possibly, but not fear.

He did as he was told and rolled up the sleeve of the white dress shirt he was wearing. Hermione looked at the soft skin of his inner arm and then up to his face.

He had been so young.

This moment would change him forever, he could never rid himself of the mark.

She thought about his arm as he had lain dead in the morgue, the mark still there, faded, but there.

She realised he had only lived less than ten short years after this moment.

The clock was already ticking down for him here.

Narcissa began crying now.

'Shut up, Cissy!' Bellatrix snapped. It was a warning.

Narcissa put a hand to her mouth, the tears spilling over her eyes.

'Are you not happy to see your son join our precious cause, Narcissa?' Voldemort's voice caused ice to form in Hermione's blood as she watched. The fear in Narcissa's face grew tenfold.

'Yes, I am,' she said. 'I'm sorry my Lor-' she didn't finish her sentence.

'Crucio,'

Narcissa dropped to the ground. Hermione watched her writhing in agony.

Hermione tried to feel sorry for her, she knew that Narcissa had probably made some weak attempts to help Draco over the years, but Hermione felt that it hadn't been nearly enough.

So she couldn't quite bring herself to feel as bad as she probably should have.

Draco though, looked horrified.

Interesting, Hermione thought. He still cared for his mother, throughout everything, even now, in this moment, he still had enough heart left in him to not want her to suffer.

Eventually, Voldemort let Narcissa go.

She fell out of the curse, sobbing quietly on the floor.

*'Hold him,' Voldemort instructed Bellatrix, and she did so.
Rodolphus took the other side.*

Bellatrix met Draco's eyes now- a warning there too.

Hermione thought that somewhere, in her crazy mind, Bellatrix loved Draco. Whatever the version of love was for these people.

*She watched then as Voldemort touched his wand to Draco's skin. He began the incantation as he drew the shape of the mark over Draco's forearm.
She heard a hiss of pain from Draco, but he held still.*

*His face was a mask of well concealed discomfort.
As the wand touched, Draco's soft skin flayed away, his blood began running out in thick rivers down his arm.*

As Voldemort continued, the blood began changing, from red, to black.

Draco's skin began bubbling, blisters forming and bursting as the black blood stopped flowing and began reversing, going into his arm instead of pouring out.

She watched as every vein under Draco's skin gradually turned black, standing out under the pale white of his usual complexion.

His eyes-she looked at them, they started off their usual silver, bloodshot with pain, but as she watched, the pupils grew, the black took over and suddenly his irises were black, then the whites, until every part of his eye was a shiny black orb.

She heard him now, a low groan escaping from his lips as he accepted the poison into his body.

His teeth were clenched. His eyes seemed to roll back in his head, and he jerked slightly, squeezing them shut. Bellatrix held him firm.

Then, it was over.

Voldemort took his wand away, and the mark was left behind.

Black ink burned onto Draco's skin.

He opened his eyes, and they were silver again. He was panting, breathing heavily, but he had not cried out.

'Ahhh, we have a brave one, I see.' Voldemort said with a sickening chuckle.

'I like to see that Malfoy bravado. Let's hope you can do better than your father in other ways too.'

'You'd do well not to fail like he has Draco. That would mean bad things for you, and your mother. Very, very bad.'

The memory began to fade. Hermione lifted her head out of the Pensieve with a sharp intake of breath.

She felt so relieved to be out of the claustrophobic room, the tension and the fear permeating the memory, and staying with her now.

She felt ill, once again, at what she had seen.

She needed to see the next memory. To find out if it held any more information on the plot to take her.

How had Draco stopped it? Had it even been him?

She selected the next memory, May 1997.

Still their sixth year, she wondered if this was the memory she had been struggling to remember herself.

She tipped it in quickly, anxious to find out if her hazy memories were omitting more or less than she thought they were.

'Draco,'

Silence.

'Draco,'

'What do you want, Nott?'

'Are you awake?'

'Clearly,'

'Okay, move over.'

Hermione realised that the memory was beginning down in the Slytherin dorm.

As her eyes adjusted to the dark, she saw Draco's large four poster bed, next to Theo's, the two boys within.

Blaise's bed appeared to be empty.

Draco was laying, flat on his back. His eyes were open. He didn't look like he'd been asleep.

She watched Theo now, his curly hair wild from sleep, dressed in his boxers and a white vest, clamber out of his own bed and get into Draco's.

'Move over, it's bloody freezing.'

Draco moved, looking at Theo with mild annoyance.

Theo pulled the blanket over him and lay, squashed up next to Draco, who now looked positively disgruntled at having his bed invaded and blanket stolen.

'What are you doing?' He hissed.

'I need to talk to you.'

'It couldn't wait until morning?'

'No, and you were awake anyway. I needed to talk to you about-' Theo stopped speaking, but he motioned with his head as he looked down at Draco's arm, encased within his pyjama sleeve.

Draco's eyes flashed in the dark. His face became taut. He looked over to Blaise's empty bed.

'Where's Zabini?'

'Off on the pull. He's denying it but I swear, it's Weasley,'

'WEASLEY?' Draco sounded alarmed. 'Ron?'

'No, you prat. Ginny.'

There was a pause.

'Oh. Not much better. What happened to the French girl?'

She saw Theo pull a face in the gloom.

'She's in France, isn't she?'

'Oh,' Draco said again.

Theo was quiet then for a few moments.

'Malfoy...Did it hurt?'

There was a long silence.

'Yes.'

'You can talk about it with me, you know that, don't you? You can talk about anything with me, Draco. I'm your best friend. My father and your father, they're in the same- business. I

understand, not all of what you go through. But some. Talk to me, let me in, you don't have to do it all on your own.'

There was another silence then, Hermione waited, watching the memory version of Draco weigh up his options.

'It's fine,' he said quietly after a time.

'I've heard my father talking Draco. I know what they want you to do. What they're planning. Talk to me, please.'

She saw Draco's eyes widen. Take in what Theo was saying. Theo knew.

Hermione's mind instantly flashed to present day Theo Nott. Did he know things too? What was he hiding behind that immaculate facade?

I heard my father talk about the plan, for Granger-'

'Yeah'

'But you-'

'Yeah,'

Theo seemed to be deep in thought, not saying anything. Hermione watched both boys, lie quietly together under the dark green duvet cover.

'What are you going to do?'

'I don't really have a lot of choice, do I? All I can do is go along with my part, but try and stop them doing theirs.'

'Hogsmeade, they're going to try and snatch her there,'

'I need to try and stop her from going somehow. I don't know how yet. They've given me things, to give to people. I'll do that, try and do it before the trips. I'm trying my best, to keep her safe.'

'What about Dumbledore?'

More silence in the dark.

'I don't know yet.'

'I can help Draco, we can come up with some sort of plan.'

'Thanks, Nott.'

It was quiet for a long time then, Hermione wondered if they were asleep.

'Are you going to that party tomorrow?'

Hermione's stomach dropped at the memory of the party they were talking about.

'Yeah, why not.'

It went quiet again, and Hermione thought that they definitely were asleep now, until she heard Draco's voice, quiet, desperate.

'I can't let them take her, Theo. The things they'll do to her, I can't let that happen. Dumbledore, he's old, he's lived a full life. They're just talking about getting rid of him. But Granger, they'll torture her, hurt her, pass her around.'

Theo swallowed hard at Draco's words.

'I can't let them get to her.'

Theo didn't say anything, he just nodded, a look of grim determination on his face.

Hermione watched then, as the two settled down and drifted off to sleep, Draco's blonde head falling to rest on top of Theo's curly, brown one.

The memory jumped now, to the next evening. The night of the party. It had been held in the Hufflepuff common room. A celebration of Dumbledore's reinstatement and the ridding of Umbridge from Hogwarts.

Hermione remembered Ginny, desperately pleading with Hermione to go. She thought now, it was clearly so that Ginny could secretly meet with Blaise.

It had obviously been going on longer than she'd realised at the time. Hermione hadn't wanted to go. She'd been pining over Ron, frustrated with his lack of interest. Ginny convinced her to get dressed up for once, to let her hair down.

A bottle of Firewhisky had been smuggled into the Gryffindor dorm, and the girls were all swigging from it. Eventually, Hermione reluctantly gave in.

She remembered that it had only taken a few swigs for her to feel the effects. She had dressed in muggle jeans and a glittering strappy top, and allowed Ginny to put a little bit of shimmery eyeshadow on her.

She came back now, to Draco's memory.

He, Theo, Pansy, and Blaise sauntered into the Hufflepuff common room. There was music blaring, and lots more smuggled Firewhisky being passed around, the room had been decorated with balloons bearing Dumbledores face, the lights were dim, the atmosphere heavy with teenaged hormones.

Hermione saw Padma, her tongue down Dean Thomas's throat in the corner.

Draco and Blaise separated from Pansy and Theo, who settled themselves in a corner and stuck their own tongues down each other's throats.

She saw Blaise grimace, and Draco grin at that.

She watched how deferential people were to them. Draco's nastiness didn't seem to put off the other girls. Hermione wondered why that was, was it his looks? Did the fact that he was handsome just excuse him for everything in their eyes?

Whatever it was, neither he nor Blaise were short on attention.

They both ignored most of the girls, their eyes tracking the room until they found what they were looking for. Hermione followed the gaze of both boys, to where she and Ginny were stood in a corner, speaking to Luna.

Neither of them said anything, but two sets of eyes, one cool silver, and one warm brown, followed her and Ginny around the room.

As the night wore on everyone in the common room got drunker. Hermione could see herself, giggling uncontrollably, cringing at how loud she was. Draco himself was swaying slightly.

He still looked like he had the world on his shoulders, but his movements were looser, less controlled.

She watched, fascinated, as the game of spin the bottle began. Knowing what she knew now, she realised it had been fully engineered by the Hufflepuff boys, as another way to get the girls.

The room was positively fizzing with teenage angst.

She watched as different people moved into the center of the circle after being chosen by the bottle. Ginny kissed Seamus Finnigan, much to Blaise's consternation, she saw.

She watched Luna kissing Goyle, Blaise halfheartedly kiss Angelina.

She could see herself, still swigging from the Firewhisky bottle. Draco was sat in the circle, his eyes flickering to her every few minutes.

'Malfoy's turn!' Someone roared. The game was noisy, people cheering and shouting as each couple moved into the middle, emotions running high.

Everyone's drunkenness had taken away their wariness of Malfoy and the other Slytherins. She realised that no one else had hated them the way she and her friends had.

At least not then.

She watched Draco sit up, he looked anxious, his eyes were firmly on the bottle. He smiled wryly as they cheered and watched as Flint spun the bottle. Hermione watched it too, knowing how it played out, but seeing it in the memory she realised, Draco had moved that bottle to her.

His eyes were on it, she knew now he had that ability.

She remembered that when the bottle had pointed at her she had been horrified.

Draco Malfoy, of all people.

The room had erupted into jeers and laughter, they all knew about the slap, about how much she and Malfoy hated each other, about him calling her a Mudblood, so it made everyone more determined that they should kiss and make up.

She saw herself, shaking her head and backing away, looking mortified. Draco just sat there.

Eventually, after being good naturedly shoved towards him by Padma, she had acquiesced.

She watched as they both stood up from their places in the circle, she stepped towards him, her face a picture of disgust.

She hadn't realised he had looked the way he did. Apprehensive, nervous. His sneer was nowhere to be seen in that brief moment.

Their faces came together, to a huge cheer from the other drunken students. She watched, and she remembered.

She had looked up briefly, seeing the way his silver eyes caught the light, seen how long his lashes were up close.

She remembered his face, tense. She thought it was because he didn't want to kiss her, but she saw now, his hands come up to her waist and grip her there. She remembered the feel of that grip. In her drunken state, she had liked it, the firmness of it contrasting against the softness of the kiss as he met her lips with his.

She remembered knowing she must be wasted because the kiss felt amazing, so amazing that she had brought her hands up into his hair, to run them through the soft blonde strands at the base of his neck. She'd felt the gentlest movement of his tongue against hers, and she had melted into him, for just the briefest second.

She knew what happened next, but she still cringed when she heard Harry's voice.

'Hermione, what the fuck?'

And she had sprung away from Malfoy like she'd been burned.

Draco's memory showed Harry striding towards them and pushing Draco back. He had instantly reacted by drawing his wand. People were laughing, jeering.

Dean was explaining to Harry that it had just been a game. She watched Draco facing Harry, his face back to the usual spiteful pinched expression as he pointed his wand between Harry's eyes.

Others came around them now, Blaise, Seamus, Harry was shouting that Malfoy must have hexed her, to make her kiss him.

She was nowhere to be seen. She knew it was because she was now vomiting Firewhisky into the toilet.

The memory began fading, and Hermione gladly stepped out of it. She had mostly blocked that night out.

She'd been so horrified by herself, she had hated Malfoy at the time, Harry was already suspicious of him by then, following him around school.

She'd thought Harry would never forgive her, but she thought he had seen her hangover and realised how drunk she had been.

Plus, if she remembered correctly, he had been pretty drunk himself, having come from a Slug Club party.

Hermione sat for a moment, reliving that kiss she had tried to hard to block out. It had been so out of character for her, and she had regretted it so much. She almost laughed as she realised now, she would give anything to do it again.

She wondered why Malfoy had included it in his memories. It was such a benign one, so soon after the horror of him receiving his mark. She thought back to Narcissa, she had seemed terrified for Draco to get the mark, she had looked like she hadn't wanted to be there.

Hermione realised that Narcissa was one of the only people in Draco's memories that wasn't dead. Maybe she could answer some of Hermione's questions.

She had so many.

She decided she would watch one more memory, and then go upstairs to put in a visitation request.

She needed to speak to Narcissa.

Narcissa (Part 2)

Draco - May 1997

He'd kissed her.

Fuck.

It had been mind blowing.

Six years of imagining and finally, Draco had felt how soft Hermione's lips actually were, he had looked into her gentle brown eyes close up and breathed in the sweet honeysuckle scent he would forever associate with Granger.

Draco had thought he was going to lose his shit when she had actually agreed to do it.

They had all been on the Firewhisky, himself included, it was the reason he'd had the guts to make the bottle turn to her, just to try his luck. So when she actually stood in front of him he felt like he was going to explode.

Draco had lost himself in the kiss almost immediately. He had to make sure he wasn't too close to her incase she realised *how* much he actually was enjoying it.

Now that would have scared her off.

When he'd pushed his tongue gently into her mouth, forgetting himself for a second, he had been thrilled to feel her delicate hands come up to his neck, to pull him slightly closer, to run her fingers through his hair.

Fuck, fuck, fuck.

Draco couldn't think of anything else after that night, he got lost in thoughts of her.

He'd be in the common room and lose track of conversations, eventually having to go back to the dorm, pull the curtains around the four poster and think of her a bit more, desperate to just find some relief in his own hand and his own thoughts of where the kiss could possibly have led.

He'd walk back into the common room afterwards, sweaty and red faced, Blaise asking him 'How's the wrist Malfoy?' And falling about laughing. Theo would look at him a bit more sympathetically and ask him later in a quiet moment- 'Granger again?' And he'd just nod, and try not to fall back down the rabbit hole at the mention of her name.

It was ok for Zabini and Nott. They were both getting it. Theo and Pansy were forever warning him not to come into the dorm, the sound of their activities torturing him as it came through the walls.

Blaise was constantly disappearing, he was happy, relaxed. He wasn't a taut wire like Draco, frustrated by a situation he had no control over, knowing he'd never get what he wanted.

Granger hadn't looked at him since the party and Potter was like a damn bad smell- haunting him everywhere he went.

Those suspicious green eyes behind his fucking ridiculous glasses, following him around every room. Merlin, he had no idea of the actual risk to Hermione, and it wasn't fucking Draco.

Eventually, his frustrations boiling over, he gave into the other Slytherin boys nagging and started letting the girls who fawned all over him get their hands on him.

He let them kiss him, put their hands down his trousers, unzip him and get on their knees for him.

That's not to say Draco didn't enjoy it, he was sixteen after all. But the only way he'd ever come, was by closing his eyes and imagining that they were her.

Only ever her.

He lost his appetite, only able to stomach the odd apple from the huge selection of food that appeared on the table each meal time.

He'd try not to let his eyes flicker to her, try to keep his head down. He'd forget where he was, and drift into his thoughts, chin resting in his hand, his fantasies of Granger obliterating every other thought, even the ones he knew should be important, like Dumbledore. He didn't even know what he was going to do about that.

He was still working on the vanishing cabinet, trialling putting different things in there, so far, none of them had come back alive. He didn't know if that was a good thing.

His Dark Mark hurt- it hurt so much.

It was constantly flaring, a sharp screeching pain that came as a surprise no matter how many times he felt it.

It was a reminder that he still wasn't free, that Lucius might be gone, but that he was someone else's bitch now. There was nothing but the promise of more pain in his future. That's all his life had ever been.

Draco thought, he must have been the worst kind of person in a past life, to deserve to have been born into this one.

His only consolation was his friends - they loved him.

Draco wasn't a hundred percent sure about exactly what love was, what it felt like, but he thought that the relationship he had with his friends was the closest thing he'd ever get to love.

His friends wanted to spend time with him, wanted the best for him, seemed happy when he was happy and sad when he was sad. They told him they loved him. They kept him going.

He was confiding in Theo more and more, huddled together under his duvet in the dark. He told Theo of all his worries, and together they tried to come up with contingency plans and alternative ways he could keep Granger safe, and possibly avoid killing Dumbledore. They had already figured out how to swap the poisoned mead Draco had been given to one that looked and smelled almost identical, but although it would have some nasty side effects, it wouldn't kill you.

He had his copious reading from the manor to thank for that knowledge.

He'd already managed to plant the mead with the old dolt, Slughorn.

One morning Draco woke with a pounding heart, a cold sweat covering his entire body.

He'd realised that Theo didn't know how to Occlude.

If anyone ever got hold of him, he knew too much. He could inadvertently undo all of Draco's hard work, all of his ministrations. What was the point of him hiding his thoughts, if they could just get Theo.

Should he obliviate him? No. It would be too obvious. He needed to train him.

Draco got ready for lessons in a daze, how was he going to fit it in? He was spending all the time he wasn't in class, with the vanishing cabinet. He wasn't sleeping, as he worried about Granger, or fantasised about Granger, how was he going to find time to teach Theo a skill which had taken him years?

He walked into Charms class, and didn't even realise to begin with, that the room was ablaze with gossip, everyone talking loudly, speculating, Lavender Brown crying noisily.

'What's happened?' He asked Pansy.

'You don't know?' She asked, her eyes narrowed.

'No?'

'Ron Weasley got poisoned last night. Drank something in Slughorn's office, dropped, and started foaming at the mouth apparently.'

She laughed, a slightly nasty sound.

'He's going to be fine they said, what an idiot.'

Draco worked at keeping his face level, his eyes blank.

'He's a dickhead. It was probably the quill ink knowing Weaselby.'

They both laughed then. Draco remained in Charms, doing his work, appearing bored and dropping in plenty of his usual sarcastic comments until, finally the class ended.

When the bell eventually went, he walked straight out and headed to the hospital ward. He melted into the shadows as he heard voices and looked around the corner to see a positively horrendous looking Weasley laying on the bed, Granger gazing down at him, with nothing but love and adoration on her face.

He thought back to the look she had on her face before she had kissed him. A world apart from this one. She'd never look at him the way she looked at Weasley he realised.

Never.

He stumbled away from the room and down to the common room. He sat working with Blaise, but he felt like he was crawling in his skin.

He had to go.

He made an excuse and grabbed his cloak. Heading outside.

He kept walking, towards the forbidden forest, until he thought he was deep enough that no one would hear him scream as he approached the Whomping Willow.

He waited until it sensed him, then he allowed all the frustration to leave his body as he felt the first sting of the branches against his skin. He fought back against it, breaking branches and ripping them off, fighting against something that could hurt him equally and would never be able to tell anyone about him, and all the foul secrets he kept inside.

He understood this type of pain, it felt better than the other kind.

The next morning, when he saw them all at the breakfast table, Draco was already at his limit.

He had nothing left to give when Potter followed him into that bathroom.

Maybe if he had, he could have fought back, made Potter see reason.

Draco thought that the scars he got from Potter that day were his own fault really.

Another sign of him showing weakness. He really needed to stop doing that.

Hermione - June 2006

Hermione siphoned the memory out, and found the next. She realised as she looked at them lined up that there weren't very many memories left, Draco had shown a lot from his years in school, not as many after it seemed.

She tipped the next one in. It was from the same time period- May 1996.

Hermione readied herself for the now familiar feeling, and dipped her head in once again to the shimmering liquid of the Pensieve.

Draco was walking through the corridor at Hogwarts.

He was already thinner than in the last memory, pronounced dark circles under his eyes. He looked incredibly stressed.

She watched as he began moving slowly now, carefully as though he didn't want to be seen. He was approaching the hospital wing.

He crept, moving into the shadows and positioned himself behind a stone pillar. He peered into the ward.

She saw herself, sat on the bed with Ron, who had been poisoned the night before. Hermione remembered their terror that he wouldn't wake up, Harry had thought he was going to die.

It was discovered later, that the poison wasn't fatal, it mimicked one much more deadly one, but the one Ron had ingested thankfully left him with no lasting damage.

Draco's eyes were trained on her as she leant over Ron's bed. She watched him watch her, as she ran her hand down Ron's face, and swept his hair back from his head.

Draco turned then, a pained look on his face and strode away.

He moved back down the halls, shoving a first year out of his path and she could see the anger there, in the set of his shoulders, the clenching of his jaw.

Gradually, the further he moved away, his eyes began to grow blank and his breathing slowed, until, by the time he was back with Blaise in the common room, he was relaxed and ready.

She watched him sit and help Blaise with his Transfiguration homework and marvelled at how well he hid everything that was going on in his life.

The memory jumped now to what Hermione knew was the next day. Ron was much better, they sat in the great hall, eating breakfast and discussing Lavender Brown's worrying obsession with Ron. Hermione remembered not being able to focus on anything except Lavender's deranged eyes, trained on her across the hall.

Hermione watched as Draco now entered the great hall. He strode quickly down past the tables, clearly looking for someone. He still tried to look arrogant, to look down his nose at everyone, but he was faltering.

His thinness and paleness was stark. His eyes looked huge in his face.

He suddenly stopped dead as he saw them. His eyes flashed to her, her hand on Ron's arm and then he abruptly turned around and left.

Hermione saw Harry see him, and follow him out determinedly.

Harry had been obsessed the whole year with finding out if Malfoy was a Death Eater. They had had an altercation on the train, and then the events of the party had made tensions rise further between them. Harry had been laser focused on Malfoy, which Hermione thought was a reaction to losing Sirius- Harry wasn't himself either.

She watched as Malfoy walked quickly through the corridors of the school, she could see he didn't know Harry was behind him. He looked like he did when he was about to have a panic attack she thought- like on the train.

He needed to get somewhere quiet and Occlude.

His chest was rising and falling with his shuddering breaths, he looked even paler than he had before, as white as a sheet.

She saw his hand creep up to his chest to press at his heart, the sure-fire sign she recognised that meant he was struggling now. He reached the bathroom and abruptly turned in to it, heading to the sinks and leaning heavily on them, his breathing fast and uneven.

Draco reached up and pulled his school sweater over his head, then bent forward onto the sinks, looking at himself in the mirror, wild grey eyes meeting wild grey eyes.

'Fuck, Granger,' he whispered to himself. 'What the fuck am I going to do?' She heard an almost sob then, the sound abruptly stopping as Harry's footsteps sounded behind him.

She watched as Draco whirled around. His wand was in his hand instantly.

Harry's was already pointed at Draco, at his chest.

'I know what you did Malfoy, You hexed her, didn't you?'

Draco didn't answer, he threw a curse at Harry. It went deliberately wide. Hermione thought that he could have easily hit him if he wanted to.

'I didn't fucking hex her Potter, she was just drunk.' He said, ducking as Harry threw a curse back.

'She'd never kiss you voluntarily Malfoy, she hates you.'

She saw pain flare briefly in Draco's eyes.

'Why are you so obsessed with her?' Harry said, another curse just missing Draco as he twirled away, sending his own in return.

'I'm trying to fucking keep her safe Potter!'

'LIAR!' Harry shouted.

'Stop saying that to me! I saw the note someone wrote. You want to hurt her-you and your Death Eater buddies. You're always fucking staring at her, I've seen you!'

They both stood now. Chests heaving, looking at each other.

'I'm telling you Potter, I'm trying to help.'

Draco sounded desperate.

'What, by calling her a Mudblood and taking advantage of her when she's wasted? I know you've taken the mark Malfoy. You're gone, once I get Dumbledore to take it seriously, you're gone.'

'YOU CAN'T DO THAT POTTER!' Draco shouted now. 'I need to be here, I can't be at home, I can't be left there. I need to make sure-' his words were cut off as Harry shot a spell at him, ripping the sleeve of his shirt open.

Draco stood, the mark standing out stark against the pale skin of his arm, Hermione could see infection curling out of it, it was raw, blood and pus congealed around it.

Harry looked at him, triumph shining in his eyes.

'Try and deny it now Malfoy.'

'Potter, you don't understand-'

Harry shot another curse at him. He was angry she saw. He was vindicated, Draco had the dark mark, he'd been right all along.

She watched as Draco dodged all of Harry's curses, diving away but not sending any back of his own.

Why wasn't he reacting? She thought.

She'd seen him, he didn't need a wand to hurt Harry. He could destroy him in an instant.

Draco seemed to be trying to think, he spoke again, 'Potter,' just as Harry muttered his own word.

'SECTUMSEMPRA!'

Draco fell.

She watched as he lay on his back on the bathroom floor, and a terrifying amount of blood began flowing out of his chest, his white school shirt turning crimson red in moments.

Harry approached him, horror on his own face. Draco coughed, and the blood soaking his shirt increased. He made a strangled noise, he was dying, she thought.

Hermione looked at Harry in the memory and willed him to move, to get someone more quickly.

He seemed to be debating, before finally, leaving the bathroom and going for help.

She watched Draco struggling to breathe, the floor was now a river of his blood, mingling with the water from the sinks destroyed by their wand fight.

His eyelids fluttered, he didn't move, except his fingers, which twitched spasmodically. His breathing began to sound wet, wheezing thickly in and out of his lungs, a laboured sound. He coughed again, blood spraying from his mouth and on to his face.

Hermione watched the memory and she cried, the tears running down her face, he was suffering so much, and her friend had done that to him.

Finally, she saw Snape come running in, his face awash with panic.

'What did you do Potter?' He said, his eyes flicking to the spell book in Harry's hand, before coming back to Draco's face.

Draco's eyes were closed, his breathing becoming more laboured .

'GET OUT!' Snape shouted then, and Harry left without a word.

She saw that Snape was panicking, he opened Draco's shirt, and closed his eyes with horror at the injuries covering Draco's torso.

She watched as he took out his wand, 'Vulnera Sanentur,' he said the word like an incantation, over and over again as he closed the wounds on Draco's body.

Draco didn't move, he didn't wake, but the bleeding stopped.

She watched as Snape lifted him then in his arms, and began walking with him, out of the bathroom.

'I'm so sorry Draco,' he whispered.

Hermione's eyes widened in shock to hear such a tender tone from Snape. He looked down at Draco with something like care and affection as he carried him. Hermione was so grateful to Snape in that moment, a man she had thoroughly despised her whole life, the only adult she'd ever seen show Draco kindness.

Hermione watched the other students eyes widen in horror as Snape staggered down the hall with Draco in his arms, the shocked whispers, sobbing coming from somewhere. She remembered finding out about what had happened and looking into the the bathroom, shocked by the amount of Malfoy's blood on the floor, even more shocked to find that Harry had been the one to cast the curse.

She watched as Snape reached his office, grabbed a leather satchel and then moved to the Floo. He disappeared in a flash of green flames.

The memory followed him to the manor.

Snape carried him quickly through the halls and then lay Draco gently onto his bed. He quickly reached into the leather satchel and withdrew vials Hermione recognised as Murtlap essence and blood replenishing potion. Snape then saw to Draco's wounds, lifting his head carefully to administer the potion.

It made Hermione's heart hurt to see how he cared for Draco. Finally, someone had.

Eventually, Draco regained consciousness. His eyelids fluttering open, face pinched with pain.

Snape said nothing now, just looked down at him as he struggled to sit up.

Draco opened his eyes fully now, the silver cloudy, the whites bloodshot.

'What happened?'

'Potter cursed you. Why the hell didn't you fight back Draco? You could destroy that boy in a wand fight easily?'

'And get expelled?' Draco said, weakly, still trying to sit up.

'Who will keep her safe then? Potter doesn't trust me, he doesn't believe me. He's busy fighting his own battles, I can't trust him, and Dumbledore-' he stopped. *'Dumbledore will be dead soon, and he can't protect her either.'*

Snape looked at Draco with almost pity in his eyes.

'I can help,' he said. 'With Dumbledore, but I can't help with Granger.'

'I've got to kill him,' Draco said. 'I don't want to kill him. He's never hurt me. There are people I want to kill. But not him. I don't think I'll mean it enough.'

'I will be there, we can deal with Dumbledore.' Snape said.

'I made your mother a promise, to look after you Draco, and I will. But not because of the promise. Because you deserve it. You deserve more than this.' Snape indicated to Draco's body, bleeding once again.

Draco smiled a rueful smile at the mention of his mother. 'Shes getting you to do what she won't.' He said. *The bitterness back in his voice.*

'She tries Draco. She's trying.'

Snape was trying to get Draco to look at him, but he closed his eyes and lay back on the pillow, the blood he had coughed up congealing around his mouth.

'At least now the Hogsmeade trips are cancelled?' Was all he said.

'Yes,' replied Snape. 'After the Katie Bell incident, Weasley and now this- many things will be cancelled.'

Draco looked pleased then, his face relaxed. Hermione let her own tears fall as she again watched an injured, bloodied Draco Malfoy smile, softly as he drifted off to sleep.

She lifted her head up out of the memory and screamed.

She sat on the floor next to the Penseive and screamed and screamed until her throat hurt, How had she been so blind to the sacrifices Draco had made for her?

He allowed Harry to curse him- to protect her, he hid his power, let people hurt him time and time again- for her. The version of him he had shown to her was so far away from what she was seeing now. She had never had any idea.

Hermione felt like she she was going mad. Like her heart couldn't take watching any more.

She needed to undo this. She knew where his life would take him, to that pub, and that noose, and she couldn't let it happen.

She couldn't just carry on as she was, happily living her safe, simple life when she knew the misery Draco had lived, and some of it had been for her.

Hermione sat and cried, and as she did, she came to a decision.

She was going to find out if there was any way to change the course of Draco Malfoy's life.

She had the memories, if she could just change one small thing, could things have ended differently?

She looked over to the memory vials. She had a few still to watch but she needed a break. It was too heavy.

She decided to go first to see Narcissa Malfoy, and then head to Hogwarts, Ron could get her access to the library. If she was going to research ways to help Draco, she'd start there.

Harry nor Blaise were in the office when she finally ascended the stairs, more than five hours after going down. She was so relieved to see that Simons was also gone.

She headed straight to the admin office to see Raina Grey, the woman in charge of witness interviews.

Hermione went for breezy and business-like as she took a witness request form and filled it in, handing it to Raina and then engaging her in conversation.

Raina barely looked at the form before signing it and handing it back to Hermione as she chatted to her about her plans for the weekend.

Hermione clutched the piece of paper between her fingers and thanked her as she made to leave the office, bumping smack- bang into Harry on her way out.

'Hi' he said. 'You're in a rush, where are you off?'

Hermione sighed.

'I want to interview Narcissa Malfoy.'

'Why?'

'Because Harry, Malfoy's memories aren't particularly clear. They aren't telling me what I need to know about where he's been and I'm wondering if she might have more information.'

'She doesn't. She's been interviewed before, and plus, the woman's batty Hermione. She doesn't know who she is half the time.'

'Still,' Hermione persevered, 'She can tell me things about Draco's childhood, answer a few questions I have.'

'Does his childhood matter? We're trying to find out where he's been, who's been hiding him- recently. Not when he was a kid,'

'I think his childhood acquaintances could tell us a lot actually.' She said.

‘They could have been hiding him. Narcissa can tell us more about who he was friends with, places he might have gone. So far, all our witnesses have lead us on wild goose chases. We still have no clue where he’s been or how he ended up dead. The memories I’ve seen so far are telling me more about who he was then, but they aren’t helping me find out who he is now. We’ve got nothing to lose by seeing her have we?’

Eventually Harry agreed, although he insisted on going with her.

‘If she’s anything like her husband and son she’s an evil old bitch, I don’t want you going there alone. You look awful at the minute Hermione. You need to eat more, sleep more. I don’t want you to have another seizure.’ She ignored him, knowing she already had.

‘Shouldn’t Blaise come?’ She asked.

‘No, he’s having a few days off. He’s struggling Hermione. He says he’s not, but I can see it in him. Some time at home with Ginny will help.’

She agreed so she said nothing. She could see herself that something wasn’t right with Blaise. She’d never seen him so on edge.

She and Harry grabbed a coffee and a croissant and made their way to Saint Mungo’s.

As they travelled up to the ward where Narcissa was being held, Hermione filled Harry in with a very vague outline of what she’d found out about Malfoy. She kept her voice light, professional.

She didn’t mention herself, and the things he’d done for her. Harrys brow furrowed when she told him about how Lucius had treated Draco. He asked questions but didn’t give any opinions.

She wanted to ask him about their altercation in the bathroom, did he remember? She wanted to ask him why he didn’t give Draco a chance to explain, and why he’d never told her what he had said. He had lied about seeing the note too.

Hermione realised that she and Harry were both keeping things from each other when it came to Draco Malfoy. She knew her own reasons, but what were Harry’s?

She looked at him as she told him about Draco’s suffering as a child. His face showed flashes of guilt as well as anger, and something else, something deeper than she had time to unpick at that moment.

‘Gods, he hid that well.’ Was all Harry said. ‘You’re recording all of this?’

‘Yes, you know how detailed my notes always are.’

When they reached the ward, Harry flashed his Auror badge and they were instantly granted access.

Hermione thought he needn't have bothered. The healers were ecstatic to see him, all smiling excitedly at each other that Harry Potter was on their ward.

They were shown towards Narcissa's room by one of the senior healers who introduced herself as Sairah Wynd.

She told them a little about Narcissa as they walked.

She explained that Narcissa had episodes of lucidity and mania. That she frequently had hallucinations where she believed she was living in the past. She insisted her husband was alive or that other people were dead- people she had seen recently.

She was struggling significantly with her son's death.

Not able to come to terms with it, not able to accept it, insisting that he was alive one day, crying over his death the next.

She could be violent, when provoked. They had to keep her drugged to prevent her performing wandless magic. She had hexed several people before they'd realised her skill.

Hermione thought of Draco's own abilities. She remembered also, Narcissa smashing the chandeliers to stop Draco cursing his father. He obviously got it from her.

As they reached her door, Sairah paused.

'It's been- difficult,' she said, looking at them both with something like regret in her eyes.

'Looking after a Malfoy, after everything that family has done, especially the boy. But Mrs Malfoy. I don't think she asked for any of it. I think she was a pawn in those men's game- Lucius and Draco. She never stood a chance.' And she walked away.

Harry paused at the door, he looked at Hermione quizzically as she stared after Sairah, a furious look on her face. She looked back at him and shook her head, anxious to get into the room. She took out her charmed notebook and quill, ready to record Narcissa's information.

Harry went in first, Hermione followed behind, hiding slightly behind Harry, she almost didn't want to see Narcissa, she was so angry with her for her utter failure of Draco as a small boy. She pushed her emotions down, told herself to be professional. She was here to do a job.

Narcissa was laying in bed, the white sheets pulled up to her chin. She was bone thin and fragile in the bed. Her hair was piled up on her head, curly, the white streak noticeable through the middle.

Her hands shook as they rested on her chest, they were thin and birdlike, just like the rest of her.

She looked so old, Hermione thought. Like the events of the past few years had aged her. She opened her eyes when Harry approached the bed.

'Harry Potter,' the word came out a whisper.

'To what do I owe the pleasure?'

'Hello Narcissa' Harry said. He sounded hesitant, Hermione thought.

‘I’m here for work I’m afraid. I’m currently working for the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, and I’m here to talk to you about-‘

‘No you aren’t.’ She interrupted him. ‘You’re still at Hogwarts.’

He flashed his eyes to Hermione, who hung back. She looked at Narcissa and she couldn’t stop thinking about six year old Draco, calling out for her with no response.

‘No, that was a little while ago now.’ He said gently.

‘Now I work for the DMLE. I’m investigating-‘

‘No, you’re at Hogwarts. They left you at Hogwarts, when you died. They had to.’

Harry looked concerned now. ‘It was very sad.’ She continued. ‘So many of you died. Lucius was happy of course, it helped him greatly.’ Harry waited, saying nothing until she fell silent again. She appeared to be nodding off.

‘I’m here to investigate the death of your son Mrs Malfoy- Draco.’

Her eyes flew open now.

‘Don’t!’ She said, ‘Please don’t speak of Draco. He, he suffered so much. He didn’t deserve it! He was a good boy! His father he-‘ she stopped dead then.

She had seen Hermione.

She closed her mouth with a snap.

Hermione looked at her, she said nothing, just watched the myriad of emotions that seemed to be flickering over Narcissa’s face.

She brought a hand up now, and reached towards Hermione. Her nails were painted black, pointed.

‘Hermione dear,’ her voice was soft.

‘Ah Hermione. Sweet Hermione. My Draco loved you so very much. Are you with him now? At the graveyard? Or is he at home? At the manor?’

Hermione couldn’t answer. Harry was staring down at Narcissa, his eyes wide.

Narcissa continued staring at Hermione for a moment longer. Then blinked, and it was like a switch had flipped.

Her face changed, it filled with a cold, bloodless rage. Her brown eyes opened wide, staring, her lip curled. She began shaking.

‘You’ she said. Looking at Hermione with a murderous expression.

‘It was all your fault. All of it! You killed Lucius!’

Hermione opened her mouth to respond, but she couldn't. She felt frozen under the force of Narcissa's hatred.

'You, did this to my boy,' Narcissa said, 'he's dead because of you. Because of what you did. My Draco. He thought it was the only way!' She was screaming now. The healers came running in.

'She's a MURDERER!' Narcissa was screaming as they fussed round her, opening vials of potions, Narcissa fought against them, trying to get to Hermione.

'SHE KILLED MY HUSBAND! And now Draco is dead because of her! He helped her cover it up and now HE'S DEAD! Someone Avada her now! It's her! It's her!'

Hermione lost sight of Narcissa then, as the healers surrounded her. Narcissa's voice faded as she ingested the potions they forced to her lips and she began calming, her hands unclenching, laying back on the pillow.

Hermione and Harry stood frozen, their mouths open in shock.

'Im sorry,' Sairah said looking at them both apologetically. 'We thought she was having a lucid day today. She seemed fine earlier,' she apologised again as she ushered them out of the room.

Hermione looked back. Narcissa was silent now but her eyes still tracked Hermione, full of hate.

Sairah closed the door to Narcissa's room and began guiding them to the exit.

'Feel free to try again another day.' She said. 'She might be better then. However, maybe it's best if you don't come. Miss Granger. This isn't the first time she's said those things about you. You seem to be a bit of an obsession for her.'

Then, suddenly, they were outside the ward, the heavy double doors swinging shut behind them. Hermione and Harry stood, looking at each other in shock.

Harry cleared his throat and motioned towards Hermione's charmed quill and notebook.

'Did you get all that?' He asked,

Let them in

Chapter Notes

Again, I'm so grateful to everyone who has read, subscribed and commented! It really does make my day!

This chapter is the first chapter to move away completely from canon and begin telling Draco and Hermione's own story in my own way.

As it is fanfic, I have made it so that Harry is not a horcrux in this story, but he is still important to Voldemort as the boy who lived.

This chapter finally shows Hermione exactly what Draco was willing to do for her, and it's the memory that will push her over the edge!

The next chapter will be called 'Chaos Theory' and it should finally begin answering the all important question- does Hermione go back to change things for Draco, can she help him? And what will the consequences be?

Please note, this fic is definitely going to be on the longer side. There is so much of the story left to tell! I really hope people can stick with me, and I promise the pay off will be worth it for this beautiful pair!

Draco - June 1997

'Mr Malfoy, Remain behind after class please.' It wasn't a question.

Draco looked up from his Amortentia brew and nodded to Snape.

'Yes professor.'

He caught Pansy's eye and she raised her eyebrows.

He pulled a face and shrugged his shoulders, the picture of apathy.

Draco needed the lesson to hurry up and end. The smell of the potion was a problem. He was having to breathe in through his mouth, so as not to catch any sort of honeysuckle or Firewhisky scent.

It was making him think of things that weren't appropriate for potions class.

The knowledge that Granger was just behind him made it so hard to ignore her. He kept his eyes resolutely forward and was relieved to finally bottle the potion, although he could still smell the honeysuckle in the air.

When the bell went and everyone began filing out, Draco hung back, rolling his eyes at Pansy as she left, sticking out his foot to trip Neville Longbottom for good measure.

Finally, the last student had left and the classroom was empty.
Draco gladly moved away from his cauldron, he looked at Snape and waited.

Snape stood, his black hair tucked behind his ears, looking down his long, hooked nose, surveying him silently. Draco thought about how they were similar, he and Snape- hiding any sort of heart behind a black, heavy facade, ensuring that cruelty and spite were the only thing the world saw of them.

‘How are you Draco? How are your scars healing?’ Snape drawled eventually.

‘I’m fine professor. Thank you.’ He didn’t have the energy to discuss his pain with Snape. It wouldn’t change anything.
Snape knew though, he raised an eyebrow. I will give you some more Murtlap to take with you. Please, use it Draco.’

Draco could barely look him in the eye. He hated how vulnerable he’d been in front of him, hated how much he owed him, how much he craved the care he gave him.
He didn’t want to *need* anyone.
He’d decided after the Sectumsempra incident that he’d had enough of being weak, there were more difficult times to come.

‘How is the vanishing cabinet coming along?’

‘I think.. I think I’ve fixed it.’

‘So you know what this means?’

‘I do.’

‘Are you ready?’

‘I am.’

‘You need to let Voldemort know, he is becoming impatient. Then, you must prepare yourself, Draco. This will be a pivotal moment in your life. I hope you are aware that you will not be able to return to Hogwarts, no matter what happens.’

Draco felt as though Snape had punched him. He felt all air leave his lungs at once. He couldn’t move, couldn’t say anything. He just blinked at him as he tried to take in the gravity of what he was saying.
Snape looked at him incredulously.

‘Draco, your peers will know you have taken the mark. You are a Death Eater, surely you know this?
For both of us, the night you choose will be the end of one part of our lives, and the beginning of another.

Dumbledore is a hugely influential, powerful wizard. For you to bring about his end, there will be no coming back.

You will set in motion a chain of events much bigger than you or I- Voldemort's return.'

Draco felt the guilt and horror of his actions seize at his heart. He badly wished for a way out, to stop things. He felt so overwhelmed, so alone, but he knew this was only the start.

Voldemort had been gathering strength, increasing his forces for months. If he didn't do what Voldemort wanted, he would kill him, no one would care about him and then no one would care about Granger.

They were all so focused on Potter, she would be dispensable.

Draco realised that there would be no more Hogwarts for him, no more nights in the common room with his friends, no more great hall, no more Quidditch, no more parties, nothing.

He would likely never see Granger again.

He would be back at the manor, full time.

He had to give it all up, so that he could keep her safe.

Draco didn't even feel the panic attack coming on.

One minute he was stood, and the next he had stumbled, his chest contracting, unable to take a full breath, his head spinning.

Snape was crouched next to him, murmuring comforting words, a hand on his shoulder. He began to see black spots. He was going to pass out he realised.

A few moments later Draco woke up, he was on the floor of the potions classroom. Snape had rennervated him and was now bending down, offering him a vial of Pepper-Up.

He took it, snatching it angrily out of Snape's hand. Why was he always laying on his back? He sat up and swallowed the potion. Draco ran a hand through his hair as he forced himself to face his new reality.

'Could I please just have one more week?' He asked Snape. 'Maybe just don't tell them it's ready?'

Snape looked at him pityingly then.

'Of course Draco, one week. No more.'

'Thank you Professor.'

He left the classroom and walked down the halls, looking around him as if seeing Hogwarts for the first time.

He'd always loved it here, but now, he thought again about how much he really, truly loved it.

Hogwarts was more of a home to him than the manor had ever been. He had waited his whole life to get here and now it was over.

His life was only going in one direction, the direction his father had planned out when he was

six.

There had never been any hope for him, there was never going to be any other outcome.

Draco headed back to the Slytherin dormitory. He needed to be with his friends.

He sat amongst them all, and looked around him.

Crabbe and Goyle were sitting on the floor, practising their Transfiguration, failing miserably to turn goblets of water into Butterbeer.

Pansy and Theo were cuddled up on the sofa, their legs entwined, talking in low voices.

Blaise was dancing around, pretending to be a muggle boxer. Telling them all about someone he'd heard of called Mohammed Ali.

He was going on about 'Float like a butterfly, sting like a bee.' Draco was irritated with him, especially when he began shadow boxing in Draco's face.

'Come on Malfoy,' he teased, 'Punch me, you know you want to.' Draco felt a flash of anger then, he almost did punch him.

Didn't Blaise realise it was the end of the world?

He stopped himself at the last second, Blaise wasn't to know. This wasn't how he wanted them to remember him.

Instead he smiled, and laughed and forced his emotions down deep inside.

He wanted one more week of being seventeen, of just being a boy who went to school, not a soldier, not a Death Eater. He wanted to pretend he was like them.

Draco spent the next week doing everything that gave him any sort of pleasure. He made himself force down all the foods he loved that he could only get at Hogwarts, even though he wasn't hungry.

He stared at Granger, openly. Potter wasn't around and Weasley was clueless. He thought she'd noticed, he saw her cheeks burn a few times, but he made sure to return her looks of disgust when their eyes met, just so he didn't creep her out.

He spent all his time with his friends, convincing them to miss lessons, to go and lay by the black lake instead, laughing and swigging from a bottle of Firewhisky. None of them ever asked why he'd suddenly stopped caring so much about his grades, about learning. They all just went with it, and Draco was grateful for that.

Theo watched him closely, chewing his lip, concern heavy in his blue eyes. But he didn't ask, and Draco didn't tell him anything, he didn't want to put that on Theo's shoulders.

It was safer that way.

He'd managed to teach Theo basic occlumency, but it wouldn't be enough against Voldemort. He knew that, and so did Theo.

Draco also made the most of the girls. They didn't seem to mind that he barely spoke to them afterwards, that he was rough, rushed. He knew they probably wanted more from him,

wanted intimacy, but he didn't have it in him.

He just wanted to come, quick and dirty, as often as possible before he went back to the dark, lonely halls of the manor.

He'd been standing in one of the darkened hallways, late one evening.

His trousers were around his knees, and he was holding his robes up as a Slytherin girl, he thought her name was Astoria, had knelt in front of him, her mouth full of him, as he gripped her hair in his other hand and closed his eyes, thinking of Granger, when he suddenly heard a sharp intake of breath.

His eyes flew open and he saw her- Granger- stood there, her face a horrified mask of embarrassment.

She'd been on prefect duty.

He pushed Astoria off and let his robes drop, opening his mouth to say something, but she had turned and run. She'd stuttered out an apology and disappeared before he fully even registered what had happened. Astoria had stalked off, not even waiting for an explanation.

He saw the next day that 100 points had been deducted from Slytherin for out of hours activity.

He smiled at that, but he wished it hadn't happened. He didn't want that to be her last memory of him.

Draco had a feeling, one that had formed in his mind and that he couldn't quite shake.

He wondered if he might die, the night that he let the Death Eaters into Hogwarts.

That something might go wrong.

He thought it might have been a relief, if it wasn't for Granger. Even if he didn't die, he knew a part of him was going to.

He was going to lose everything he loved.

Every night he'd go to bed and he'd work on his occlusion. He'd mentally prepare as he forced himself to come to terms with his fate.

By the time Snape asked him to stay behind again, he was ready. He'd made his peace with it.

He'd had a good run. Six years with his best friends, six years of seeing Granger daily. Six years free of the manor.

He was lucky really, he told himself.

Draco was ready. He was going to make them all proud.

Hermione - June 2006

It was an awkward walk back for Hermione and Harry from St Mungo's.

Hermione didn't know what to say. She couldn't stop shaking, her adrenaline still running high.

She thought about the hatred in Narcissa's face, about how insistent she was that Hermione

had killed Lucius. It was laughable of course, just like Damilda Crease insisting she'd seen her with Draco at the Hogs Head.

But, as she'd looked at Narcissa, as she'd heard her say the words, an image had flashed into Hermione's head. She wanted to forget it, to believe that it was just an image that Narcissa had forced there with what she was saying.

It was an image of Lucius Malfoy, covered in blood. His face twisted with the same hate she'd seen in Narcissa's face as he uttered a curse she didn't recognise, the last thing he'd ever say, Hermione had been sure.

She felt like her wand had been pointed at him at the time.

She tried to catch hold of the image, to see what he was saying, but it was too fleeting, just a flash in her mind.

Neither she nor Harry said anything as they entered the office. Hermione felt like there was so much to say, but now wasn't the time. Harry disappeared straight into his office without another word.

Hermione looked over to Blaise's empty desk. She could have really done with him now, to reassure her, to say that it was nothing, that Narcissa was insane, that she didn't know what she was saying.

As she got to her own desk she saw a note had been left. Someone had Floo called from St Mungo's. They wanted to discuss her brain scan results and could she please get back to them.

She looked at the note, read it a few times and then crumpled it up and put it in the bin.

Hermione spent some time collating her case notes.

She went through and included the preliminary report of Draco's injuries, the autopsy notes, ignoring the fact that it was marked as incomplete.

She added in the crime scene photos, the witness evidence, Crease's testimony about her, and the transcripts from Narcissa and Theo and Pansy.

As she looked at it all she realised it was woefully lacking in any actual information.

She was no further along to having any clue where Draco Malfoy had been or why he'd killed himself when and where he did.

Every step they took forward, something happened to take them another step back.

The only thing left was the last few memories, she needed to see them.

She headed down to see if the Pensieve was free.

She had a headache, had done since seeing Narcissa. Probably stress, she thought.

Hermione saw Robards then, his mouth set in a grim line, on his way into Harry's office.

She pursed her lips and made her way to get the Pensieve room password, glad to hear that it was free for the next two hours before the department which granted access, closed for the

night.

She headed down yet again to the room she knew so well now.

Hermione looked at the date on the next memory.

She took a deep breath. She didn't know if she could do it.

She stood for a while, dithering, wishing again that Blaise were here, to hold her hand. She thought that she'd go and see him and Ginny after work, to see how he was.

Eventually, Hermione knew she needed to get this memory out of the way.

She uncorked the vial and poured the memory into the Penseive.

She watched it swirl, then lowered her face.

Draco was at the manor. He was in the dungeon room again.

He was so thin he looked unwell, however, he was immaculate in a fitted black suit, black shirt, snake shaped tie pin at his chest. His eyes looked huge, a clear silvery blue, the dark circles underneath them made him look ghostly in the dim light of the dungeon.

He was listening to Voldemort, being given instructions.

Snape lurked in the far corner.

'You will wait until the others are in bed Draco, then you will move to the Room of Requirement and open the passageway to Borgin and Burkes. Once the door is open, this will grant access to Bellatrix, Fenrir, Rabastan and Barty. The passage should take them less than five minutes. You wait for them in the astronomy tower.

Severus will be ready, to ensure that Dumbledore is unprotected, unsuspecting.'

'Barty?' Draco said. His voice like ice.

Voldemort sneered. 'Yes, it would appear that Barty has reappeared from the woodwork. A fortunate turn of events wouldn't you say boy?'

Draco gritted his teeth, 'Yes, my Lord.'

'My lord, may I be the one to kill Dumbledore?' Bellatrix's voice came now from the corner. Her eyes flickered to Draco.

'I want to pay him back for a few things.' Her singsong voice set Hermione's teeth on edge. She twirled her wand through the air.

Hermione wondered if again, this was Bellatrix's attempt at protecting Draco.

'You may not!' Voldemort snapped. Nagini raised her head and slithered towards Bellatrix and over her pointed boots. Hermione saw her tense, holding her breath as the snake curled around her ankles briefly.

'It must be the boy. He must pay for the sins of his father.'

Hermione clenched her jaw at that. How much more did Draco need to pay for the sin of being born to Lucius Malfoy. When would it be enough?

'Yes, my Lord.' Bellatrix said, deferential and adoring. She bowed low, her curls falling over her black rimmed eyes. 'And what of Potter my Lord? Once Dumbledore is dead he will be vulnerable, we can bring him to you.'

'No,' Voldemort hissed. 'I am not ready for the boy yet. Thanks to Lucius I am unaware of what the prophecy said. You are to leave the boy until the risk is known.'

'Of course, he will not be touched.' Bellatrix replied.

'Where is Narcissa?' Voldemort asked.

'She is, ah, incapacitated again at the moment my Lord.' Bellatrix answered.

*She heard Voldemort hiss his displeasure.
He turned his snakelike eyes to Draco.*

'Draco, it appears you are the only member of your family with any strength of character. I hope your shoulders are strong enough to carry the weight of the Malfoy name.'

'They are my lord,' Draco replied.

Hermione cringed as Voldemort smiled, his face a sickly mask. He beckoned Draco to him then, one crooked finger, the blackened nail long and pointed. Draco moved closer,

'Come here Draco.' Voldemort kept beckoning until Draco was bent over him. Hermione's stomach twisted as she watched Voldemort's pull Draco's face close to his own and plant his foul lips on Draco's cheek, tenderly.

She saw Draco's eyes close, his Adam's apple bob in his throat. He looked as though he was going to vomit.

'You must go back to Hogwarts boy. Enjoy your last evening. We shall look forward to seeing you tomorrow.'

Draco straightened, his face bone-white and nodded before Apparating away with a crack.

Hermione watched him arrive at Borgin and Burkes. He was shaking slightly. He wiped at his cheek, rubbing harshly at the spot Voldemort had kissed over and over again.

He bent over in the street outside the shop and dry heaved several times.

After a minute or two of seeming to gather himself, he entered the shop, his mask was back in place and he was calm. He muttered a greeting to Borgin and walked quickly to the back of the shop before standing in front of the vanishing cabinet, taking a deep breath and climbing in.

Hermione watched as he appeared back at Hogwarts and unfolded his long body, stepping out into the Room of Requirement.

He walked, as calm and quiet as she'd ever seen him and went back to the Slytherin common room.

Draco sat with his friends, and didn't say a word. Hermione saw the way he looked at them all, love shining in his eyes as he laughed at Blaise's awful jokes. His eyes seemed to linger upon each of their faces in turn, as though he were memorising them.

Eventually he told them he was going to bed, and walked towards the dorms. Hermione watched as he stood in the dark, but he didn't actually go back to the dorm.

He held his wand above his own head and turned it in a twirling motion for a moment until suddenly, he disappeared. He'd disillusioned himself she realised, the way he had with her years ago. He obviously needed his wand to cast on himself.

He was very skilled- he was practically invisible. In the memory he appeared as a pale, wavy outline.

She followed the outline of him she could see down the halls and she knew where he was going before he got halfway there.

Hermione watched Draco wait next to the Fat Lady's portrait until some Gryffindor fourth years gave the password then he slipped in behind them.

She saw the blur of him move around the common room, eventually making his way to the dorms, where she was fast asleep. Her hair spread in wild curls over her pillow.

She watched the depression appear on her bed as he sat, just down from her feet.

He stayed there the whole night, not moving, not touching her. He bent his head, like a person in prayer, and he just sat still, next to her on her bed.

When the dawn light began leaching in through the heavy maroon curtains of the Gryffindor girls dorm, he stood and left.

The outline of Draco cast one last glance behind him, and sighed heavily before finally returning to his own dorm.

He waved his wand over his head and again became visible, his blonde hair messy, his clothes rumpled. He paused as he looked down to see Theo, fast asleep in his bed.

He grinned, and pulled the duvet back, before getting in, fully clothed next to Theo, turning over and instantly falling asleep.

Hermione watched his breathing becoming more even, she looked at his lashes, so long on his cheeks, his face relaxed from its constant pinched, anxious expression for the first time she could remember.

He truly looked like a fallen angel she thought, and brought a hand up to swipe at the tear that rolled down her cheek.

The memory cut now, to the evening that she knew would change all of their lives forever.

Draco was sat on his bed in the Slytherin dorm. He was sitting bolt upright. His hands resting on his thighs. He was occluding, Hermione saw.

His eyes were completely blank, his face expressionless. He was taking deep, slow breaths. He was alone.

Hermione watched him stand now, he was wooden, stiff. He walked out of the dorm, past the common room.

Draco disillusioned himself again and walked through the school, silently, like a cat, until he reached the blank wall she knew held the Room of Requirement. He stood at the wall, and closed his eyes, waiting, then when the door appeared, he slipped inside, coming into view again.

He walked to the cabinet, and just stood for a moment. She could see his shoulders rising and falling, he was pale, ghostlike in the moonlight. He took a deep breath and then opened the door.

Hermione watched as the dark magic formed around the cupboard, a thick, black, acrid swirling cloud.

Draco watched the smoke creep forward for a moment, with eyes like saucers, then he held his wand up, a ray of green light shot upwards and through the ceiling.

Hermione knew it was exploding into green light in the sky, a spray of sparks dancing in the dark.

He turned and began walking, quickly.

She saw him, heading straight towards the astronomy tower as he had been instructed. This was where Dumbledore would go when he saw the sign in the sky.

Draco didn't pause or falter on his way there. He took the steps two at a time, moving fast. When he got there, he stopped, then crept, slowly now, barely moving, towards the middle of the room. He seemed to be listening intently. The wind was blowing through the astronomy tower, a storm brewing outside.

She tried to see the emotions on his face, she wondered if he was scared, but his eyes were unreadable, there was no way to tell what was going on behind the unsettling, expressionless grey.

Dumbledore was already waiting for him. He looked fragile, Hermione thought. He held one hand against his side.

'Good evening, Draco.'

Hermione watched Draco as he raised his wand and trained it on Dumbledore. His hands were still, there was no hint of a tremble there.

Dumbledore seemed to know why he was there. He looked at Draco with a resigned sadness in his eyes.

'Draco, I hope that you know, you don't need to do this, this isn't who you are.'
He held his hands out, imploring, trying to get through the wall of glass that Draco was behind.

'How do you know who I am?' Draco replied, his voice flat.
'You don't know me professor. No one here knows me. I'm a ghost.'
He was looking at Dumbledore, but he didn't seem like he was really there, his mannerisms were off.
Hermione felt like he'd pushed himself so far down there was nothing of him left to feel anything.

'I know that you have been failed in life Draco, by the people that were meant to keep you safe. But there is hope for you. I can help.'

She saw Draco flinch slightly, she could see he wanted to believe Dumbledore, but he was too far gone. Nothing in his life had allowed him to believe that there was hope.

He flicked his eyes to the stairs at the back of the room. It looked to her as though he were trying to tell Dumbledore that the Death Eaters were on their way.

Draco's voice was quiet, there was no emotion, 'It's too late now Professor, the time when anyone could help me is long gone. The Dark Lord has chosen me.' He lifted up his sleeve, showing the Dark Mark on his arm to Dumbledore.

Dumbledore looked at the mark sadly.

'Years ago, Draco, I knew another boy who made all the wrong choices. Please let me help you.'

Draco just laughed, a humourless, resigned laugh. 'I don't get to have choices professor. None of this is my choice.'

They stood then, just looking at each other.

'You can't protect everyone Draco. This isn't the way.' Dumbledore said. *'Please, I can help you, with all of it- with every one.'* There was something implied in those words.

It broke through the walls Draco had constructed. Hermione saw how young he was, how out of his depth. She thought that Dumbledore could see it too.

When Draco eventually spoke, his voice was broken.

'I have to do this. There's no other way for me Dumbledore.' He let out a sob, *'I'm sorry.'*

Hermione cringed then, as she heard Bellatrix's high pitched cackle and she appeared out of the gloom at the stairwell of the tower, the others skulking behind her.

'Well, look what we have here. Well done, Draco.'

She moved towards him, prancing on the balls of her feet, and planted a kiss on Draco's cheek. Much like Voldemort had the day before.

Draco stayed, frozen, his eyes on Dumbledore.

Hermione saw that Dumbledore wasn't surprised to see the Death Eaters. He had known they would be there, just like he'd somehow known that Draco would be there.

'Good evening, Bellatrix. I think introductions are called for.' Dumbledore said in his usual measured tone, looking behind her to the others lurking in the shadows.

Hermione watched Bellatrix as grinned, her blackened teeth bared.

'Love to, Albus, but I'm afraid we're on a bit of a tight schedule'.

She looked utterly unhinged as she stalked back to Draco, her hair trailed across his neck as she leant in close to his face.

Draco kept his wand trained on Dumbledore, but the tip of it shook as she put her mouth close to Draco's ear, her dry lips moving across his skin and she hissed, 'Do it Draco!'

Greyback came into view, his back hunched, teeth glittering in the moonlight coming through into the astronomy tower.

'He doesn't have the stomach... just like his father. Let me finish him in my own way.'

'No!' Bellatrix shrieked.

'The Dark Lord was clear, the boy is to do it. This is your moment. Do it! Go on, Draco! NOW!'

Hermione watched in horror as Draco narrowed his eyes and levelled his wand back at Dumbledore's heart.

Bellatrix giggled as she danced from foot to foot. Her eyes wild.

Draco raised his wand, the Death Eaters encroached.

'Barty!' Bellatrix snapped. 'Go fetch the Mudblood! We're almost done here! Draco! NOW!' Bellatrix screamed again.

Crouch moved from the shadows, a sly smile on his face. His footsteps clattered as he ran down the stairwell.

Draco flinched and glanced again to the stairwell, the dull grey of his eyes was suddenly replaced with a bright, terrible fear.

'DO IT DRACO!' Bellatrix shrieked. 'DO IT NOW!'

Hermione watched in shock as Draco suddenly whirled around. His wand no longer pointed at Dumbledore, but at Bellatrix.

Bellatrix drew her wand, her eyes widened as she realised what was happening.

Everyone in the room seemed to move in slow motion as Bellatrix looked behind him, and shot a blast of green light towards Dumbledore.

'AVADA KEDAVRA!' The word left her lips in a manic shriek.

Draco looked around, just a slight turn of his head, then he shot his hands out as Lestrangle and Greyback lunged at him.

Everything seemed to stop, to move in slow motion.

Draco stood in the middle of the astronomy tower, all three Death Eaters stood in front of him, and in that moment, he looked so young, so fragile, like the sacrificial lamb.

Dumbledore stumbled back, his eyes had gone blank. His back hit the railing behind him and he fell backwards, his limp body sailing through the air. Hermione put her hands over her ears so she didn't need to hear the sound of his body hit the floor.

Then there was another sound. A huge, thudding, deep sound, like a bomb going off under water. The whole tower appeared to shudder.

They all fell to the ground with the force of it. Everyone except Draco. His eyes were ablaze now, no longer cloudy as he stared into Bellatrix's face, looking down at her. The change in his expression was terrifying. Hermione looked at him and she felt like she'd never seen him before.

Bellatrix, Dolohov, Lestrangle, were frozen, their eyes went blank, they stood, suspended like marionettes as the teenage boy in the middle of the room lifted his arms up.

His eyes rolled back in his head and as his arms came down again, they all fell to the ground, their bodies limp, all life extinguished from them in seconds.

The whole tower began to shake. The beams in the ceiling began to creak, then to splinter. There was a groaning sound as huge pieces of wood began falling around them.

The tower was collapsing.

Draco stood in the middle of it and he didn't move. His face wasn't his own. He looked like a monster then, the mask had slipped to reveal pure, unchecked rage, his wand slipped from his fingers with a clatter.

Draco had snapped, Hermione thought.

Years of torture and abuse had created the boy that stood there now with nothing but fury behind his eyes.

He was a child, she thought. At this point, he was still a child, one who had lived through hell and he had lost control. It was too much for him.

'Draco, enough!' Snape's voice cut through the chaos. Hermione saw Snape suddenly emerge from the shadows.

'What have you done?'

The tower stopped shuddering.

Nothing else fell. Draco didn't look at Snape, he didn't move. His eyes were wide and glassy.

'Look at me Draco.' Snape said, 'Stop.'

Draco looked at him. His eyes were so full of pain and hopelessness that it broke Hermione's heart.

'Voldemort will know. He will sense immediately through the mark that they are dead. He will be sending more Death Eaters here. You need to go, Draco, now.'

Draco still stood, frozen. Looking at the dead Death Eaters on the ground, one his own aunt, realising what he had done.

'Go!' Snape said and Draco went. He picked up his wand, and he ran. He sprinted, out of the astronomy tower and down, down the stairs.

There were students streaming through the corridors, the green skull in the sky and then the noise of the tower as the building had shifted had lead the teachers to begin moving them to safety.

People were panicking, it was noisy, some were pushing and shoving.

The wave of students all moved one way, and in the middle of them all, Draco Malfoy moved in another. He was frantic, pushing against the moving tide of people.

He whipped his head back and forth through the crowds, he appeared to be searching.

Mc Gonagoll caught sight of him, 'Mr Malfoy! Come back please!'

He didn't slow. He was going for the Gryffindor dormitory, where Hermione knew she had been. She thought about it now. She couldn't remember being moved by the teachers, she couldn't remember walking with the other students.

Draco got to the fat ladies portrait and froze as he saw the slash marks, the portrait hung to one side, the fat lady nowhere to be seen.

He stepped forward and through the hole and then kept running, through the common room to the dorms, his face was twisted with worry, he was whispering, something like an incantation, she looked closely at his lips 'Please, please, not yet.'

As he rounded the corner into what she knew was her dormitory, Hermione's mouth dropped open at what she saw. She felt sick, her heart stuttered.

She was still there laying in the dormitory, unconscious on the bed.

She had clearly been Stupefied.

She was in her pyjamas. Her legs were bare, her vest top barely covering her. She was flat on the bed, her arms and legs limp, her eyes open.

Barty Crouch was leaning over her, leering. His tongue flickered out near her face as he smiled. His hands moving over her.

He looked up as Draco approached, his wand instantly in his hand, pointed at Draco.

'EXPELLIARMUS!' Draco was too fast for him.

'Malfoy you little shit!' Crouch roared as his wand landed in Draco's open palm.

'Voldemort will kill you if you interfere with this Malfoy. He wants the Mudblood, he's waited long enough.'

Draco stalked towards him, he put Crouch's wand into his pocket, and trained his own wand on Crouch's chest. His eyes kept flickering to her, lying on the bed.

Crouch snarled at Draco.

'What are you going to do Pup?' He asked, licking his lips. 'If the dark lord doesn't get the Mudblood, it will be on your head. He will destroy you.'

'Maybe I'll destroy him,' Draco said.

Crouch laughed then, a real belly laugh.

'You really are as stupid as your father,' he said. 'I thought he'd maybe beaten that out of you, but he must have gone too easy on you. You're still a stupid little shit. You won't get away with this Malf-' He didn't finish his words as Draco held his other hand out, palm up.

Crouch suddenly began rising from the floor. His back bent backwards and he screamed in agony as Draco began closing his fingers into a claw position.

The more Draco clawed his fingers, the more Crouch's back kept bending, further than it could go, Crouch screamed and screamed, as his limbs suddenly bent at awkward angles, in ways they were not meant to go. Hermione heard his bones snap, like twigs.

'Stop saying I'm like my father,' Draco said, his voice cold.

He kept Crouch suspended there for a moment, then let him drop from the ceiling. Hermione heard the sound of Crouch's bones crunching as he fell.

He was barely conscious as Draco stepped forward. He whimpered on the floor, he'd pissed himself and it leaked out from underneath him. Draco sneered down at him, hate in his eyes.

He pointed his wand at Crouch's forehead. His voice was eerily calm, detached.

'Avada Kedavra'. The words were soft.

As soon as Crouch fell Draco ran towards the bed.

She watched as he ran his eyes over her, checking her she knew, to see what Crouch had done to her.

The worry on his face as he looked was palpable, he checked every inch of her body.

Eventually he seemed satisfied that Crouch hadn't had time to do anything to her. He squeezed his eyes shut, and brushed her hair gently back from her face.

Then, Draco cast a shield over both of them and she watched as he gently scooped her up, and began running again with her in his arms as though she weighed nothing.

He carried her out of the portrait hole and stood in the corridor. Seemingly unsure of what to do.

Hermione heard the distant sound of shouting, running feet.

There was suddenly a loud bang and the main doors to Hogwarts, just down then corridor from where they were, burst open, the wood splintering, metal twisting.

Death Eaters began pouring in, their masks in place, robes swirling. There were so many, that just watching it made Hermione's blood run cold. They immediately began running and spread out, swarming though the school, Hermione heard the screaming start and curses began flying.

'No.' Draco said the word softly under his breath.

'No, no, no.' Hermione saw the fear in Draco's face then. He was frantic.

He took out his wand, disillusioned them both, and ran, trying to dodge people running through the halls, he moved down into a stairwell and waited, she could see his outline, hear his breath coming in heavy pants.

Draco looked both ways down the corridor and then seemed to come to a decision.

He began moving again, a different way, lower down into the school. He followed the staircase down to the lower floor, back where the dormitories were and once he got to where there was no one in sight, he lay her gently on the ground. He looked down at her face, watching her chest move up and down.

He suddenly whipped his head up at the sound of shouting and running footsteps coming towards them.

He swore softly. Hermione recognised Corban Yaxley at the front of the band of Death Eaters as they marched towards them.

Draco quickly picked her up, she could see the wavy outline of her hair hanging over his arm. He shrank back into the corner.

The Death Eaters passed by their disillusioned forms without a pause, Hermione watched in horror as they moved through the corridor, sending curses into every room they passed. She heard screaming coming from some of the rooms, dull thuds as the curses hit. Some students fought, sending their own spells back.

The school was a war zone.

Draco started moving again. Hermione jumped as she saw someone suddenly appear from the doorway of a room ahead, walking quickly towards them- Snape.

*He was looking around, his wand out in front of him.
He stopped then, just in front of Draco who had paused. They were less than a meter from each other.*

She watched as Draco bled into view, he was sweating, his face pale and eyes wide.

She lay unconscious in his arms, he gathered her close to him defensively, her neck bent over his one arm, her legs hanging limply over the other as Snape looked at him in horror.

*'Crouch had her, she's Stupified,' Draco said, his breath panting out of him. He whipped his head back and forth looking around, his face desperate.
'I don't know where to take her that's safe.'
He said. 'What can I do?'*

Snape looked at Draco, his own face a picture of anxiety.

'They are looking for her, Voldemort has told them to bring her to him. You'll need to take Miss Granger to her friends, to Minerva. You can't be found with her- by either side Draco. It will be a death sentence.'

A sudden explosion rocked the corridor and both Snape and Draco cringed, rubble falling down onto their heads.

'I don't care what happens to me,' Draco said. 'I just need to keep her safe. Please, help me.'

*Snape looked up and down the corridor, he was panicked.
'Get her to Minerva' Snape said. 'I'll hold them off as best I can. Be careful Draco.'*

She saw Draco nod, he set his jaw and rearranged her in his arms slightly.

Snape flicked his wand and disillusioned them both again before he set off running down the corridor, wand raised.

*Hermione could see Draco's outline as he looked down at her. He suddenly gathered her unconscious body tightly to him.
'It's going to be ok Granger,' he whispered into her hair. 'I won't let them have you.'*

Draco froze suddenly, as there was a sound in the darkness. A footstep. He stopped, looking around him.

The noise came again and Hermione gasped as the form of Harry began to materialise from the darkness, he held the invisibility cloak in one hand, the Marauders map in the other. He had obviously followed their names here, he pointed his wand at them, 'Revelio,' he whispered.

Draco didn't say anything. He couldn't fight with her in his arms, he just looked at Harry. He held her tightly to him and began backing away.

'Potter, don't- ' he began. But Harry held his hands up.

'Malfoy, it's ok.' He said, looking at Draco like he was a bomb that would go off if he got too close.

'I heard everything.' Harry said. 'I know you aren't going to hurt her.'

Draco seemed to release the breath he had been holding.

'Dumbledore's dead Potter,' he said.

'I know.'

'I'm sorry.'

'I know.'

'Potter, I- I never meant for any of this to happen.'

Draco said. 'All I wanted was to keep Granger safe. The Death Eaters want her, they want to keep her, to use her as a spy, to use her for her intelligence, to use her in other ways.'

Harry's eyes grew wide. Draco continued.

'Picture the worst thing you can imagine, Potter, and you wouldn't even be close to knowing what could happen to her if they get hold of her.'

The sound of explosions was growing nearer, there was a smell creeping into the air- smoke.

Draco turned his head to look up the hallway and then looked back at Harry. There was something like desperation in his expression.

'I know you won't believe me, but everything I have done for the past few years has been to keep her out of their hands, I've become a fucking Death Eater myself, just to keep her safe.'

Harry seemed to really see Draco then, see the desperation in his face.

'Why Malfoy?' He said. 'You hate her, you hate us.'

'I don't hate you Potter. I just hate me. You have no idea of the things I've done, the things I need to do now.' Draco's words were bitter.

'Malfoy, you don't have to do this. It's not too late. You can defect. Come to the order. Help us.'

Draco laughed hollowly. 'You know I can't do that. I'm branded. I'm a Death Eater. You're the chosen one, but I'm also the chosen one, chosen for a totally different purpose to you.

My life is nothing but darkness Potter. Everything I touch is cursed. Take Granger now, get her somewhere safe.

Never ever let her near me, or anyone connected to me, let her have a happy life, please.'

The two enemies stood and looked at each other then. Finally, an understanding between them, after so long.

Draco's voice was soft, 'I'm going to give her to you now. Go, hide her please.' Harry nodded and Draco walked towards him. He looked down at her again, the look of love on his face almost broke Hermione's heart. He gathered her to him, pressed his cheek gently once to the top of her head and then passed her, carefully, to Harry.

Harry took her into his own arms, his eyes travelling over her face, checking her over.

'She's alright Potter,' Draco said.

'Make sure it stays that way. If you don't- I'll fucking kill you.' Harry's green eyes flashed, and after a minute, he nodded.

Hermione watched, as Harry lifted her then, and began to walk down the corridor with her. Draco stood, his hands by his sides, and he watched until Harry ascended the stairs.

Then he moved towards the wall. He pushed his back up against it and then crouched down until he was sitting on the floor. His body seemed to convulse with the sob that tore through him, his breath hitched.

He hung his head between his legs and she watched as the tears ran down his face and dripped from his jaw. Hermione had never seen anyone someone so tortured and so utterly alone.

Hermione remembered, waking up in the Great Hall, Harry telling her that she had taken a rogue spell. So much had been happening at the time she had never questioned it.

She watched now as Draco stood. He swiped a hand over his face and he breathed deeply.

He began to move back through the school.

As he walked he seemed to be trying to get himself under control.

She watched, as he changed.

The desperate look on his face became cold, the devastation in his features hardened, turned to stone. Hermione felt like she was watching as Draco shed his skin, shed the person he really was and leave that boy discarded on the floor of Hogwarts.

The devastation wreaked on Hogwarts that day had been the start. With Dumbledore dead, the wizarding world had fallen into chaos.

Hermione remembered the teachers all frantically fighting to protect them, the older students fighting too.

Voldemort hadn't come for Harry that night.

It had just been a warning, a way to cause fear and panic that had backfired when inexplicably, the Death Eater losses had far outweighed their own.

The school had lay in ruins by the end. Nothing had ever been the same again.

The war had begun.

As she finally pulled her head out of the memory, Hermione remembered being told that Draco, Theo Nott and Pansy, along with Crabbe and Goyle had left with the Death Eaters, Blaise had chosen to stay.

She had hated Malfoy when she heard that, she remembered. Hermione felt like she couldn't breathe, thinking about the hate she had harboured in her heart for him.

Draco Malfoy had literally saved her life, he was the sole reason she hadn't been taken from Hogwarts, kidnapped by Death Eaters, raped, tortured.

She had lived a happy life, safe, surrounded by friends, while he had died, aged twenty five, after an existence that seemed to consist of little more than pain and suffering.

Her best friend had known what Draco had done for her that night and he had never told her. He'd never let her understand, and now Draco was dead. It was too late to do anything about it. Too late to feel his love, to tell him that she'd seen his heart and it was good.

That he was worthy of love, her love.

Hermione so desperately wanted to feel what could have been. She felt like she was shattering with the loss of it.

Draco was the only person who had ever made her feel like she was special, and he'd done it through the memories he had left.

Giving her a gift, but also cursing her with the futility of it- she was too late. All she had was questions that he could never answer and an ache her heart where she thought about what could have been.

Hermione realised that she didn't know if she could ever forgive Harry for not telling her. But she couldn't live with it, just accept it. She needed to hear his explanation. She yanked open the door to the Pensieve room.

She needed to see Harry, and then she needed to see the only other person that she thought could help her.

She was going to see Snape.

Chaos Theory

Hermione - June 2006

Hermione left the Penseive room and marched up the stairs. She could feel her jaw trembling and she tried to compose herself before she got to Harry's office.

She felt raw, like she'd been flayed alive by Draco's memories, they were almost too much to handle.

It was still so hard to connect the two versions of him in her mind.

On one hand she still saw the spoiled, spiteful boy she thought she had known, on the other, he was her hero. Her angel in disguise.

As she walked she replayed the images of him from her dreams, like she could will him into existence. She couldn't stop imagining him at twenty five, if he had lived that long, thinking about what he would have looked like, sounded like, what would he have been like as a person?

Had he remained funny, quiet and thoughtful, the way she had seen him with his friends in the common room?

She thought about how he had helped them with their homework, the patience he'd had as he explained something to Goyle for the fourth time, and about the gentle way he had let Pansy down at the Yule Ball, so careful with her heart.

She remembered the comfort he had clearly taken when Theo squashed up next to him at night- even though he tried to hide it.

Had he still been that person?

People changed, didn't they?

Hermione realised with a jolt that in the last memory, she had watched him kill four people, in just one night, and he had been aged just seventeen.

He had done it with a cold detachment, almost like it was nothing. She hadn't seen any remorse, or any second thoughts.

The reality was, Hermione reminded herself, that her angel was also a murderer. He had gone on to kill countless people before his own untimely death.

She wondered who he might have become if he had had a different father, a different start in life.

She felt the loss of that potential like a physical pain.

Hermione reached Harry's office and put a hand out to open the door. As she did so the door suddenly opened from the other side- Harry, seeing Robards out.

She met his green eyes, the eyes of one of her best friends, whom she had thought she had no secrets with.

She felt a deep pulse of anger as she looked at him. 'You stole him from me,' was the thought that rose in her mind.

She had to take a moment, to realise that realistically, she and Draco would never have been together, no matter what Harry had done.

She had loathed Draco then, she still would if she hadn't seen the memories.

He was a cruel bully, a Death Eater.

His life was very different after Dumbledore's death. Draco never came back to school, to the shit show that was their eighth year.

She wouldn't exactly have been going on dates with him.

But still, she couldn't shake the feeling that she had been cheated out of something she wanted so very much.

Robards strode out of Harry's office, offering her only a curt 'Good afternoon Miss Granger.' Then he turned back to give Harry a meaningful look.

She thought that Harry had paled as he looked at Robards, then back to her.

He motioned her inside and shut the door.

She watched Robards storm from the office through the frosted glass and then turned back to Harry.

'What was all that about?'

Harry had gone around to sit opposite her at the desk.

He put his head in his hands.

'Harry?'

She could see his reluctance as she waited.

'Robards is taking you off the case Hermione.' Harry said, from behind his hands.

She felt as though he had slapped her. She couldn't speak for a moment.

Harry looked like he would rather be anywhere else.

'I'm so sorry. The decision has come from above.

There are now two witnesses insisting that you were involved with Malfoy, and until we know more, they are forcing me to take you off the case. You and Blaise. They'll give it to Simons.'

Hermione looked at Harry, open mouthed with horror.

He couldn't do this to her, there were still memories to see. He couldn't take this from her as well.

She stood up and pushed her chair back.

‘You absolute BASTARD,’ she choked out.

Harry looked at her, shocked at the venom in her voice.

‘Hermione, it’s not me, I don’t get to have the final say. No matter what I think, the decision has been made. I can’t change it.’

She was shouting now.

‘No Harry! You can’t! And that’s not all you can’t change! It seems as though you think you have full control over me and everything in my life!’

‘What?’ He said. ‘Hermione no, I don’t. That’s not true at all. If our roles were reversed you’d be in the exact same situation I’m in now. Do you really think I want this?’

‘Blaise will kill you.’ She said, lifting her eyebrows. ‘No, actually, he will kill Simons and then you’ll have another death on your hands.’

‘Hermione, why is this so important to you? It’s Malfoy. You hated him. Why all of a sudden are you so obsessed with this case? I feel like it’s making you ill. You’re pale, you don’t eat, you don’t sleep. Why the hell do you care so much about him? Malfoy was an evil person. The world is a better place now he’s dead.’

She stopped and looked at him. Her chest still hot with rage. He was still trying to play dumb.

‘Are you seriously asking me that? You don’t know why I care? Do you really think I’ve been watching all these memories he left and that I wouldn’t have found out what you did?’

Harry’s eyebrows knitted together, he looked utterly confused.

‘What? What are you talking about?’

She looked at his green eyes, focused on her behind his glasses.

‘You know what Harry! I watched his memory from the castle, the night Dumbledore died.’

She waited for his reaction, for him to look embarrassed, guilty. But he just looked more confused.

‘Hermione, what the hell are you talking about? Did he kill Dumbledore is that it? I don’t know what you’re trying to tell me.’

Half an hour later she had convinced Harry to come back down to the Pensieve room and watch himself in Draco’s memory.

She couldn’t bring herself to watch it again, it was too painful.

Harry tipped the memory in and lowered his face into the liquid.

She sat on the floor, back against the Penseive and waited.

She let herself get lost in her favourite daydream again, soft lips, long eyelashes, fine blonde

strands...

After a while she opened her eyes and looked over at the remaining two memories on the shelf.

An idea came to her then, a sudden flash of desperation.

If they were taking her off the case she could take the last two memories, hide them. She didn't know if they had a record of how many there had been.

If they would notice?

But before she could act, Harry lifted his face back out from the Pensieve.

He stood back and looked at her, the shock evident on his face as he blew out a long breath. She saw the emotion there, remembered that he would have seen Dumbledore's death in the memory and relived that awful night in the castle. The smoke and the ruin, the rubble of the ruined classrooms, the blood and death.

'I, I don't know what to say Hermione.' Harry said. He looked thunderstruck. 'Malfoy saved your life back there, I...' He risked his life for you.'

'I know Harry. And you do too.'

'What?'

'He gave me to you. You took me out of his arms after he killed Crouch and carried me through the school to safety and then you took me upstairs.'

She searched Harry's face. What was his excuse?

He looked at her, and she could see he wasn't lying, when after a time, he said, 'Hermione, I swear to you on Ron's life, that I have absolutely no memory of that happening whatsoever. I remember looking for you, and I remember being gathered in the great hall, you were there. You'd been hexed, you were groggy. But I swear to you, all I knew of Malfoy that night was that he let the Death Eaters in, and then he and his cronies left with them after we killed half of them and injured the other half.'

Hermione looked at him, and she believed him. She had interrogated enough people to know the truth when she saw it.

His face was a picture of confusion, his expression open.

He really didn't remember it.

He looked absolutely gobsmacked at what he had seen. She watched as his eyes stared and moved back and forth, unfocused, as he thought.

'So- Malfoy,' he said slowly. 'He did have feelings for you.'

She took a deep breath. 'Yes, the memories make it appear like he did, I think since first or second year.'

Harry raised his eyebrows. 'I remember him being a bit creepy, staring at you a lot. But I genuinely thought it was because he couldn't stand you, or the fact that you were

Muggleborn and beating him in every class. I had no idea he cared for you like that.'

He indicated towards the Pensieve,
'I mean, he killed his own aunt to protect you Hermione.'

'I know.' She said, still astounded by it herself.

Harry just sat silently for a moment, he seemed to be processing everything.

'I was Obliviated.' He said finally.

I must have been. It's only a short part of the night I can't remember, and it's the part involving him.'

Hermione had already thought about it, 'Draco didn't Obliviate you.' The memory showed him for most of the night. He was fighting, he let you walk away with me and told you to keep me safe. He wouldn't have then Obliviated you.'

'It's the only explanation though.' Harry said. 'Who else would have reason to erase my memory of Malfoy doing something good for once in his sorry life?'

Hermione hated that she didn't like hearing Harry speak badly of him. But she had already thought the same thing, and she thought she knew.
She and Harry both said it at the same time- 'Snape.'

'He was obviously fond of Malfoy,' Harry said. 'Probably on the Malfoy bankroll.'

Hermione didn't say anything.

She didn't bother to tell Harry that Snape had been the only person she had ever seen show Draco some care, he'd been more like a father to him than his own evil bastard of a father.

She thought of something else.

'Harry, you told me you'd never seen a note, about Dra- Malfoy. Was that true?'

This time Harry did look contrite.

'I found it in my pocket. Second year I think. To be honest Hermione, I didn't give it that much thought. I already knew Malfoy was a prick. The note didn't tell me anything new. I didn't believe he was dangerous though. Just a smarmy little spoiled bully.'

'I think there was a bit more to him than that Harry. Malfoy tried to tell you. In the bathroom before you..' she stopped, not wanting to say the words. 'You didn't listen when he tried to tell you he was protecting me.'

Harry's face grew red, 'See, there it is again!'

'You're defending a murderer Hermione. Do I need to remind you that it was Malfoy who let the Death Eaters into Hogwarts, that he got the Dark Mark when he was, what, sixteen?'

He let Voldemort live at his house, he fought for him, right up until he turned on him and killed him.

We just saw him kill his own aunt.

You cannot possibly find anything redeeming in Malfoy- The guy was evil.

The best thing that could have happened has happened.

He did the right thing for once and got rid of himself from this world.

He was a cockroach, a stain on the wizarding world.

Simons can find out what happened, check it was nothing criminal and then we can wash our hands of him and just be glad that he was the last Malfoy.

Let the name die and close the history books on that whole sorry family.'

Hermione felt like she was going to scream. Everything Harry was saying about him was true, she couldn't deny he'd done those things.

But, she'd seen another side to him. She couldn't believe that Draco had been evil. He was a product of his environment, forced into a life he hadn't seemed to want.

She needed to see Snape more than ever.

She wondered whether Pansy and Theo would see her again? Pansy might be calmer. She would go in a different capacity, not as a DMLE investigator. She would just try and find out about Draco after he left school.

'I'm sorry Hermione,' Harry said, breaking into her train of thought.

'But we need to go back up. You need to transfer your case notes over.' He sighed, 'I don't want to fight. I'm beyond glad that Malfoy did what he did for you that night, I can't imagine what my life would have been like without you and I dread to think what he saved you from. Please understand, I don't have a choice in this, but to be honest, I think it's for the best anyway. This case is messing with your head.

Give it to Simons and move on. Get back to yourself a bit.'

Hermione said nothing, she just watched Harry siphon out the memory and nodded.

She walked towards the door and waited for him to pass through, before darting back and grabbing the last two memories.

Dropping them into her pocket, she slid back out of the door before it closed.

She tried not to let the glass vials tinkle together as she followed Harry back up the stairs.

She didn't know what had made her do it. But she knew, somehow that she needed to see Draco's memories through to the end. Somehow, she'd find a way back to the Pensieve and watch them.

'It's six o' clock' Harry said as they got back to the office, glancing up at the clock in the wall.

'It's Friday night. Let's call it a day and we can sort the transfer of the case after the weekend.'

He looked at her, worry and contrition in his eyes.

'Dinner at ours tomorrow night? I'll cook.'

Hermione usually loved being with Harry and Ron, but she had things to do, and people to see. She shook her head.

‘Thanks but I’m busy this weekend.’

Harry looked up at her, hopefully. ‘A date?’ He asked.

She chewed her lip as she looked back.

‘Yes, sort of.’

Draco - June 1997

Draco had watched Potter walk away with Granger in his arms and he felt like he could physically feel the last shreds of his soul being peeled away.

He knew he’d never see her again, her long legs in her knee high socks, her bushy hair swishing as she walked. He’d never hear her prim voice as she described a complex spell as though it were obvious.

He’d never be able to catch a glimpse into the deep brown of her eyes, feel the warmth from them pour in through his own cold, grey ones and heat him from within, replacing all the bleak iciness of his life with a comforting glow, if only for that brief second.

He knew that coldness was all he would know now.

Potter would make sure she was gone, out of his life for good. That was for the best.

He walked through the halls of Hogwarts and surveyed the damage and chaos he had allowed into such a hallowed place, and he knew that coldness was all he deserved.

As he walked he mentally drew some scrolls, he wrote every new memory he had of Granger on them and rolled them away, then pushed them back, to the dusty, dark recesses of his mind, along with the other ones, to keep them safe there.

To those he added the knowledge that he hadn’t actually killed Dumbledore, but that he had killed four Death Eaters. He couldn’t let Voldemort see that knowledge, and Voldemort would be looking, he knew.

He pushed that scroll back too, out of sight.

He thought now of his friends, were they alright?

He had seen Nott senior, and Pansy’s father, they were both here so he was sure they would have ensured that Theo and Pansy weren’t caught up in the mayhem. But he didn’t know about Crabbe, Goyle or Blaise.

He wanted to find them all.

As Draco walked, he kept his wits about him, it seems to be calming now, the banging and cracking slowing down, less screaming.

He held his wand out and started ascending, back up the main part of the school. He began to feel the familiar coldness settle over him.

He let it freeze any feelings of sadness or worry in his heart, let it make him hard, like ice. He stopped himself from caring, stopped himself feeling anything except his determination.

He was going to impress Voldemort, get close to him, and kill him.

Draco lost count of the amount of Death Eaters he had stunned, cursed and even killed that night.

He disillusioned himself and went through, getting to them before they could hurt any more students.

He might be the horrible bastard who had let them in, he thought, but he wasn't going to stand by and let them hurt the students for fun.

When, eventually Draco felt his mark start to burn he had positioned himself within a group of Death Eaters, who were in the process of attacking the wards around Dumbledore's office, under the impression that there were Order members within.

He felt the sharp burning pain and felt relief seize his heart.

It was over.

He tested his Occlumency walls, made sure they were in place, then followed the other Death Eaters out, through the main corridor and back towards the forest where they could Apparate back to the manor.

He felt, rather than saw, the eyes of the other students, huddled behind or stood with the teachers as they left. The odd spell still being thrown. He was aware that they were watching him leave with the Death Eaters, that they would all know, soon enough that he was one himself, that he had allowed them into their safe haven, and that Dumbledore was dead, their school in ruins because of him.

He had sealed his fate. All he could do now was run with it, continue with his plan.

He returned to the manor to find Voldemort in a blind rage.

Snape was down in the Dungeon with him, discussing the events of the night as Draco himself also entered, along with Alecto and Amycus Carrow and Corban Yaxley.

'How could this have been allowed to happen?' Voldemort hissed loudly.

'We lost a third of those who went in. Dumbledore is dead, the school was unprepared. How on Earth did we lose so many?'

'The Order were alerted, my Lord,' Snape drawled. Possibly by Minerva McGonagall.'

'I believe that Alastor Moody was killed along with Dumbledore. The Order will be heavily impacted. Draco did well my Lord, he did as you asked.'

Draco didn't even look at Snape. He kept his eyes on Voldemort, kept his expression confident, and hoped that both he and Snape were good enough Occlumens that if Voldemort

questioned it, they would still be alive by the time he was done checking.

Anyone who could have told him that Draco had backed out was dead, he reminded himself.

‘Yes Draco. Well done boy. You did your job well.’ Voldemort said.

‘Very curious though Severus, that neither of you are able to explain how four of my best duellers were killed within an hour of entering a school that had only one or two order members in it and a bunch of quivering children. It seems very strange that neither of you saw what happened.’

‘We were in the astronomy tower,’ Snape said. ‘Crouch had gone to fetch the Mudblood, Lestrage and Fenrir were guarding the entrance to the stairwell and Bellatrix had gone down ahead of us to open the main doors. We should have stuck together.’

‘Clearly!’ Voldemort hissed and Draco felt Nagini fix him under her gaze. He heard the sickening sound of her slithering towards him and tensed as he felt her sliding over his feet. He tried to remain calm, keep his breathing even.

‘And why do I still not have the Mudblood?’

‘She is being protected by the order My Lord.’ Draco said.

‘On account of Potter needing her to help him figure out even the simplest of tasks.’ He added drily.

Snape cut in. ‘She will be difficult to get to at present. We need to wait until the Order has been weakened further and then she will be left vulnerable.’

Voldemort looked furious. ‘She’s more hassle than she’s worth.’ He snapped. ‘That is a matter for another day.’

Draco had to fight not to look at Snape.

‘Draco, you may leave.’ Voldemort said. ‘Go to the training quarters.

You must practise your duelling. We will be sending you in for further skirmishes over the coming days.

And find your useless mother.

I will be moving up to the main portion of the house. I need access to a war room. Your mother will need to be prepared to host.

I will be holding a strategy meeting with my inner circle tomorrow evening.

You will need to attend, as you will be supporting Corban on another Azkaban breakout.’

Draco felt his stomach swoop.

Not again, he couldn’t face the Dementors again.

It had taken him months to stop having nightmares last time.

The images and memories they had dragged up had almost crippled him. At one point he had wanted so very badly to end it all. Moddles had had her work cut out, stopping him from hexing himself and ending his misery. He couldn't do it again.

He actually thought he was going to be sick when another thought struck him. He realised Voldemort was talking about his father. They would be breaking him out.

Lucius would be returning.

Draco swallowed down the vomit that had risen into his throat.

'Yes my Lord.' He said and bowed on his way out.

Draco spent several hours training out in the grounds outside the front of the manor.

He battled against Yaxley, Carrow and Flint senior, all of them going hard on him. Hexing, jinxing and throwing curses at him relentlessly as he danced and spun out of the way. With Bellatrix gone he was their best dueller.

He was sweating and bruised by the time he had finished.

He realised he needed to eat more, to build his strength up. He was muscular, but not heavy enough. He needed the energy.

Draco summoned Moddles and was settling down at the dining table to eat when he heard the doorbell of the manor ring. He tensed as he heard one of the house elves open it and call his name.

He walked towards the door.

Theo and Pansy were standing there.

He couldn't help the smile that rose to his lips.

'What are you guys doing here?' He asked as he led them into the main parlour, he was inordinately glad to see them.

'Is it true Draco?', Pansy asked, the second they were seated on the squashy black velvet sofa.

'Did you really kill Dumbledore?'

Draco didn't answer her. He just looked at her, not able to tell the truth but hating the lie too.

Theo said, 'It doesn't matter now who did what. The war has started. My father said that Voldemort is using the manor as a base for everything. Training, strategising, all of it.'

Draco nodded.

‘Are you ok?’ Theo asked. ‘The other night was pretty intense. We heard you were fighting, that you saw Crouch get killed by Moody.’

‘I’m ok.’ He looked at both of them and realised he needed to find a way to get them to leave. He didn’t want them here, seeing his mother drunkenly falling about, putting themselves into Voldemort's attentions.

‘It’s amazing to see you both,’ he said. ‘Truly, but the manor isn’t going to be safe now. There’s too much going on. You guys need to keep out of it. Go home.’

‘Draco!’ Theo said. ‘We’re already in it. Both of our fathers are Death Eaters.’

‘Yes but you aren’t.’ He argued.

‘If you hang around here he might recruit you too. Believe me, you don’t want that.’

Both Theo and Pansy looked doubtful for a moment, he saw how their eyes flickered to each other.

Then Theo stepped towards him.

‘Draco. You’re my best friend. You always have been. I’m not going to leave you to do this alone. You aren’t alone. You’ve got us.’ At this Pansy nodded, a fierce look on her face.

‘Your parents have never looked after you, Draco, but we aren’t going to let you be alone. We both love you. We’re here for you. No matter what.’

Draco felt a lump rise in his throat. He wanted to turn them away, to shout and scream at them to run, before it was too late for them. But he realised they were right. Their families were just as involved as his.

He looked at his two best friends and he so desperately wanted to accept their love, to not be so alone. He could protect them if needed, if he kept them close. He could train them, he thought. He so desperately wanted to have them around..

Eventually he met their eyes.

‘You really won’t leave?’ He said. ‘Even though I’m telling you you should.’

‘We aren’t leaving.’ Theo said.

Draco allowed himself a smile then.

‘Okay.’ He said. ‘Okay.’

Both Theo and Pansy came to him then. They put their arms around his trembling shoulders and held him tight.

He accepted it and allowed his own arms to snake around them both, letting the warmth of their bodies melt some of the ice he had to keep wrapped around his heart. It felt so incredibly good. Draco felt like his knees could give way with the gratitude he felt. It was so nice not being so alone.

Pansy pulled away first.

‘You need to know, Draco, that Blaise is wavering. He doesn’t feel comfortable with all this. We asked, but he didn’t want to come.’

‘It’s ok.’ Draco said, and it was. He was pleased Blaise had the option of pulling himself out. He would have done the same.

For now, he sat with his two friends and smiled as they bickered with each other about who was the better dueller, who he should train first. He wished he could convince them to keep away from the manor, but he knew them both so well.

They would do what they thought was best, and truthfully, he was so grateful to them both. He needed them.

The next day, Voldemort had moved upstairs.

He took full residence of the manor. Narcissa had the house-elves make him up a room.

Draco could smell the foul stench of him everywhere, it permeated the walls. He felt like he could smell him, even when he wasn’t around, like the smell got stuck up his nose.

Nagini slithered around the vast expanse of the manor, surprising him when he went into the training room or touching his foot as he sat at the long dining table with the other Death Eaters.

Draco realised he was already being included in meetings about strategy and planning.

Voldemort had quickly cottoned onto the fact that Draco was academic, good with spotting potential issues, and coming up with attack plans.

Crucially, Draco knew Potter and knew some of the Order members. He made sure to sit next to Voldemort, to point out things others had missed, to be as useful as possible.

The smell of him up close made Draco constantly feel sick, he was showering five times a day, sure that the residual odour clung to him.

A few weeks after the battle of Hogwarts, the Greengrass sisters began coming to the manor with their father.

Draco had no idea why to begin with, then he noticed Astoria staring at him from across rooms, finding excuses to touch him, brushing against him when she passed him in the hallways.

She was spending time with his mother, hostessing, helping Narcissa to make the manor suitable for guests. The house elves were working on overdrive, bringing drinks and food, cleaning, cooking and restocking the bar.

Draco had been walking down the hallway one evening when Astoria ambushed him, coming from the dining room in the opposite direction.

‘Draco, how are you?’ She asked, her eyes travelling over him in his fighting leathers.

He gave her a reluctant smile. He hadn’t spoken to her since the night in the hallway.

‘I’m well, thanks Astoria, how about you?’

‘I’m very busy. I thought your mother was good at hosting. It seems like I’m the one doing all the party planning.’

‘Party?’

‘Oh yes, Voldemort wants to hold a party here, for all of his supporters. To welcome home the people you’ll be breaking out of Azkaban next week. It will be nice for you to have your father back, I imagine.’

Draco couldn’t really respond to her. He desperately wanted to get away from her.

Suddenly she was crowding him, so close he could feel her breath skate against his cheeks. Draco looked at the ice blue of her eyes and he didn’t like how cold they were, they made him feel colder inside, not warmer.

He could feel her, pressing her breasts up against him, he was pushed up against the wall. Astoria brought her hand down to caress him through the thick material of his trousers and felt himself stir slightly at her touch, his body responding to the contact, even if his mind was running through all the ways she definitely was not Granger.

‘We’d be good together Draco,’ she breathed. ‘Our families are important- pure bloods. If we came together we could be the most influential, wealthy family in the wizarding world.’

She pressed her cool lips to his then, still running her hand up and down the length of him, he was thick and hard now. Unable to make himself stop her.

‘Draco,’ Pansy’s voice was hard as she came out of the dining room. Astoria finally stepped away from him and began walking away, throwing a catty glance in Pansy’s direction as she did.

Pansy glanced down. ‘Really Draco? Astoria Greengrass is a horror. She’s an utter bitch.’ Draco just raised his eyebrows at Pansy and they both laughed, knowing that Astoria paled in comparison to Pansy.

‘It’s not like I’ve got many other options is it.’ He replied, and he missed Pansy’s bitter smile, as he walked into the war room for his meeting.

Hermione - June 2006

Hermione left the office, but she didn’t go home. She knew she wouldn’t be able to rest until she had seen Snape.

She had searched up his address on the DMLE record scroll and was now preparing to apparate to Spinner’s End.

She felt incredibly nervous. She realised that she was still as scared of Snape as she had been in her school days. He had appeared to detest her so much, that she’d be surprised if he didn’t slam the door again at the sight of her face.

When she arrived outside the ramshackle house she stood for a moment, gathering herself. The house was like Snape himself. Ominous, dark, hulking. The spiked metal fencing outside needed painting, the black peeling from the steel.

The garden was overgrown, the house looked thoroughly unloved.

She took a deep breath before walking up the narrow, uneven path and pushing the doorbell. Hermione stood there for so long she had thought he must not be in. She was just about to leave when the door suddenly flew open.

Hermione swallowed as she met the eyes of a man she had dreaded interacting with every day she was at Hogwarts, she had despised him. He was another person who had completely subverted her expectations during the memories. She tried to tell herself now that she knew he had a kind heart underneath.

Snape had aged. His black hair was now streaked with grey. There were lines around his eyes and mouth, he looked tired. The malevolence in his eyes had been replaced by a wary suspicion, that gave way to a look of grim acceptance when he saw that it was her.

‘Miss Granger,’ the familiar unfriendly drawl. ‘What an unexpected visit.’ She had the feeling it wasn’t unexpected at all.

‘Professor Snape. May I please come in?’ She asked, embarrassed by the wobble in her voice.

He said nothing but opened the door and she stepped in to the house. It looked like the house of a hoarder, Hermione thought.

Every available space was filled with various potion ingredients, bottles, decanters and sealed jars. The space not taken up with ingredients was full of books. Hundreds of them. Spell books, history books and potion books. Hermione looked around her in amazement. She thought this was what her house might look like when she got old. Hers would be cleaner though, she thought uncharitably.

‘Have you got a reason for turning up at my door Miss Granger? Other than to gawk at my house?’ His tone was cold. It took her a minute to find her voice, she was still terrified of him, Hermione realised.

‘Umm yes,’ she said eventually. ‘I’ve come about um, well I’ve come about Draco.’ Snape said nothing, just looked down his nose at her. His black eyes glittered with an emotion she could not decipher.

Eventually, he spoke, ‘Of course you have.’

He beckoned her through to another room, equally as full of books, and motioned for her to sit on a saggy leather couch in the center of the room.

She sat down and immediately sank into it so that her knees were up next to her face. She sat back up and perched on the end of it instead. Snape sat opposite her on a single version of the same seat.

He seemed to be waiting for her to speak.

‘I’m sorry for your loss.’ She said eventually. Snape said nothing, just angled his head slightly in thanks.

‘You and Draco, you were close right up to his death?’

‘Is this an interrogation Miss Granger? Are you here for the DMLE, or for yourself?’

‘I’m here for myself.’ She answered quickly.

‘Draco, when he died. He left memories, they were from when he was young, um, also whilst he was at school.’

Snape looked at her knowingly then, a wry smile lifted one corner of his mouth.

‘So you’re finally aware then?’ He asked.

‘Yes.’ She replied.

‘So you know about his feelings for you.’ It was a statement.

‘Um, I have seen.’ She stuttered. It appears in the memories he left, that he maybe liked me a little more than I had originally thought.’

Snape snorted.

‘Liked. The boy was utterly infatuated with you Miss Granger. Some might have said in love. If Draco Malfoy had had any concept of what love was.’

In love. Those words in association with Draco still seemed so impossible.

‘You cared for Draco a lot Professor Snape?’

‘Less of the professor, I’m retired, and yes. Draco came to mean a great deal to me as a young boy. As you may have seen, he had a very troubled life. I felt that he deserved somewhat better than he got, and I tried to make some things easier for him.’

‘I’m sure he appreciated that.’

‘Yes.’ He said no more. Hermione could see the emotion there behind his eyes.

‘Professor Snape, I need to know, do you truly think Draco was the way the news reports portrayed him? Did he kill as many people as they say he did?’

Snape looked at Hermione for a long moment. He sighed deeply.

‘He did. Miss Granger,’

She felt her heart sink.

‘I’m glad that you have managed to see Draco’s memories and to finally understand how different he was from what he chose to show at Hogwarts.’

However, a few memories cannot fully reflect the true scale of the difficulties Mr Malfoy faced in life. Unfortunately, with the hand he was dealt, it would have been very difficult for him not to become a monster, rather than the other way around. He suffered greatly.'

Hermione felt her throat grow thick with tears.

'But he wasn't always a monster. He cared for me, he helped me. He could have let them hurt me, or even hurt me himself.'

'Miss Granger, I found that when Draco Malfoy loved something, yes, he was extremely caring, and also very possessive. He would do anything to protect it. You came under that category. Draco loved you very much and so, he was willing to do whatever it took to protect you.'

She couldn't stop her tears now. They fell from her eyelashes and ran down her cheeks. Snape blanched and began casting his eyes around the room, desperate to look anywhere but at her it seemed.

'Why didn't he ever tell me?' She cried, sobbing, big gulping tears. 'It's too late now, and I can't tell him how I feel, I can't find out what it's like to kiss him properly, I can't touch him. I can't comfort him.' She cried so loudly she thought she should feel embarrassed. But she didn't. It felt so good to talk to someone who didn't hate Draco. Who knew that he wasn't truly evil.

'I just want to change things for him.' She said to Snape. 'To give him another chance. I want to know him!'

Snape looked at her and she could see her words had ruffled him, shocked him.

'You feel that way? About Draco?' Pardon me Miss Granger but I'd always thought his affections particularly misguided. I was under the impression you were less than enamoured with Mr Malfoy at school.'

'That's because I didn't know him!' Hermione practically shouted. 'If I'd known what he was truly like, instead of the awful version of himself he showed to us all, who knows what could have happened? But I didn't get the chance! He took himself away from me, he kept me safe during the battle at Hogwarts, risked everything, then he just gave me to Harry and then never saw me again.'

She saw Snape's eyes widen slightly at the mention of Draco giving her to Harry.

'Did you obliviate Harry, that night?' She asked. Expecting Snape to deny it.

'Of course I did. Only an idiot wouldn't have.' Snape retorted. 'Mr Potter was dealing with members of the Order, and Voldemort. Any Legilimens would have seen Draco hiding you, and known instantly that he was not doing his Death Eater duties. Potter could not be allowed to walk around with that knowledge.'

I told you Miss Granger, I would not have stood for Draco suffering any more than he already was.'

She sat now, her heart heavy and looked around.
'There must be something I can do.' She said eventually.

'What do you mean?'

'I mean about Draco. This can't just be it. He can't just be dead and it all be over. He deserves better, you said so yourself. He needs another chance.'

'Hermione, don't be ridiculous. Unfortunately, Draco found himself in a situation where he chose not to fight any more. Death is death, and it is final'

'It doesn't have to be! We used the time turner to bring Buckbeak back. There must be a way to bring Draco back. To stop him doing what he did. To show him there is more out there!' Hermione was practically shouting, she knew she sounded hysterical.

'There must be a spell, or a potion, something! If anyone would know, it's you. Please professor.'

Snape looked angry now. 'What you are speaking of is dark magic Miss Granger. Altering the past has consequences. Did you not listen during the lessons on Chaos Theory?'

'Chaos Theory?' She repeated.

'It is the concept of chaos. It means that something as small as the flutter of a butterfly's wing, can ultimately cause a typhoon halfway around the world. It explains that any small thing you change, could have a bigger impact in the future.' He moved his hands in a rotating motion, 'You could change something small for one person, and cause a huge impact for another. Every small thing, snowballs, so you can't see it.'

Hermione paused, she understood what Snape was saying, but she thought that any outcome would be better than hanging from your neck, alone, in a dingy pub after living the life that Draco had. If she could change just one or two things about his life, she could stop him ending up there. Stop him from feeling so hopeless.

As she mulled over Snape's words, Hermione realised that crucially, Snape hadn't actually said that such a potion didn't exist.

He hadn't said no, hadn't said that it was impossible.

'Professor, hypothetically, is there a way to do it?' She asked him.

Snape sighed. He looked as exasperated by her as he always had. 'I have read that yes, there is a way that it can be done. A potion. However, the potion requires ingredients whereby, the person intending to use it would be required to make a significant sacrifice. As such, there are very few recorded cases of the potion actually being made, and so very little anecdotal evidence of how well it works, what the consequences are and the side effects of the potion.

Only a person who is desperate would make this potion.

Hermione thought, was she desperate? She felt like she might be. She had never felt anything like the way she had, as she had watched Draco in the memories. She'd never felt so strongly that a person deserved better, deserved a second chance.

She couldn't shake the feeling of having lost something, missed something monumental.

She thought about the risks Draco had taken for her, the sacrifices he had made. She had had a happy life, a safe life, and she had him to thank for it. How could she not try and do the same for him?

'Professor, please. Can you tell me what it is?' He didn't respond for some time. Seemingly battling with himself internally.

Eventually he stood up, he went to his bookshelf and pored through the tomes, his lips moving silently as he read the spines. After a minute, he picked up a book and returned to the sofa with it.

'I think it's this one.' He murmured, beginning to flick through the pages, delicate with age. 'You have access to the Pensieve?' She thought about it, she wasn't sure if she would, now she'd been taken off the case, not officially. But she would find a way if necessary.

She nodded.

Snape looked through the book for a while, then got up and replaced it, selecting a different one which he returned to his seat with. Eventually, she saw him begin running his fingers down the page, reading the words.

'It's here- Aniamia Adamantino.' He read silently for several minutes, his eyes skating over the page, then he shut the book with a snap.

'I'm sorry Miss Granger, but I can't allow you to do this. I'm not comfortable with giving you the tools to do something I believe is dangerous. Draco has already lost his life at an unnaturally young age. I can't advocate for something that could lead to you doing the same.' He stood and put the book back on the shelf.

'Professor please!' Hermione said. 'I can't live with myself if I don't even try.' She stood and went towards him, before she'd even thought about it she had grabbed his hand, he flinched, but didn't pull away.

'I know you loved him' she said, looking deeply into the dark pools of his eyes. 'I saw how much you cared for him. I truly believe I could love him too. He just needs the chance to try again. To be saved from his father. You said to him yourself, that he deserved better. I want to give that to him. Please. I'm begging you.'

Snape sighed then, and looked at her. 'If you are going to do this I want you to think, very carefully Miss Granger, firstly, what are you willing to trade for another chance for Draco? Secondly, I want you to be very careful about what you are meddling with. Anything you change must pertain to Draco only. This potion will allow you to revisit his memories and intervene in them. It will mean that instead of just viewing them, as in an ordinary Pensieve

memory, you can actively participate in it. But you must choose what you say and do extremely carefully. Think about the Chaos Theory. Do no harm.'

She couldn't help it. She flung her arms around him as he reached again for the book.

'I'm not doing this for you, Miss Granger. I'm doing it for Draco. He had the potential to be a wonderful human being. The monster who raised him denied him that opportunity. They call you the brightest witch of our age, if anyone can do this, I would hope it would be you. Draco always said it was your mind that he loved so much. Use it wisely.'

She stood back from him, seeing the colour still high on his cheeks from where she had taken him by surprise with the hug.

'Will you help me to make it?'

'No' he said. 'I've told you. I don't approve of you doing this. I will let you have the book, but I cannot be the one to make this potion with you. To me, the cost is too high. You will have to find someone else.'

Hermione could instantly tell there was no arguing with him. She felt lucky that she had what she did. She thanked him and followed him to the door.

Snape looked at her sadly as she stood on the doorstep.

'Please be careful Miss Granger.'

'I will. Thank you.' Hermione Apparated home, the book under her arm, and she knew that no matter what the cost, she needed to do this. She felt like she had been existing, watching everyone else fall in love, give themselves to someone who meant the world to them.

Maybe, she thought, I can't find anyone because I already have. Maybe my big love is waiting for me, just on the other side.

Hermione dreamed of Draco that night. She had gone to bed, but awoken a short time later. She wasn't in her bed. She sat up and looked around her. Dark mahogany furniture, rough wooden floors, a huge room with tall ceilings, intricate woodwork and dark patterned wallpaper. She was laying in a huge four poster bed.

She recognised the room suddenly, from Draco's memories. She was in his bedroom at the manor.

She turned to her side and looked down. Draco was laying next to her, his beautiful face relaxed in sleep.

His eyes were closed, long lashes splayed over his cheeks, his hair was sticking up in blonde spikes, ruffled from sleep. His lips pouted, his breathing coming in slow, even puffs, she looked downwards, he was bare chested, the Sectumsempra scars snaking up towards his neck, ending at one collar bone and criss-crossing over his ribs and chest.

Hermione could smell the clean, apple scent she had smelled before, a warm vanilla undertone, it was delicious, like coming home.

She didn't want to blink, didn't want to breathe, incase she ended the dream. She just wanted to look at him.

A tear rolled down her cheek.

She wanted this to be real, she wanted him to stay. As she brought a hand up to wipe her face he stirred. His eyes opened and suddenly she was looking into the unnaturally pale silver of his irises, her breath caught in her throat at the beauty of them. His soft lips curled up into a smile when he saw her.

'Hermione,' he said, his voiced cracking from sleep, then he frowned. 'Don't cry, why are you crying?'

She couldn't help it. She cried harder, her tears dripping down onto his chest. He pushed himself up on an elbow and brought a hand up to her face, to wipe away her tears. The feel of it made a jolt of pain lance through her.

She could feel it, it was so real, but she couldn't keep him.

He would be gone when she woke.

She caught hold of his fingers and kissed them. Savouring the feeling of his skin, for however long she could.

'Please don't cry,' he said again softly. She couldn't stop so she didn't reply. She just brought her lips to his and kissed him through her tears. Draco responded instantly. Kissing her back and moving his hand from her face, to wind his fingers through her hair, tangling them in the strands at the base of her neck.

She opened her mouth and his tongue slid along hers making her shiver. She pulled him towards her, moving onto her back so that he was laying in between her legs, he let go of her hair and put his hands either side of her head, kissing her harder now, his breathing increasing in pace.

She sighed underneath him, feeling herself becoming desperate for him again. She pushed her breasts up against his chest, realising that she was topless too. She felt her nipples brush against the soft skin of his chest and she gasped.

She could feel him now, thick and hard, between her legs. She pushed herself towards him and Draco moaned softly into her mouth as she kissed him.

Hermione thought she was going to die of disappointment when she was awoken suddenly by a loud bang. Her eyes flew open in the dark.

She had knocked her water glass off her nightstand. She tried to catch her breath, the shock of the noise combined with the dream making her chest heave.

She cast a Lumos and looked under her bed to retrieve it. As she stretched out her fingers, Hermione could see something, catching the light from her wand.

She reached a little further and her fingers brushed against it, she tried again and eventually she pulled it out- it was a cufflink.

One silver cufflink in the shape of a Clavicula Nox.

The Trade

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the slight delay! I've been away. Next few updates will be much quicker as I've got some time off!

Draco - November 1998

'Malfoy, Voldemort wants you in the war room.' Draco nodded curtly at Flint and headed down the hallway.

The manor was a hive of activity. He could barely remember it as it had been when he was young- echoing and empty.

Now there were people everywhere, all the time.

The manor was still the Death Eater's base after Voldemort had commandeered it almost a year ago, and at the time, with his father not around and his mother a drunken wreck, Draco had just had to accept it.

However, he was determined that it was not going to be for much longer- his plan was moving forward.

Voldemort valued him now. He had been sent on several skirmishes over the past few months, and had done exactly what had been required of him, he had put on his Death Eater mask, and killed the resistance members who had tried to kill them. He had done it with ease, cold and clean.

Draco stood now, at Voldemort's shoulder, his trademark cruel smile pasted in place as Voldemort had used Legilimency on other people who had displeased him, then got Draco to dispose of them. He did so with ruthless efficiency, Voldemort's eyes glittering with pleasure as he watched him.

Draco continued to train, to get stronger, faster, fitter.

He was Voldemort's Rottweiler, his pet, and anyone who had had a problem with it had somehow managed to find themselves mortally wounded during the next skirmish.

The other Death Eaters weren't aware of the full power of Draco's magical ability, but they were aware that he was 'other.' He was polished, intelligent, inscrutable. There was an unspoken rule not to challenge him, he was respected.

Draco could see, from his vantage point, that Voldemort was struggling.

It appeared that Potter had destroyed another Horcrux. Draco had heard that Hermione Granger had helped him, she had been the brains behind the whole discovery. Of course she had, Draco had thought.

Draco thought of Hermione often, she haunted his dreams. He kept tabs on her as best he could, but they were keeping her in a safe house now, he didn't know where. There were wards designed to keep out people exactly like him. Death Eaters, murderers- the enemy.

Snape knew more, but it was too dangerous to speak about in detail. Snape had promised him he'd let him know if she was hurt or worse, so all Draco could do was continue on with the plan, do as was asked of him with the thought that eventually it would be for the greater good.

Voldemort was furious at their inability to get to either Hermione or Potter, the resistance was continuing to grow in size, the Order's intelligence stopping Voldemort from making any headway.

He was losing control, becoming desperate. Draco could see it in his decision making, his lack of forethought. He was sending them into attacks without considering strategy, and losing more fighters every day.

Draco watched him, studied him, he looked for weaknesses, he was very good at finding those in people. He had learned from his father after all.

Draco thought he was beginning to see where Voldemort's were.

Lucius had been released from Azkaban just weeks after Dumbledore's death. He had returned to the manor a shell of his former self, bedraggled and nervous, jumpy, often losing his train of thought. His once sharp mind fuzzy around the edges. It made Lucius dangerous, Draco thought, unpredictable.

The first time his father had walked into the manor, Draco had watched his mother melt into a puddle at his feet.

Nothing had changed.

She had promised Draco she would be better, but since Voldemort's inhabitation of their home she had been slowly coming apart at the seams, drinking more and more, barely held together by the Greengrass sisters who had been told to help her to hostess, to ensure that the manor served its function.

The second Narcissa saw Lucius, she was a sobbing wreck, glad to be under his control again, she immediately went to his side and stayed there.

The day Lucius had been released, Draco had been on his way in from another skirmish, he was wearing his fighting leathers, hot and sweaty, with blood on his hands and in his hair. He had walked into the sitting room and come face to face with the devil.

He watched as Lucius took him in. His eyes travelled over Draco's muscular physique, his broad shoulders, then they moved up to meet Draco's eyes. Draco was almost a head taller

than Lucius now and he looked down his nose at his father, the disdain all his.

‘Draco, my boy.’ Lucius’s voice had cracked. He had looked at him with wonder in his eyes, and it made Draco feel unbalanced. His father had never looked at him that way before.

‘You look well, son.’ Lucius had breathed.

‘The same can’t be said for you Father.’

His father’s wheezing laugh had burst from him like a gun, the sudden noise emanating from Lucius had made Draco jump, he had been so tightly coiled.

‘You’re succeeding, aren’t you?’ Lucius had said, his eyes shining, ‘I prepared you well, I gave you everything you needed.’ His lips stretched wide, a brown toothed, hideous facsimile of a smile, ‘I’m so proud of you Draco.’

Draco had bitten down hard on his tongue, tasting blood. He had looked at the man he absolutely loathed, who had caused him so much pain and suffering, and he hated the way that he still wanted his approval.

Draco couldn’t escape it, no matter how old he got, no matter how powerful he became, Lucius still had a hold over him. He was still that seven year old boy, crumpled on the wooden floor, desperately trying to find a way to make his father proud.

Over time Lucius’s mental state improved, but he was out of favour with Voldemort, replaced by his son.

Draco was aware he needed to be careful, his father might be a coward, only happy to attack those he perceived as weaker, but he was devious too. Draco didn’t believe the new snivelling, deferential version of Lucius for a second. He would need to watch his back.

Draco walked in now to the meeting room, Voldemort was gloating, addressing the room with a renewed vigour.

They had found the safe house.

‘Nott, you will accompany Draco, along with Pucey, Flint and Dolohov.’ Voldemort was saying, in his thin reedy voice. ‘I’ll give you some other lower ranked fighters too as back up.’

Draco could feel Theo’s eyes on him as they both nodded, he willed him to look away, not meeting his gaze.

‘I know you will return with my prize Draco,’ Voldemort said.

‘We are still unable to confirm Potter’s whereabouts but we have been told the girl is being moved to Grimmauld Place, the old Black family home. Bring her to me, Draco and she can be yours first.

You will be rewarded with breaking her in, turning her to us, through any means possible. You can have your way with her, let her know she’s not with the Order any more.’

‘Make sure you tell us all what that tight little Gryffindor pussy is like, Malfoy, while we all wait for our turn,’ shouted Pucey, and the Death Eaters around him laughed.

Draco saw Theo swallow hard, he felt his own vision white out, but forced himself to keep a smirk on his face.

‘There won’t be anything left of her by the time I’m finished,’ Draco said, a cocky smile on his face, there was further laughter.

‘You leave tonight,’ Voldemort said. ‘Ensure you are ready.’

Draco held himself together until he left the war room, and barely managed to Apparate to his own bedroom before the panic took over him yet again.

Snape had said she was safe, she was prioritised by the Order. How could this be allowed to happen?

Theo arrived minutes later, appearing at his side with a crack. He said nothing, just rested a hand on Draco’s back as he struggled to catch his breath, his chest heaving. Pansy also appeared and sat with him then, guiding him through the panic attack with a calming, reassuring voice.

‘You’re ok, you’re ok,’ she repeated. Theo’s eyes were large, as Draco was finally able to look up to meet his. ‘Draco-’ Theo began. But Draco just shook his head. No- too dangerous, Their occlusion wasn’t good enough, it was putting them at risk.

Theo swallowed again and nodded. They stayed with him until his heart stopped feeling like it was stuttering from his chest, and his breathing had eased, then they left Draco whilst he prepared himself, Pansy throwing him one last worried look as she headed out of the door.

Draco sat on his bed, back straight, hands on his thighs and occluded, planned and schemed. He stood suddenly and looked at his watch. He had time to make a quick visit.

He Apparated quickly away, reappearing at Spinners End.

Snape ushered him in, glancing around with a furious expression on his face.

‘Draco, this is too risky, you can’t come here.’

Draco walked down the cramped hallway, running an agitated hand through his hair.

‘Do you know? Where they are sending me tonight?’

‘I do,’

‘You said she’d be safe, after you Obliviated Potter, you said you’d make sure. You promised me.’

‘This was unprecedented, Dolohov just so happened to have business with Mundungus Fletcher who let information on the safe house slip. Dolohov took him to the manor and Voldemort tortured the information out of him. Nothing on Potter but he sang like a canary about them bringing Granger from Hogwarts where she’s been the last few weeks.’

‘Fuck. There’s no way to get out of this, is there?’

‘Can you speak to your contact?’

Draco thought about it, could he risk that? Risk his own cover by speaking to them and letting them know what was happening? He thought he might be able to get them a message. He looked down at his watch.

It was worth a try.

An hour later, Draco was back at the manor. He was in his fighting leathers, his wand in his holster, his breathing even, his face relaxed. He laughed and joked with the others, widening his eyes meaningfully at Theo until he did too. Theo needed to get a better game face, he thought.

They were flying, disillusioned on broomsticks, the quietest method of moving, so that their arrival outside Grimmauld place timed perfectly with Hermione’s planned move.

Draco took his Death Eater mask from Pucey’s outstretched hand and fit it over his head, hearing the volume of his breathing increase as it rattled out from behind the mask.

Then it was time to go.

They left, rising up and out from the manor grounds, flying quickly across the night sky. Draco’s mind raced as he flew, his thighs clenched tight around his broom, knuckles white. Could he pull this off? Would he die trying?

As they approached the airspace around Grimmauld, they stopped talking. Draco sent a spell into the sky to briefly illuminate the wards, and show how far they extended, to ensure they stayed above them.

‘Spread out,’ he commanded.

They waited, silently suspended above where they had been told the house was. Time ticked on, moving well past nine o'clock when they had been told that the order was due to bring her.

Draco could feel the nerves bleeding in through his Occlumency walls, maybe his message had gotten through, they weren’t going to bring her.

They all waited, silent and on edge, Pucey flying back and forth slightly higher above their heads.

Draco barely felt the change in the air before a volley of spells suddenly shot their way. He whipped his head around and saw a group of resistance fighters all also on brooms, appear from above them in the sky, flying down from behind the clouds.

Draco immediately saw Hermione Granger in the middle of them, her hair wild, face terrified but determined as she shot Revelio’s and defensive spells towards them. He thought she looked even more beautiful than he remembered.

She was flanked on either side by Order members, Draco recognised Remus Lupin and Charlie Weasley.

The Death Eaters around him bled into view as the spells hit.

Flint fell, spiralling towards the ground.

Theo and Dolohov shot spells back, the resistance members taking hits as they tried to get Hermione to safety, below the wards.

The other Death Eaters spread out, sending curses flying.

Draco saw Pucey dive towards Hermione, shooting spells at Lupin and Weasley either side of her, Draco watched Lupin, firing his own spells back, but one of Pucey's hit, and he saw Lupin fall first, Weasley shortly after, and then suddenly Granger was unprotected, Pucey barrelling towards her.

Draco dove down, to where they were, shooting out his open palm as he did, and Pucey toppled dead from his broom.

Draco pulled his own broom up to stop inches from Hermione, his eyes behind his mask meeting her own terrified ones, her hair blowing, flying into her face and towards him as their eyes locked, for only a second.

Draco didn't have time to react as another curse flew towards them and Lupin appeared back from below. He could only briefly register Theo, diving down from where he'd been fighting the resistance members above them, and shooting a curse back, as the spell connected with Draco's chest and he fell from his broom, tumbling down through the night sky.

The last thing he saw as he fell was Theo, locked in battle with Lupin and another resistance fighter, and Hermione being pulled by Weasley, down and under the wards to safety.

When Draco awoke, back at the manor several hours later, he felt the stab of fear before he felt the stab of pain.

He'd been hit, he hadn't managed to kill any of the other Death Eaters who had seen him stop Pucey.

He tried to sit up. Where was he? Where was Theo?

His whole body vibrated with the pain emanating from the center of his chest and his head swam as he struggled to stay conscious. He forced his eyes open and carefully looked around him, his fear increasing.

Theo was on the ground, he was screaming in agony as Voldemort Crucioed him. Other Death Eaters stood around, five or more of them. His father lurked in one corner, his eyes fixed on Voldemort, not even flicking towards Draco as he lay on the ground.

'Who told them we were coming?' Voldemort screamed. 'How did she get away again?'

Theo couldn't answer. His blue eyes were wide open, bloodshot and glassy as they stared, his neck bent backwards at a terrible angle, his limbs contracted and clawed as he shook with the force of the curse wracking his body.

The low moan that escaped his throat was one of pure agony. Draco was glad Pansy wasn't here to see it.

He felt panic begin to rise in him as he watched Theo writhe in pain, what had Voldemort already done to him? What might he have already seen in his mind?

'My Lord, Malfoy's awake,' Thorfinn Rowle's voice came from somewhere next to him.

Voldemort immediately dropped the curse on Theo and turned his attentions to Draco, where he lay, prone, on the ground.

'Ah Draco. My boy is awake. I'm sure you can tell me more,' Voldemort said, and before Draco could even think to bring his walls up, Voldemort had slammed into his mind.

He couldn't stop him, couldn't hide her in time.

Voldemort watched him fly down towards her and kill Pucey, he watched him meet her eyes, stop centimeters from her and do nothing.

He knew.

It was over quickly, Voldemort had seen what he needed to see. Draco collapsed with relief, his head splitting with the soul crushing agony of legilimency. He blinked against the pain, trying to get his senses back.

'Bring him to me,'

Draco felt himself being lifted from the ground, as the Death Eaters dragged him across the floor towards Voldemort, Draco could smell him now, it made his panic increase.

He needed to act, to do something, but the curse he had taken, along with the agony of the legilimency was making him sluggish, his old shoulder injury causing him to grit his teeth against the pain as they dragged him.

He was suddenly dropped at Voldemort's feet. His eyes level with the rotting hem of his dusty, black robes.

He looked up at the foul form of a man, as he rose from his chair and aimed his wand between Draco's eyes, he thought he looked almost regretful.

In the moment he saw Voldemort's mouth open to say the curse, Draco used his last ounce of strength and jumped to his feet, he shot his hands out and jerked them forcefully, immediately felling the Death Eaters who came towards him, their bodies thudding to the ground.

He heard Theo mutter his own weak curses and the other two fell. Draco whirled out of the way as Voldemort screamed the killing curse and shot a bolt of green light towards him, he shot one back of his own, Voldemort laughing as he did.

‘You should know better my boy,’ he hissed, ‘you can’t kill me, I’ve still got my failsafe.’

Theo had fallen back to the ground, his wand feebly pointed at Voldemort also. Draco’s heart pounded. He would have to try and do it now, bring the plan forward.

‘You stupid, stupid boys’ Voldemort laughed cruelly, his mouth opened to reveal the rotten stumps of his teeth.

Draco became aware then of a slithering sound behind him, he watched as Nagini began wrapping around Theo as he lay there, coiling around his ankles, then up towards his thighs. He could hear the bones in Theo’s legs begin crunching together. Theo screamed loudly, his voice ripping from his throat, a hoarse sound, only punctuated by brief pauses as Theo fought not to pass out.

‘You can’t kill me Draco,’ Voldemort said his voice soft and terrifying, ‘You’ve failed at something else. You’ve always been a failure, to your father, and now, to me also,’ he raised his wand towards Draco again, his clawed fingers curling around his wand.

In desperation, Draco held his own wand up, tensed and ready to fight.

He waited until Voldemort let the curse leave his lips before wheeling again once more, out of the spell range, and sending his own curse, but not at Voldemort, he sent it at Nagini, connecting with the smooth scales, his curse cutting her head off in one clean slice.

Her body suddenly went limp, blood spurting from the severed head and detached body. It coated the floor in seconds, spreading in a crimson lake across the ground. Theo began trying to crawl away.

Voldemort watched in horror and the realisation dawned on his face. He began screaming, roaring with fury, even as he fell to the ground, his spindly legs unable to hold him up. Draco knew then that his suspicions had been right, Nagini was the final Horcrux.

Voldemort collapsed, his scream fading in volume and intensity, the true weakness of his human form apparent now without Nagini’s strength.

He was a whimpering huddle on the ground, his robes pooling around him, his wand shaking as he pointed it at Draco.

Draco stood over him, the only sound now was Theo’s laboured breathing as he dragged himself to the door, and Voldemort’s desperately feeble cries.

Draco stepped forward, and he couldn’t help a smile crossing his face. He raised his wand to cast the final curse, not hearing or seeing his father until he stepped into the space behind him.

Draco whirled around, stepping back when he saw Lucius’s wand pointed at his heart.

He should have known.

He'd gotten this close, and the person to end it all for him was going to be his father, he almost laughed with the inevitability of it.

Draco met Lucius's eyes, and in that second he made his decision, he suddenly jerked his wand arm, a flash of light flew out.

Draco heard the words leave his mouth, watched his spell connect, just as another flash of light left his father's wand.

But it wasn't aimed at him, Lucius's spell hit Voldemort just as his did, the same words uttered- 'Avada Kedavra'.

Voldemort was pushed backwards by the force of the two spells. The shock and surprise on his face lasted only a moment, his eyes widened as he took in the two Malfoys, his most loyal servants, both turned traitor.

Voldemort jerked once and was dead.

It was done.

Draco stood for a moment, his chest heaving, the enormity of what he had done not quite able to take form in his mind as he looked down at Voldemort, He felt his father step towards him.

The Malfoys faced each other now, Father and son.

Draco looked at his father and realised that he saw fear in his eyes. Lucius knew he couldn't beat Draco one on one. He had trained his perfect boy soldier and now he had his wish. With Voldemort dead, Draco was now the most powerful wizard alive.

'Remember I was merciful, at the end,' Lucius said desperately. 'I helped you, Draco, that was all I ever tried to do.' Draco swayed on his feet, he raised his wand, pointed it at Lucius.

He could end it, the years of suffering he had endured at the hands of the man before him. He could end it now, pay him back, finally.

Draco never understood why he lowered his wand, why he allowed his father to walk away.

He let Lucius live while all the others who dared challenge him were dead before they even hit the ground. They had all come running into the room, after feeling their Dark Marks burn hot, then fizzle away. The magic in them dying with their master.

They had taken one look at what Draco had done and then half had left, immediately Apparating away. Those that attempted to come for Draco barely even made it a step.

He didn't know why he let his parents leave, to flee to France, leaving Draco to become the new Lord of the manor.

After everything Lucius had put him through, the pain both physical and mental he had suffered at the hands of someone who was supposed to love and care for him, Draco should have been vengeful, but for a time he had made peace with it, he was going to get to live, knowing Granger was safe, Voldemort was gone and his parents were far away.

Draco was hailed as bringing about the end of the war.

His Death Eater status was ignored, he had been forced into it, they finally said.

For a time people believed that he was redeemable, that underneath it all he was a good person. Draco tried to believe it himself, but he knew, that snaking under his skin the dragon still remained, dormant for now, but curled, waiting to be needed again. Someone as damaged as Draco would never find peace.

It was too much to ask.

Hermione - June 2006

Hermione awoke the next morning and discovered that she had been bleeding from her nose during the night.

The blood soaked her pillow and she could feel it crusted across her face. She looked down at the large rust coloured stain, stark against the white cotton.

It seemed to be a much larger amount than previously. She felt shaky, her arms and legs stiff again, and knew she'd had another seizure.

She thought back to the note from St Mungo's, she knew she should contact them and find out what they wanted to speak to her about. But she couldn't, she had more important things to worry about.

Her fingers shook as she opened them, the cufflink had left a dent in her palm where she had clutched it as she had finally fallen asleep again last night, the silver metal grasped tightly in her hand.

The cufflink was the shape of a trident, a circle through the middle- the Clavicula Nox.

Hermione had seen it before, in a book she had read about Dragon mythology.

The name translated to 'Key of the Night' and was used to describe the transformation of the unconscious into lucid consciousness.

She stared at it, willing it to give her answers.

It had belonged to Draco Malfoy.

He was wearing the other one the night he died.

She remembered noticing it as she had moved around his body at the Hogs Head, pinning the sleeve of his black shirt together over his wrist, his Dark Mark just visible.

How on earth was this one under her bed?

She tried to remember what she had been doing the night Draco had taken his life, anything before that night seemed so long ago, hazy.

She had been with Blaise and Ginny, she thought, they'd had dinner, and then Blaise had walked her home, nothing out of the ordinary had happened before the next fateful day, when Harry asked her to go out to the Hogs Head.

Hermione thought back to her dream. The all consuming love she had felt for Draco in that moment scared her, it hadn't left her now she was awake. He crowded her thoughts, filled her mind. She felt like she could smell him, feel him, sense him.

She sat up and tried to clear her head, Hermione had a busy day planned. She wasn't going into the office. She would tell Harry she was sick. She couldn't face him after yesterday.

She was heartsick about her removal from Draco's case, upset about Harry's one track view of the situation and she knew he still wasn't being totally honest with her.

Harry pretended that he had no idea about Draco trying to help her, but she'd seen Draco trying to tell him in the memory of the bathroom fight. She had watched Draco say the words 'I'm trying to protect her,' and Harry had cursed him anyway.

She felt like Harry was so blinded by his longtime hatred of Draco, that he couldn't see past it. He'd never understand the way she felt now.

The most important thing she needed to do was to research the potion.

Hermione had taken a look at the ingredient list and had realised how potent it was, some of the ingredients were going to be hard to find.

There was a part of the spell that was in latin, she wasn't sure what it meant so she wanted to go to the library and research it.

Snape had seemed so dead against her using the potion that it had worried her slightly. But he had given her the book, so surely he must understand her reasons, she thought.

She had realised, unconsciously, that she couldn't live with the 'what if's' any more, the cufflink was the final straw. She needed answers.

She truly believed that Draco deserved another chance. He had to know love, the way she felt sure she could love him.

No one had ever cared for her the way Draco seemed to. Hermione desperately wanted to know what it felt like, to be valued, to be fiercely protected the way Snape had described, she didn't care what he'd done. The longing in her was a physical pain. She would do anything, she realised.

Anything.

She opened her bedside drawer and looked down again at the cufflink enclosed in her fist. She brought it to her lips and kissed it, before she pushed it to the back of her drawer, along with the two vials she had taken from the memory room.

Hermione forced herself out of bed and went to the bathroom.

She looked into the mirror and stared at herself in shock. She realised that Harry was right. She did not look good.

Aside from the fact that there were two matching dried rivulets of blood flaking over her cheeks from her nose, her face was thin, gaunt with hollows in her cheeks, the circles under her eyes almost looked purple.

She tried to remember the last time she'd eaten anything and struggled to think of anything past the odd pastry at work.

Hermione realised that she hadn't been hungry for so long. She was getting used to the constant shaky feeling she had, the headaches. When had they become part of every day life?

She couldn't remember.

She had been so distracted by the thoughts of Draco that she hadn't noticed what was happening to her. She washed her face and scrubbed the blood off, then she got out her wand and glamourised herself. She added some colour to her cheeks, hid the dark circles and smoothed her hair.

She picked up the book that Snape had given her and put it in her bag, along with her case notes. She had updated them when she got back last night, filling in all the details of what she'd seen in the most recent memories, and her interaction with Snape.

She was just about to leave when she heard a hard knock at her door. She opened it to find a very agitated Blaise, pacing outside.

'Granger, what the fuck?' He said, striding in.

'How can Potter let them do this?' He looked stressed, his face was pinched.

Blaise had always been someone she could rely on to find the positive in any situation, he was her light relief, he smiled easily and laughed with heart. To see him so upset set Hermione on edge.

He stopped then and looked at her, and she saw his face become even more distressed.

He walked towards her, 'Hermione,' he reached out and took her wrist in his large hand, 'Merlin, you look..' his eyes grew large as he ran them over her from head to toe.

He took out his wand and silently removed her glamours. She stood in front of him and felt like crying as she saw him take her in.

He sat heavily down on the sofa.

'Why haven't you told me how much you've been struggling?' He said.

'Blaise, I'm fine. I'm just busy, that's all. The case has taken up a lot of my time.'

'No Hermione, it's more than that.' He said.

He put his head in his hands 'Fuck, It's taking too long.' He breathed, so she could barely hear.

‘What’s taking too long?’ She went to him then, disquieted by his emotions.

‘Blaise, what’s going on? Please talk to me. You haven’t been right since the day Malfoy’s body was found. You aren’t yourself, just tell me. We’ve been partners for a long time, we’ve always told each other everything.’

Blaise rubbed a hand over his face, he closed his eyes and looked up to the ceiling.

‘I can’t Hermione. I just need you to know,’ he put his hands on her shoulders now, his warm brown eyes looking deeply into hers, ‘I need you to know that I love you very much, you deserve the world. I’m doing my best Hermione, I promise you.’

She furrowed her eyebrows, tried to see what emotion it was that filled Blaise’s eyes with an angry, worried desperation.

‘I know, Blaise. I love you too, you’re my best friend, but why? what-‘

She didn’t get to finish her sentence as he stood suddenly then.

‘I’ve got to go.’ He said, heading towards the door.
‘Will you try and see Ginny today? She misses you.’

‘Blaise!’ She half shouted. ‘You can’t just leave. I know I’ve been taken up by this case, maybe not looking after myself as well as I should, but so have you. You say you weren’t close to Draco, but his death has ruined you.’

Blaise’s breath seemed to leave him in one exhale, he rubbed a hand over his face and then indicated to her.

‘It’s ruined you too Hermione, it’s not just me.’ he looked tired.

‘The memories, they’ve shown me that he wasn’t who I thought he was,’ she said, shrugging her shoulders.

‘No,’ Blaise said. ‘He wasn’t, Draco, he-‘ he stopped himself again. Blaise looked at her once more, blanching again as he let his eyes travel over her.

‘I will be back later, with food.’ And then he left. Slamming the door behind him.

Hermione sat back down on the couch. She felt drained by the emotion of their encounter, and even more confused.

Why was everything so hard to understand? She felt like her brain wasn’t working properly, like Draco had been dropped into her mind and had completely consumed her with his memories, undoing everything she had always thought she had known.

No one was who she had thought they were.

Hermione sat for another ten minutes, breathing deeply, gathering her strength. She knew she needed to eat.

She went to the kitchen and picked up a green apple. She brought it to her nose, breathing in the scent of it. It made her stomach flip.

She bit into it, feeling the juice run down her throat, the taste of it flooded her senses, she closed her eyes for a moment, then swallowed it down and went to get ready to leave.

The first place she needed to go was Hogwarts. She couldn't Apparate in, but she could Floo due to her Auror status.

She hoped Ron wasn't teaching, she didn't want to have to go looking for him.

She reglamoured herself then Floo'd straight into his office.
Ron was behind his desk. He looked up in surprise when she arrived.

'Mione! What are you doing here?' He stood up, a wide smile on his face. Hermione instantly knew Harry hadn't told him about what was going on at work. Every emotion Ron had was always clear on his face, and he was open and easy as he came towards her for a hug.

'Bloody hell Mione, eat a sandwich will you!' He said, squeezing her shoulder blade. She shrugged him off and poked him gently in the side.

Hermione looked around Ron's cosy office. It was very reminiscent of The Burrow. Cluttered, higgledy piggledy but homely.

There were countless pictures on the walls, of him, her and Harry, of Ron's family, a beautiful one of Ron and Harry hugging at Harry's 21st birthday party, Ron's blue eyes sparkling towards the camera as Harry planted a kiss on his cheek.

There were pictures of them at school, Ron and Harry grinning in their Quidditch kits, she caught sight of Draco glowering in the background in his own green Quidditch kit.

She thought about what he'd been going through at the time, he still managed to be thoroughly determined to best the Gryffindor's at Quidditch.
She smiled a little at his grumpy face.

There was a picture of the three of them sat at a table in the library, her face serious, Ron's and Harry's full of mischief. She let her finger trail over the photo, wishing life was still that simple.

'Was this just a social visit?' Ron asked, watching her.

'Of course I wanted to say hi,' she replied, but I'm here to use the library if that's ok?'

'Of course' Ron replied. 'Is it for work?'

She swallowed, 'yes, just for one of my cases.'

'The Malfoy case?'

Hermione cleared her throat.

‘No actually, it’s a different one,’ she didn’t bother telling him she wasn’t on the case any more, if Harry hadn’t told him there was a reason, and she didn’t want him asking any questions and stopping her from using the library.

‘No worries at all. Just drop in on Minerva on your way. Let her know you’re here. I’ve got a class now, but can we grab a coffee or something after?’

‘Yes sure.’ She gave him a hug and moved to leave, Ron bent over his desk, gathering notes for his next class.

If there was one thing to be grateful for with Ron, Hermione thought, it was that he never looked too deeply into things. He took everything at face value, and that’s what she needed right now. He hadn’t questioned her being there, hadn’t pried about the case, Ron was trusting, happy to be oblivious, the complete opposite of Harry.

Hermione thought that it was due to their upbringing, Harry had been much like Draco, with no stable home, no loving parents, he’d never been able to trust people. Maybe that had been why they butted heads so much.

She headed down the hallway, looking around her as she walked, remembering how Hogwarts had looked before the Death Eaters had come. Repairs had been made but there were still signs of what had happened.

The astronomy tower had needed to be rebuilt after it had half collapsed, she now knew how that had happened. It was rarely used now that Dumbledore was dead.

There had been holes in walls, fire damage, many rooms had been destroyed. They had gone back for their eighth year, after over a year of war and fighting. Repairs had been made to the school, and they had all tried to focus on their education, but it wasn’t the same.

McGonagall was a wonderful headmistress, but she wasn’t Dumbledore. Snape had remained at the school as potions teacher until his early retirement just after Voldemort’s death.

Hermione thought about Snape, he had played both sides so successfully, staying in Voldemort’s good graces whilst feeding them critical information.

She’d had no idea how much he had cared for Draco. She had just thought that he kept the Malfoy’s on side as part of his Order work.

He had always been so unfriendly, bordering on spiteful to all of them in school, particularly Harry.

But he had been there for Draco, with promises of help, kind words and concern.

She wondered if Snape would have killed Dumbledore if he’d had to, to protect Draco. Dumbledore had already been dying by the time Bellatrix got to him, after the curse from the Horcrux. Snape had told them that Dumbledore knew his death was imminent, had known they’d send Draco after him.

Although she had known that Snape was a double agent, it had been shocking to see him at Voldemort's side in the memories, she wondered what else he had done during that time.

She headed towards McGonagall's office and knocked on the door.

Professor McGonagall opened the door a moment later, smiling when she saw it was Hermione, her smile faltering slightly as she ran her eyes over her.

'Hermione dear, please come in, how are you?' She asked.

'I'm fine, thank you Professor. How are you?' Hermione asked.

'I'm well. Are you here on Auror business dear?'

'I am. I'm researching for a case. I was hoping to use the library, if that's ok?'

'Of course dear, you know you're welcome any time. Will you need access to the restricted section?'

'Yes please, I think I will.'

'I'll let them know.' McGonagall's blue eyes were concerned.

'Make sure you aren't working too hard dear. I know that you like to do a good job, but you've got to get enough rest Hermione.'

She smiled and nodded.

'Thanks professor, I'm fine.'

'Hermione, I've told you this, you don't have to call me professor any more. I haven't been your teacher in years.'

'Of course, thank you prof- Minerva.'

They chatted for a moment longer and then Hermione felt she'd done the polite thing and excused herself to the library.

She loved the smell of Hogwarts library, the aroma of parchment, ink and leather, it was cool and quiet. There were only a few students in there, some at the shelves and others with their heads buried in books. Hermione felt a pang of nostalgia.

She headed to the back, and the wards allowed her to pass through to the restricted section immediately. McGonagall must have already got the message to the librarians.

She took Snape's book out of her bag, opened it to the right page and read the ingredient list of the potion again.

She got to work.

Two hours later Hermione sat at the table, her head was pounding.

Snape was right, there was very little anecdotal evidence on the potion, it appeared that either very few people had made it, or very few of them had written about it after they had used it. She wondered how many of them had had success.

The potion would make enough for several doses, it required borage, flitterby, hellebore and lavender which Hermione could get easily enough, but it also needed dragon blood which was harder to find.

There was a final ingredient that Hermione couldn't figure out. None of the books had helped her. She didn't understand the language it was written in, it wasn't Latin, but it was close. She wanted to go back and ask Snape but she doubted he would tell her.

She thought back to a case she had had earlier in the year. A witch named Casalia Brown had been making potions and selling them illegally. They were complex potions and used dark magic.

They had allowed the drinker to enter into the mind of another person and influence their decisions. It was similar to the Imperius Curse but required no skill, and was a way around the alert that the Aurors got if someone cast an Imperius. The potions had caused significant damage to the people who had their minds invaded, and had also caused mayhem when suddenly, people high up in the Ministry started passing random laws, witches and wizards left their families for people they barely knew, prisoners were randomly let out of Azkaban.

In one instance, a wizard turned on his friend and killed him, taking all of his galleons and hiding them somewhere, where they were then collected by a career criminal who promptly disappeared.

The wizard had been devastated in the brief moment he was aware of what he'd done to his best friend before he lost his mind completely.

Hermione and Blaise had known it was Casalia who had made the potions, but they couldn't prove it. Hermione had made plenty of visits to Casalia's house. She thought that if anyone would know what the missing ingredient was and where to find it, it would be her.

She left the library, making her excuses to Ron about needing to get back to work and took the Floo from Ron's office to Knockturn Alley.

She unholstered her wand and hid it up her sleeve, then made her way down the grimy side streets, keeping her wits about her. She wasn't welcome in this part of Wizarding London, having been responsible for plenty of its residents now being incarcerated at Azkaban.

She turned left at the end of the alley and made her way down the narrow road where Casalia lived. The houses on this street were dilapidated, with dirty windows and a general air of neglect.

Casalia's house was slightly nicer than those either side of it but Hermione still remembered the oppressive atmosphere of the house the last time she'd been there, and she wasn't looking forward to the reception she knew she'd get from Casalia, she was a dangerous young witch.

Hermione knocked the door and waited a moment, hearing movement within. A few minutes later Casalia opened the door a crack and peered out, suspicion in her bright blue eyes.

They widened as she saw Hermione standing there and the heavy wooden door was immediately slammed shut.

Hermione knocked again, harder.

‘Casalia, I’m not here for work, I need to ask you something, open the door please?’ There was no response, she tried again, and then lost her patience, blasting the door open with a powerful ‘Alohamora.’

Hermione kept her wand raised, and she was right to, the second the door opened, Casalia sent a hex her way, before dashing towards the back door. Hermione deflected the spell and sent a body bind at Casalia, stopping her in her tracks and knocking her to the ground.

Casalia fought against the binds, but had no way to free herself as Hermione stepped inside the house and shut the door with a locking charm to stop any prying eyes from the street. She approached Casalia cautiously.

‘Fuck you Granger,’ she spat, struggling against the binds. ‘I’ve done nothing, you’ve got no right to force your way in here.’ Hermione crouched now next to the furious witch. Casalia’s long red hair was splayed out over the floor, her blue eyes flashed with anger and her freckled face was red from the exertion of her struggles.

‘Casalia, I told you. I’m not here for work. I need something from you,’ Hermione said.

Casalia laughed bitterly, ‘You really expect me to believe you? You’re a lying bitch Granger.’

‘I swear, I don’t care what you’ve been doing here. I need your help with something, and I’m willing to pay you.’ Hermione said, becoming steadily aware of the scent of dark magic on the air, her nostrils burning. Casalia was still clearly in the potion business.

‘You’ll pay me?’ Her voice was scornful, the doubt obvious.

‘Yes. I really need your help.’

Casalia eventually ceased struggling and looked Hermione in the eye. She let her eyes roam over her for a moment, before a sly smile spread over her face. ‘You’re in trouble,’ she said.

Hermione shook her head. ‘Not as such, but I have a problem, I need help with a potion.’ She paused for a moment, ‘it involves dark magic.’

Casalia’s eyes widened with interest then. She smiled even wider.

‘Oh, this is brilliant. The perfect golden girl Hermione Granger, Auror and war heroine wants my help with dark magic.’ She laughed disbelievingly.

‘Please,’ Hermione said. ‘I’ve said I’ll pay you for it, I’ll make it worth your while. ‘What do you want? Tell me and if I can do it I will.’

Casalia stopped laughing and the suspicion returned to her face. 'Ok Auror Granger, 'Let me free and let's talk.'

Hermione released Casalia from the binds but kept her wand trained on her.

Casalia was wild, but not stupid. She knew Hermione was a highly trained Auror. Her magic was powerful and Hermione was skilled with a wand.

She backed away, her hands up and motioned Hermione to sit on one of the rickety chairs at her kitchen table.

'What's the potion Granger?' She asked.

Hermione took the book from her bag, she saw Casalia's eyes widen as she looked at it. She flipped to the page and allowed Casalia to read the spell and ingredient list.

Her large eyes grew steadily wider as she read.

'Fuck me Granger,' she said. 'You sure you want to do this? This could really fuck things up for you. You know that you'll mess with your own life as well as the person whose memories you're changing?'

Hermione nodded. 'I need to do this. It could save someone's life. In fact it could save lots of people.'

'It must be someone you really care about?' Casalia said. Her hair fell over her eyes as she read and she blew it back.

Hermione nodded. 'Do you know what this last ingredient is?' Hermione asked.

'I do.'

'Would you know where I could find it?'

Casalia looked at Hermione then. She seemed to see how desperate Hermione was, how dead set she was on making the potion.

'Granger, I can make this for you. But it's risky. The spell is complex. I'll need to do a few... unsavoury things to get all the ingredients. If you want my help I'll give it, but the cost is going to be high.'

'If I've got it to give, I'll give it.'

Casalia sat for a moment, seeming to weigh up her options, looking at Hermione, letting her eyes drift over Hermione's gaunt face, her desperate, dark ringed eyes.

'Fuck, who are you doing this for?' Casalia said, 'They must be someone fucking special.'

Hermione looked into the pretty young witch's face. 'They were.' She said. Understanding dawned in Casalia's eyes. She nodded.

‘There is something I want.’ She said eventually.

‘Anything,’

‘In exchange for the potion, fully made and ready to go.’

‘What is it?’

Casalia seemed to be battling internally with herself, almost unsure, before her innate need for Self preservation won out.

‘There’s a certain type of stone.’ She told Hermione. It’s extremely rare, and extremely valuable.’

Hermione was confused. ‘I don’t have anything like that.’

‘You don’t have to have it, I can make it. But you will need to give me something of yours.’

Casalia’s eyes bored into Hermione’s, she was taking a risk asking her, Hermione knew, there was no trust between them.

‘What is it? I don’t have anything valuable.’

Hermione replied, becoming frustrated.

‘You’ll need to give me a part of you, your magical signature, what makes you, you. Not all of it, just some, a small amount.’ She saw Hermione’s face instantly close, ‘You’ll be fine afterwards, you’ll barely notice it.’ Casalia let the words out in a rush.

‘It’s like a horcrux,’ Hermione said, her voice flat.

‘It’s not.’ Casalia said, her voice rough.

‘A horcrux requires the person to commit murder first, they are a part of your soul, ripped apart. This isn’t your soul, it’s your essence, a small part of your magic, your passion, your intelligence.’

Hermione stood to leave. What she was saying was ridiculous, it was unthinkable, Casalia reached out and grabbed Hermione hard by her wrist.

‘Do you want to save your friend or not? You obviously don’t care about them as much as you say you do.’

Hermione stopped. She thought about how much she desperately wanted to save Draco, to bring him back to life and give him another chance. She didn’t know how else she could do it.

She looked at Casalia. ‘What would I have to do?’

‘Nothing, it’s a spell. I’d perform it, take the essence and then I’ll make the potion and give it to you. A simple transaction.’

‘What are the side effects Casalia, there must be some.’ Hermine said, feeling a cold sense of panic come over her. Was she really going to do this?

‘I’ve told you. It’s only a small part of you. You’ll feel weak for a while, your magic will be slightly less potent, but you’ll be fine.’

‘Why would someone want another person’s essence? What will they do with it?’ Hermione tried not to let her fear creep into her voice.

‘The stones are very valuable- ‘Essentiaspis Magicae’, they are like a diamond, but black, swirling, iridescent. And very rare. The stones also have the ability to make the wearer’s magic stronger, to boost them with the essence of the person who gave it. For someone like you, your intelligence, your magic. Your stone would be almost priceless.’

Hermione looked at Casalia. She knew she couldn’t trust her. Casalia hated her, she had very few morals, and she stood to make a huge amount of money if Hermione agreed to it, so why did she feel herself beginning to waver. She could see Draco, alive, a real person, not just a dream. She could talk to him, touch him.

Save him.

She took a deep breath, ‘I’ll do it.’

Casalia looked at her, her blue eyes wide and shining, she could barely contain her excitement.

‘Really?’ She breathed, ‘You will?’

Hermione nodded. ‘I want the potion first.’

‘Ok, I’ll need a few days.’

‘Fine.’ Hermione said. ‘I’ll be back in three days, and I’ll be expecting the potion in my hand before I do anything.’

‘It will be ready in two.’

Hermione Apparated away, a heavy, determined feeling in her heart. She’d told herself she’d do anything to give Draco a second chance, she could do it. She wasn’t sure what she was sacrificing, but when she thought of what he’d done for her, the horrors of his life. How could she say no?

Hermione didn’t go to work, she spent the two days at home, pacing, worrying. She didn’t sleep.

She went back to the library at Hogwarts, with the excuse of returning books she’d borrowed last time, and she tried to research *Essentiaspis Magicae*.

There was very little information on them again. The only thing that she managed to find was that the making and trading of them was illegal, they required a significant amount of dark

magic and there was a high level of risk to the witch or wizard during the separation of the essence.

There were several in existence, but they were extremely rare and required an exceptionally talented potioneer to make them. Hermione almost choked at the value of them, Casalia would be set for life.

When Blaise and Ginny had come, the first night bringing food and fussing around, she had sat there in a daze, barely listening as Blaise ranted about Robards, Simons and Harry, he was still furious. Not willing to accept the decision.

She listened as he began explaining how he'd gone into a meeting that morning and insisted that he be allowed to remain on the case. He was waiting to hear back, but he thought he'd convinced them. Unfortunately they weren't budging on her.

'If I'm on it I can keep you in the loop,' he said, 'I can tell you what the memories say.'

That got her attention, she realised that Blaise would have access to the Pensieve.

'You'd do that?' She asked.

Blaise met her eyes.

Ginny had gone into the kitchen and was busy banging pots and pans, serving up their meals, she couldn't hear them.

'What they've done to us is wrong, Hermione. It was our case. We were always supposed to have this case. I'm not just going to walk away, I can't.'

'Neither can I,' she said. 'Blaise, the memories, the ones I've watched on my own. The things I've found out about Draco. Did you know? How he felt about me?'

Blaise didn't say anything for a moment. He looked lost in thought.

'Draco didn't talk to me as much as he did to Theo', he said eventually. 'They were exceptionally close, I think Theo had a similar upbringing to Draco, his father was a Death Eater, very strict, but not as bad as Lucius. They understood each other more. He would have talked to Theo about it more than me, told him more about his life. But yes Hermione, I had an idea. I would have had to have been blind not to. He used to watch you everywhere you went, I thought his head was going to explode when you played spin the bottle.'

Hermione smiled sadly.

'You were right when you said he had a raw deal Blaise, he didn't deserve what happened to him.'

Hermione was shocked then to see Blaise's eyes suddenly fill with tears.

'Life isn't fair sometimes Hermione'. He said. 'All we can do is try to make things right to the best of our ability.'

She looked at him, did he know? He couldn't.

Ginny came back in then and the moment had passed. Blaise swiped at his eyes and they sat together and ate, Hermione's mind whirling as she forced the food down.

When the two days were finally over, she returned to Casalia's house. She clutched Draco's cufflink in one hand, like a talisman, to remind her why she was there, why she was doing it.

She sat in Casalia's kitchen and she almost got up and walked away, but she forced herself to sit.

Eventually, it was time to begin.

She held her hand out, until Casalia placed one very small vial of a dense dark purple liquid into her hand.

'One drop, into the Pensieve, along with the memory you want to change,' she instructed. 'You will have as long as the memory originally was, to go in and alter the events as they unfold. Then, when the memory ends, you'll come out in the new timeline, you'll have changed the past for everyone involved in the memory you chose.'

Hermione nodded, feeling hope stir in her heart. She could do it, she really could save Draco.

'Ok, let's go. Follow me,' Casalia breathed. She was sweating slightly, her eyes shining, a slightly manic look on her face.

'Lie down.'

Hermione lay on Casalia's bed, her heart pounding in her chest, bile rising in her throat. She watched as Casalia unstopped a vial of something else now, a black, potent looking potion.

The smell of it hit Hermione's nose the second she uncorked it. It reminded her of something, she couldn't put her finger on what, and her mind was racing too much to focus.

'Open your mouth,' Casalia instructed, and Hermione did as she was told.

The drop of potion landed on her tongue a moment later, it slid down her throat and suddenly Hermione couldn't breathe, she felt like her throat were closing up, she began to panic, clawing at her throat, Casalia held her down and began to chant, the words were foreign to Hermione's ears, but they were potent, the rhythmic quality of them dark and ominous.

Hermione's breathing was wheezing in and out of her now, her eyes began to flutter, her body convulsing as she tried to force a breath past the droplet of potion.

She slapped her hands down and scrabbled at the bed, her feet kicking. She felt something begin to rise up inside her, an awful screaming, screeching sound began in her head, a tearing sound.

She pulled, her chest concave as she fought and fought to breathe. Her head began to hurt, the most soul crushing pain, like nothing she'd ever felt before.

Suddenly, she felt the blockage in her throat begin to clear, she opened her mouth and watched, wide eyed as a small black plume began to rise out from her open lips, it curled around, seeming to follow the sound of Casalia's voice, until after a moment, it began to move faster, the swirl, curling in on itself, growing gradually harder until, eventually, it fell, a solid stone, into the floor, and rolled underneath the bed.

Hermione fell, exhausted back onto the pillow, her muscles finally stopped clenching, the blockage in her throat clearing. She barely heard Casalia's disbelieving laugh as she held the *Essentiaspis Magicae* in between her fingers, turning it this way and that in the light. It seemed to swirl, a mesmerising, iridescent black, it was beautiful, Hermione thought.

After a time, once she felt able to, Hermione sat up. She felt the warmth then, running down her face and she wiped a hand across, smearing the blood from her nose over her cheeks. She tried to stand, but her legs gave way. She had to lie back on the bed, until her head stopped screaming and her nose stopped bleeding.

She left an hour later, her legs shaky, head still aching dully and a strange hollow feeling in her chest, but in her hand she clenched the vial, the one containing her chance, to go back and save Draco.

She could barely wait.

She would find a way to get back to the Pensieve the next day, and finally she would see him, touch him- Hermione repeated the refrain as she lay in bed that night, the cufflink grasped in one fist, the potion on her bedside table, she repeated it, as she drifted into a black dreamless sleep, 'Draco, I'm coming, wait for me, I'm here.'

Granger, is this real?

Chapter Notes

A quick update, a shorter, sweeter chapter after the last few heavy going ones...

Hermione - June 2006

Sleep had evaded Hermione completely that night.

Thoughts of Draco ran through her mind on repeat, the reality of the monumental decision she had made almost choking her with nerves.

The strange feeling she had in her chest since Casalia had performed the spell hadn't left her.

She felt the same way she did sometimes when she left the house and thought she might have forgotten something, or left the stove on, a strange feeling of something slipping through her fingers, something just out of reach.

Hermione rolled the small vial of purple liquid between her palms, marvelling at the power of the innocuous looking potion, in awe of what it could hopefully do for Draco.

She positively vibrated with nervous energy, sitting on the end of her bed, a small, thin figure now, her hair a wild mass of curls, honey brown eyes large in her face, the dark circles underneath them prominent.

She sat with her legs crossed, her foot bouncing until the time came when she could shower and head to work.

Hermione was nervous about facing Harry. Things were so awkward. Decades of trust and friendship had been stretched thin, and there was nothing but secrets left between them now.

She thought about Blaise, about how sad he seemed, how lost, should she tell him about what she had done? What she was planning to do?

No.

He might try and stop her.

When it was finally time to leave, she checked if she had everything she needed.

She cast an extending spell on a small beaded bag, and into it she put the vial of potion, her case notes- so she could check the details of the memories, the two remaining memory vials, and finally, she slipped the cufflink into her pocket, her unfathomable, tangible link to Draco.

As she Apparated to the DMLE, Hermione didn't look back at her empty house, she didn't let herself question the enormity of the decision she was making.

She was focused solely on Draco, determined to change the course of his life, to stop him from doing what he did, to show him that there was hope.

She didn't think about who and what she was leaving behind, she only thought about where she was going.

Blaise was already behind his desk. His eyes were on the door as she walked through. He stood as she entered and motioned her towards him.

She was aware of eyes on her as she crossed the office, of low voices murmuring.

The grapevine was in good working order.

Everyone knew that Robards had kicked her off the case, and the reasons why. Hermione knew she needed to get to the memories as soon as she could. She had no idea how the day would play out, if she'd even still be welcome in the office for much longer.

As she approached Blaise, he pulled her in close to him.

'I'm back on the case,' he said in a low voice, and Hermione felt her stomach swoop.

'How did you wrangle that?' She asked, surprised that he had managed to convince Harry, let alone Robards.

'I used my inside knowledge of the deceased and his life before his death,' he said.

'I told Robards that I could gain access to witnesses who might not speak to Simons, and that I would be able to identify people of interest from watching the memories, much more than someone who didn't know him the way I did.'

'But Harry said you needed time off, that you were struggling?' She said, 'I'm surprised he's given in so easily, I know how stubborn he can be.'

'Harry isn't the boss Hermione. He's temporarily filling in. I went directly to Robards, and he agrees I'm the best person for the job. It doesn't really matter what Potter thinks.'

Hermione nodded, her relief palpable.

She didn't waste any time, she didn't think she had much.

'Blaise, do you think you'd be able to get access to the Pensieve room password? This morning, as soon as possible?'

Blaise looked at her, she saw that he was pale, sweating ever so slightly.

'Is it for Draco's memories?' He asked quietly.

‘Yes, Blaise, I just need to finish watching them,’ she lied, ‘I need to know what happened to him.’

Blaise’s eyes burned into hers. He seemed almost as desperate as she was, as determined.

‘Go now,’ he said, ‘Wait for me downstairs, I’ll come down with the password as soon as I can.’

Hermione did as he said. She glanced towards Harry’s office, relieved that he didn’t seem to have arrived yet.

She walked quickly to the stairwell and disillusioned herself, moving slowly and quietly, waiting for Blaise outside the door to the Pensieve room.

She heard his footsteps a moment later, he was moving cautiously too.

‘Hermione?’ He whispered.

She reappeared and he jumped back, not expecting her so close. Hermione could see he was nervous.

‘Salazar Hermione,’ he breathed.

He looked up and down the corridor. They were both fully aware that he was risking his job, they both were.

It didn’t matter to Hermione, but Blaise loved being an Auror so much.

She looked at his kind face, his warm brown eyes, and she knew she’d been so lucky in this life to have him. He’d been a constant presence, a protector, a confidant, everything she had ever wanted in a friend.

And here he was once again, in her moment of need.

She suddenly realised that their relationship might not be the same after what she was about to do.

They might not find each other again.

It hit her all at once, and she almost wavered with the heaviness of it.

‘Blaise,’ She couldn’t finish her sentence.

He was suddenly crushing her, his arms tight around her thin shoulders, he buried his face in her hair.

She wrapped her own arms around his waist and squeezed him back as hard as she could. After a moment, he loosened his grip and looked down at her.

‘Thank you,’ she said, her voice tight with tears she needed to keep inside.

He just smiled, it was a sad smile she thought.

‘Anything for you Granger, you’re my best friend.’ He replied.

‘Oh, and, just for the record, you might not be able to see what Ginny sees in me, but I can totally see what Malfoy saw in you.’

Hermione was speechless. She searched his face, she wanted to ask him something, but she almost didn’t want to know the answer.

‘Go and do what you need to do,’ Blaise said, ‘If anyone asks where you are I’ll say you went home sick.’

She smiled at him, one last time, squeezed his hand briefly, and then waited as he whispered the password.

Blaise watched as she slipped in through the door, and then walked away.

She shut the door tight, and pressed her back up against it, her heart pounding as she looked over at the Pensieve.

It was time.

She looked to the shelf, Draco’s memories stood, lined up, the neat labels in his looped handwriting making her heart beat faster.

She had thought all night about which memory to alter, which had had the biggest impact on his life, on all of their lives.

She moved towards them, and she began placing them carefully into her bag, one at a time.

Finally, there was one left on the shelf.

Her hand closed around the memory she least wanted to revisit, but the one she felt was right- June 1997.

She took the vial between her shaking fingers and uncorked it again, before quickly and decisively pouring it into the Pensieve, the memory swirling and shimmering.

She took a deep breath as she reached into her bag and withdrew the Adamantino potion, her whole hand trembling.

She uncorked it, thinking about what Casalia had said: One drop into the memory would allow her to manipulate events as long as the memory lasted, and then when the memory ended, she would awake, in the new timeline and that was set.

She carefully tipped the bottle up, and watched as one thick, viscous purple drop slowly dripped from the neck of the bottle.

It hit the surface of the memory and instantly the iridescent swirl changed, it sped up, concentric circles forming in the center, the shimmering increased, turning a pale violet shade, until suddenly, it became crystal clear, like water.

Hermione could see inside it. She could see Draco standing in the dungeon room.

The sight of him was enough. She swallowed down any doubts and clutched onto the side of the pensive.

She breathed deeply, calming herself, and then she dipped her face into the clear memory.

Draco was at the manor. He was in the dungeon room again.

He was so thin he looked unwell, however, he was immaculate in a fitted black suit, black shirt, snake shaped tie pin at his chest. His eyes looked huge, a clear silvery blue, the dark circles underneath them made him look ghostly in the dim light of the dungeon.

He was listening to Voldemort, being given instructions.

Snape lurked in the far corner.

‘You will wait until the others are in bed Draco, then you will move to the Room of Requirement and open the passageway to Borgin and Burkes.

Once the door is open, this will grant access to Bellatrix, Fenrir, Rabastan and Barty. The passage should take them less than five minutes. You wait for them in the astronomy tower.

Severus will be ready, to ensure that Dumbledore is unprotected, unsuspecting.’

‘Barty?’ Draco said. His voice like ice.

Voldemort sneered. ‘Yes, it would appear that Barty has reappeared from the woodwork. A fortunate turn of events wouldn’t you say boy?’

Draco gritted his teeth, ‘Yes, my Lord.’

Hermione watched again, as Bellatrix enquired about killing Dumbledore, she watched Nagini slithering over Bellatrix’s feet, Voldemort’s foul kiss on Draco’s pale cheek.

She saw Draco’s eyes close, as he endured the kiss.

She watched him return to Borgin and Burkes, gagging and heaving, bent over outside the shop, before entering and getting into the Vanishing Cabinet.

She saw him leave the Room of Requirement and sit, dazed in the Slytherin common room, looking sadly at his friends.

Hermione watched Draco, and she waited.

Eventually he told his friends that he was going to bed, and walked towards the dorms.

He stood in the dark, but he didn’t actually go back to the dormitory.

He held his wand above his own head and turned it in a twirling motion for a moment until suddenly, he disappeared. He’d disillusioned himself, the way he had with her years ago.

She followed the outline of Draco that she could see, down the halls and to the place she already knew he was headed.

Hermione watched his outline wait next to the Fat Lady's portrait until some Gryffindor fourth years gave the password; then he slipped in behind them.

She saw the blur of him move around the common room, eventually making his way to the dorms, to her room where she was fast asleep. Her hair spread in wild curls over her pillow.

She watched the depression appear on her bed as Draco sat, just down from her feet.

Then, she finally put down her bag and stepped forward.

She moved towards her sleeping form on the bed, and with a shaky inhale, she slipped inside. She felt a warm sensation, like sliding into a warm bath, her heart beat hard, once, twice and then it was done, she was seventeen again.

Hermione swam up from sleep.

She began to stir slightly, becoming aware of a weight, pressing down on the bed near her feet.

She forced herself to stay still, to not open her eyes yet.

She made herself breathe evenly, slowly, even though her heart was pounding.

Hermione felt the weight at the end of the bed shift slightly, she didn't dare to open her eyes.

She listened intently, and she could hear the quietest inhale and exhale that wasn't her own.

She breathed in through her nose, and she felt her chest contract as she detected the familiar aroma, one she recognised from her dreams.

He was here.

Draco was next to her, alive and breathing.

'Draco.'

She wasn't aware she'd said it out loud until the weight at the end of the bed moved, it was suddenly gone, a rush of air passed her by, the warm, spicy scent of caramel apples swirling in the air.

'Draco, don't go!' She whispered, as loud as she dared. The air stopped moving. The room was still, silent.

'Please,' she whispered. 'Please don't go.'

She could hear it again now, breathing which had increased in pace, a soft inhale and exhale, panicked, rapid.

‘Draco,’ she said once more. She sat up, her eyes adjusting to the gloom, blinking against the swooping, disorienting feeling of being back in the Gryffindor dormitory again after so long. So glad that she had gotten a room to herself, being Head Prefect.

‘Please, it’s ok. I don’t want you to go.’

The breathing stopped completely.

Hermione moved slowly, carefully, reaching for her wand.

She whispered the word, so that it was barely audible.

‘Revelio,’

She watched as finally, Draco Malfoy began to materialise in front of her, just a few feet away. He was real, corporeal, she could almost reach out her hand and touch him.

Her chest contracted.

He stood, tensed, facing her. His face was bone white, his eyes staring, glittering in the soft moonlight, the only light coming into the room through the small gap in her curtains.

He wasn’t moving. He was frozen, unsure of what to do. He’d been caught, sitting disillusioned, at the end of a girl’s bed. Not just any girl, a girl who thought of him as her mortal enemy.

She could see his mind working, running through his options.

‘Granger, I’m so-‘ he began to say, just as she said again, ‘Draco, it’s ok. Please.’

He flicked his eyes to her, they were huge, his pupils blown so wide that she could only see a tiny ring of silver. He didn’t know what to do, it was almost as if he couldn’t move.

He was the definition of a rabbit in the headlights.

She almost laughed as she watched him, thinking of the power he held in the hands that were spread out in front of him in a placating gesture, his signet ring glinting in the moonlight.

She moved slowly, pushing back the covers, looking down at herself, her pyjama shorts and vest top clinging to her curves.

Draco was still frozen, but his eyes also moved over her for a millisecond, lightening fast. She watched his Adam’s apple bob as he swallowed.

His eyes followed her as she stood, and walked towards him.

‘Granger, I should go, I can explain,’ he began, but he didn’t say any more, couldn’t say anymore, because now she was in front of him, standing in the near dark. She had stopped just inches from him.

She looked up into his face and felt her heart stutter.
He was even more beautiful up close.

She let her eyes rove over his full lips, his pale, smooth skin, the strands of blonde hair that had fallen over his forehead.

He was wearing his black shirt still, the collar undone now, sleeves rolled up, the Dark Mark clearly visible on his forearm.

He saw her looking at it and quickly dropped his arms to his sides.

Hermione felt her own breathing increase as she let her eyes travel back up to meet his own. So far he had stayed stock still, feet planted, his heaving chest the only part of him that moved.

Their eyes were locked, their breathing fast, uneven.

She stepped closer, not dropping her gaze. Draco was positively panting now, like he'd just run a mile, his breath coming in and out in quick puffs.

She brought her face infinitesimally closer and let her lips part, Draco's parted too as he watched her, his silver eyes locked on hers.
She moved again, closing the small gap between them, and suddenly their lips were touching.

She heard him moan softly, barely more than a breath, as she pressed her lips to his.

Draco opened his mouth and she felt his tongue move gently against hers.
Her knees almost buckled at the sensation of it, so soft, gentle but sure.

Hermione felt like she was being assaulted by every emotion at once, her heart bursting with the agonising joy of actually touching him after imagining it for so long.

She couldn't help it, she brought her hands up again, like she had during the spin the bottle game. She felt the soft skin of his cheeks, his neck, as she grasped the soft blonde strands at the base of his skull, and wound her fingers through them.

Draco groaned properly this time and stepped forwards. Suddenly, his long, strong body was pressed hard to hers. She could feel every inch of him, including the part that pressed insistently against her hip.

She pressed back, her tongue sliding into his mouth and against his own.

'Ah fuck, Granger, what's happening?' He muttered against her lips even as he pulled her closer to him.

She couldn't answer, she was lost in the kiss, her body responding to him, her fingers running through his hair, that same desperation she'd felt in her dreams taking over her.

She pulled him back, stumbling until she felt her bed frame, hard against the backs of her legs, he came with her, neither of them willing to let any space come between their bodies.

She sank back onto the bed, pulling him down. His eyes flew open momentarily as he put his hands out to bracket her head, her hair spreading out over the duvet.

She opened her legs so that he could crawl between them, and then he came down on his forearms, his hands tangling in her hair, his chest pressed against hers, their hips hard against each other.

Hermione was aflame, the feel of Draco's mouth on hers was better than any of the times she had dreamt him. The intoxicating scent of him was everywhere, all around her, the sound of their shuddering breaths echoing in her ears.

She could feel him pressing between her legs, he was shaking slightly with the effort of his self control, his lips bruising against hers.

She wrapped her legs around him, gasping as it brought him closer and increased the pressure, the material of her pyjamas stretched taut between them.

'Granger, Granger I need to stop,' Draco said suddenly, taking his lips from hers, breathing hard, his grey eyes wide.

Hermione couldn't hide her disappointment as he pushed back onto his haunches and looked down at her, his face a picture of confused amazement. He ran a hand through his hair, leaving it sticking up in spikes. His face was flushed, his lips swollen and pink, the evidence of how much he'd enjoyed their kiss obvious in his trousers, level with her eyeline, as she came up on her elbows.

'I- I don't want to stop,' he said, 'But I need to, I'm confused. I'm not sure what's happening here.'

Hermione bit her lip, her breathing still elevated, her heart still pounding. How on earth could she possibly explain it to him? The Draco in this timeline had no idea that she knew about his feelings for her, the things he was doing to keep her safe, he didn't know that she knew about his childhood- his suffering.

He was watching her face, his confusion growing more evident. He was beginning to catch his breath now.

She sat up, 'Draco-'

'Wait, when did I become Draco?' He said, his voice hoarse, frowning slightly.

'I'm Malfoy, you're Granger. We hate each other. We aren't friends, we don't do - this. His brow furrowed, his hand continued raking through his hair.

Hermione looked at him now, her warm brown eyes trying to hold his cool silver ones.

'Do you hate me, Draco?'

'What?'

‘I said, Do you hate me?’

He held her gaze for a moment, then dropped his eyes, his hands came up, in a gesture of surrender, he shrugged his shoulders, his voice resigned, ‘No Granger. I don’t hate you. But you hate me. You’ve always hated me, you, Potter and Weasley.’ He said the names with a slight grimace.

‘You should hate me,’ he added.

‘I don’t think I should, Draco,’ she replied quietly, her voice soft.

His eyes came back up, and locked again on hers.

‘In fact I should thank you. I should be grateful. I think, you’ve been protecting me, for a long time.’

She might as well have slapped him, he practically recoiled back from her. Draco’s eyes couldn’t get any wider. He moved back off the bed now, standing suddenly.

‘I need to go. You need to stay away from me Granger, stay with Potter, with McGonagall. Anywhere as long as it’s away from me.’ He was agitated, pacing.

‘Draco, stop.’

Hermione held out her hand- ‘I know,’

‘Know what?’ He was raising his voice slightly now. He looked distressed. ‘Granger, please, you don’t understand, you don’t have a clue!’

‘But that’s the thing, Draco,’ she said.

‘I do know. I know all of it, in fact, I know more now, than you do.’

Draco’s eyes narrowed, he was utterly confused. Hermione shook her head, she was doing a terrible job of this.

Draco stopped, he looked at her, waiting for her to explain.

Hermione suddenly had an idea.

‘Draco, I know you can Occlude,’ his eyes widened.

‘But are you a Legillimens?’

‘A Legillimens?’

‘Yes, can you do it?’

He rubbed a hand roughly over his face.

‘I can. But I don’t know why you need that. It hurts Granger. I’m not doing that to you.’ He moved further away, his hands up in front of him.

Hermione was frustrated. She huffed out a breath, then she suddenly had an idea. She went into her bag and brought out her Auror Notebooks. It would take much longer, but she could already see that she wasn’t going to change his mind about the Legillimency.

‘Dra- Malfoy, I know this is going to sound insane, but I need you to read these, now. As quickly as you can.’

‘What? Why? You’re being really strange Granger.’

He suddenly looked very worried, his face a picture of confused anxiety, he didn’t take his eyes off her.

‘Please, just do it. Trust me.’

He had no reason to, but he did.

She moved up on the bed and patted the space next to her. Draco clambered up, crossing his long legs elegantly as she handed him the notepads, one after the other. He read quickly, his eyes darting over the words, the disbelief and distress growing on his face with each page.

Finally, he finished the last of her notes and looked at her.

‘I’m dead?’ He asked.

‘Not now you’re not.’

‘You’ve done all this, traded a part of yourself, to come back here, to this day, to bring me back to life? After I *killed* myself?’ His voice was strained.

What could she say?

‘Yes,’ was all she could choke out.

‘Fuck,’ he breathed.

‘This is a lot, it’s a lot to take in.’

‘I know. I understand. It’s been the same for me Draco. I’ve learned so much about you,’ she said, ‘About your parents, your childhood.’

His intake of breath was sharp.

‘I also know what you’ve done for me, how you’ve tried to do everything you can to keep me from the Death Eaters, how you didn’t want that-’ she indicated to his Dark Mark.

‘I know what they’re making you do tomorrow. I know that you don’t want to. I know that you’re good, Draco. You aren’t what you want us to see.’

She reached her hands out, but he flinched and moved away, rising from the bed and beginning to pace the floor.

‘This doesn’t change anything Granger’ he practically shouted. ‘I’m still dangerous, being around me isn’t safe for you.’

‘You’re wrong Draco,’ she said. ‘I know now. I can help you. We can do this together.’

He looked up at her, something like hope flashing in his grey eyes.

‘Together?’

‘Yes Draco. I- I- my feelings towards you have changed. I don’t hate you, in fact, I feel the opposite.’

She took a deep breath, decided to just go for it. She had nothing to lose.

‘I feel like I might love you Draco, and I think you love me too.’

He paled so much then, that she thought he might actually pass out, or have one of his panic attacks.

But he didn’t.

He smiled.

It was beautiful.

He smiled at her and his face changed-it opened up. She saw even, white teeth, little crinkles appear at the corner of his eyes, his nose scrunched. It was the most perfect thing Hermione had ever seen. It almost broke her heart that she’d watched him for so long and had never seen him smile so broadly before.

They looked at each other from across the room.

Hermione saw Draco’s eyes move over her again, over her body, her hair, her face. The smile faded slightly, his jaw clenched and his eyes darkened.

‘Draco,’ she said, her voice barely a whisper.

‘I know, I understand what you’re going through. What you’re being made to do. I can help you, I will help you.’

He didn’t reply. His eyes kept moving over her.

‘Granger, is this real?’ He asked, his voice low, hesitant.

‘I don’t think I’ll survive it, if it’s not.’ He brought a hand to his face, to rub at his eyes. ‘You don’t know, how long-‘

‘I do Draco. I know. It’s real, I’m here.’

All the doubt left his face with her words, his expression changed, became hungry, his eyes stormy.

She barely had time to register him moving across the room, and to the bed, before his lips were on hers again, his body pressing her down into the mattress.

I Don't Want to Let Them In

Hermione - June 1997

Draco's lips crashed into Hermione's, and it wasn't a hesitant kiss this time.

His weight pressed down on her and she could feel every muscle in his long, lean body, the power behind each movement as he stole her breath with bruising, soul-crushing kisses.

She didn't hold back either, she pulled Draco tighter to her, the air burning in and out of her lungs as she wrapped herself around him and pulled his face closer to hers, her fingers wound tightly into his hair.

Draco's breathing was ragged, forearms flexing as he held himself over her, kissing, licking and sucking his way down her neck to her collarbones.

She felt the soft strands of his hair brush over the sensitive area just below her ear as he kissed the juncture of her shoulder.

'Oh, gods, Draco,' she said, but it came out as a soft moan.

Hermione had never, ever wanted something, or someone so badly. She felt like she was going to combust.

Draco lifted his head momentarily, 'Tell me to stop,' he breathed, and his voice hitched on his shuddering exhale.

'What?' She asked, pulling him back to her.

'I said, tell me to stop, when you want me to, because I don't think I'll be able to stop by myself.' His eyes were glassy, heavy lidded.

'I don't want you to stop, Draco. Please don't stop.'

He closed his eyes at her words, and swore quietly under his breath.

He brought a hand up now, and placed his palm flat against her pounding heart. She shook under his gaze, shivering as his hand slowly moved lower, trailing down, grazing over her curves to grip her waist, his long fingers firm, wrapping halfway around her body.

Hermione became even more aware of him pressing hard between her legs. She wriggled against him, desperate for more friction. He pushed his hips towards her and she inhaled sharply, every nerve tingling with sensation.

She let her own hands travel down now over his back, feeling the hard knots of muscle as he held himself over her.

She brought her hands around, and moved her fingers to the buttons of his shirt. She kissed him as she began undoing them slowly.

Draco faltered, his kisses suddenly becoming less frantic, less passionate.

She undid the last button and began pushing his shirt back, her eyes still closed as she kissed him, all she could think about was finally getting to feel him, for real this time.

As she peeled it off she heard him suddenly suck in a sharp breath between his teeth, the unmistakable sound of pain.

She stopped.

‘Draco, are you ok?’

He didn’t stop kissing her, didn’t miss a beat but, even through her haze she realised something was wrong.

She put her hands up to his shoulders, to pull him back, to get them both back to where they had been, and as she did she suddenly jerked her hands away, a small cry of surprise leaving her mouth.

Hermione opened her eyes and looked at her hands, they were wet, sticky with blood.

An awful, crushing realisation came to her then. His scars- the Sectumsempra. He had only been cursed weeks before.

She moved back slightly, making sure that she didn’t put her palms down on the bed, sitting up so that she could see him.

Draco’s face had closed, an angry, hurt disappointment clouding his features.

‘Draco-‘ she said, quietly. ‘Oh, I’m so sorry,’

Now that she could see him, she realised how far away from healing he was.

Their activities had opened several of the deep slashes on his torso and back. His black shirt had covered the bleeding, soaked up and hidden the blood that was seeping out, dripping in slow rivulets down his chest. His pale skin was stained crimson, smeared around the deep, half healed slices of the curse.

‘Oh, Draco,’ She couldn’t help clapping a hand to her mouth, leaving his blood smeared on her own face now too.

‘Granger. It’s fine. Please don’t.’ He said, his voice quiet.

‘It’s not fine Draco, you’re bleeding.’

He suddenly jerked back from her and stood up. His face had changed, he looked furious.

His shoulders were squared, his mouth a thin line as he looked around on the floor, seeing and snatching his shirt up, sliding it on over his arms and shrugging it over his shoulders.

Hermione couldn’t fathom how it had all gone so wrong. She felt tears prick at her eyes. Draco looked over at her then, and his face softened.

‘Shit. Granger, I’m sorry.’ He said. He looked upset that she was upset.

He came to sit next to her on the bed and dropped his head into his hands.

‘Less than an hour with me and you’re already crying. This is what I meant when I said I wanted you to stay away.

Stay with Potter and Weasley. They don’t make you cry.’

‘I’m not crying because of you, Draco. I’m crying for you.’ Hermione’s throat was thick with tears. ‘I just wish you didn’t have to suffer so much. I’m upset to see you bleeding, it’s so much worse knowing that Harry did this to you.’

Draco looked at her, his eyes guarded, seemingly amazed that she cared so much. She realised how hard his brain must be working to process her change of heart. How sudden it must seem to him.

He blew out a long breath.

‘This is what I do, Granger,’ he said eventually, his voice resigned.

‘I bleed.’

‘Draco, please don’t say that..’

‘It’s true.’ He said, with a small shrug. ‘You’ve supposedly seen my life, seen what it was like when I was younger. I bleed Granger. I’m good at it. I bleed and I bruise and I take the hits so that other people don’t have to. And I’ve done a good job of it, did a good job of it according to your notes. You got to twenty five and you were still alive, happy, healthy.’

Hermione felt like her heart was breaking as she listened to him speak.

‘Stop-‘

‘No! Granger. All I’ve wanted to do, since I first saw you on the train, you with your ridiculous, beautiful hair and your kind eyes, is keep you safe, and I did, it seems. And now you’ve come back here, back to danger, because you want to *save* me.’ His face was incredulous.

‘Granger, there’s no saving me. There’s no helping me. I don’t know what the fuck adult me was thinking showing you my life, making you think that there’s hope for me, some sort of redemption.

Because there’s not, and there never has been.’

He yanked up his sleeve, angling his arm so that she could see the Dark Mark, stark against his pale skin.

‘I’m meant for this life. I’ve been bred for it. Trained for it. I’m not surprised that I killed myself, I’m just shocked I even lasted that long. You shouldn’t have done this. You should have carried on as you were. Far away from me.’

His voice broke on his next words, 'You've made it so that it was all for nothing, Granger. What if it all goes wrong this time and I fail? What if something happens to you? At least before, I'd have died happy, because you were happy.'

Hermione's tears ran in rivers down her cheeks, she felt like she'd never stop. Had she made a mistake? No. She couldn't accept a life where he was dead. He was wrong. She wouldn't be happy. Not now, not now she knew him, had seen his heart.

'You deserve more than that Draco. You deserve to live. To know love, you deserve happiness too.'

He laughed a bitter laugh. 'I'm a Death Eater Granger. Tomorrow I've got to do a job that will ruin so many lives.'

Don't say I deserve happiness. I'm not like real people. I'm a commodity, nothing more.'

'STOP!' She screamed, clapping her hands over her ears.

Draco stopped. His eyes opened wide and he just looked at her. 'Stop speaking like there's no hope Draco! You've been made to feel like you've got no choice. But you do. I'm here now. I've come for you. I can help you. We can find a way to change things for you.'

She cast her eyes around in desperation. 'We can run away together. Disapparate somewhere far away.'

Draco closed his eyes, he squeezed them shut like he was in pain.

'Granger. You have no idea how good that sounds to me. How much I fucking want that. But, I'm marked. It's not that simple for me. Voldemort is in my house, he's got my mother, do you really think he'll just let me go? All I'll be doing is painting a target on my back and an even bigger one on yours. If anyone knew how much I care about you..' he broke off.

'We need to find a way to stop the war Draco. To stop Dumbledore dying. You can stay at Hogwarts, away from your family, we can be together, you can be happy.'

His eyes were cast down, his shoulders sagged. She reached her hand out to his, ran her own fingers through his long, elegant ones, feeling the cold metal of his ring. He looked down at their linked fingers and the sight of them seemed to bring him even more pain.

'I just want you to be happy, Draco. Please, don't give up. Fight.'

He brought his eyes back up to hers.

'I think this must be a dream.' He said. 'I'm going wake up in a minute and I'll be fucking spooning Nott or something. You aren't real. This is my mind tricking me.'

Hermione brought her other hand up and caressed his face, running her hand over the small white scar, the only small blemish on his perfect pale skin.

'It's real, Draco. I'm real.'

He stared into her eyes, and he seemed to be wavering. She stared back, into the deep silver pools and she willed him to trust her, to let her in. Eventually, he sat back. He took their joined hands and lifted them, inspecting them before letting her hand go.

He shook his head, then let it hang, his elbows on his knees. He looked at the floor, seeming to be trying to gather himself.

‘I don’t want to kill him.’ He said eventually.

‘I know that.’

‘I want to stay at Hogwarts, with you. I’ve only just got you. I don’t want to leave you.’

‘I want that too, Draco. So much.’

‘But they’re coming. I don’t know how I can stop them from coming, what reason I can give for not opening the cabinet. Even if I put it off, I’ll have to do it eventually. Or they’ll just come for me another way. I can’t hide here indefinitely. And if Voldemort uses Legilimency on anyone, he’ll see.’

‘So open it.’ She said. He lifted his head and his eyes flashed to her.

‘Open it, but we will be ready for them. You can hold them off, distract them. I can go ahead of you, to the astronomy tower and tell Dumbledore what’s happening and we can get the Order here, ready to stop the Death Eaters before they attack the school. We can stop the war from ever starting. Think how many people we could save.’

Draco looked doubtful.

‘But in your journals, it says that I went on to kill Voldemort. That’s a good thing isn’t it.’

‘But you died anyway.’ Hermione said. And she hated herself for it, but she needed him to understand.

‘You didn’t get any happiness Draco. You died alone. You killed your father, your mother was insane, and you lived a life on the run, a murderer. I want to save you. I want to bring you happiness, to be with you. You are so much more than you’ve been made to think you are. Let the Order take care of Voldemort. Help them. It doesn’t have to be you Draco.’

He looked stricken. He was utterly torn.

His eyes burned into hers as he seemed to be battling between what he wanted to do and what he’d been conditioned to believe he had to do.

‘Granger,’ he said, and her heart broke at the desperation in his voice- ‘My Mother, I can’t- I can’t leave her.’

She looked at him. He couldn’t be serious.

‘Your mother?’

He nodded slowly.

‘You won’t leave her? After everything she’s put you through, after what I’ve seen. You won’t... You won’t leave her?’

She stared into his face, his eyes were round, the silver of his irises crystal clear. She watched as they filled, and a single tear slipped down his cheek.

Hermione’s heart stopped as she watched it track down his face.

He shook his head.

‘I can’t.’

Draco.

He still loved his mother. She had neglected him, watched Lucius beat him to a pulp, had left him broken and alone from the age of six, and he still wouldn’t leave her.

Hermione could never pretend to understand it, but she could accept it.

She’d have to.

She looked at the beautiful, broken boy in front of her and she knew she’d take him any way she could get him.

His heart was something so precious, that it still had the capacity for love, despite all he’d been put through.

Hermione felt like she would die for him.

She watched the tear, tracked its path, and she thought that she would do anything, anything at all for him. Being with Draco, even for this short time, had confirmed all the feelings she had had through watching the memories.

He was hers.

She was his, and he was hers. And she would do whatever it took to be with him.

She heard Draco’s breathing begin to pick up pace, it became uneven, rapid. He struggled to hold her eye, his chest began to visibly rise and fall, and she saw his face pale.

He suddenly sprang up from the bed and began pacing. She watched his hand come up to his heart and she knew the signs. It was all too much, he was panicking.

‘Grang- Granger, I, I, I can’t-‘ His words stuttered as he tried to speak around his heaving breaths. His other hand came up to grip his hair, his eyes were wide. He swayed slightly. Hermione jumped up.

‘Draco, Draco it’s ok, please, it’s ok. Breathe, breathe, I’m here.’

She rubbed a hand slowly over his arm, scared to touch him anywhere else incase she hurt him.

He looked to her again, but he couldn't get a hold of it, his breath began wheezing, he swayed a little more. She could see that he wasn't getting enough air, he was going to pass out.

She put her hands up, as if she could catch him. He was at least a foot taller than her, and much heavier, but she thought she'd do her best to catch him, always.

She put her hands out, ready, but Draco stayed standing. He looked into her eyes and he reached towards her, like she was his lifeline. She brought her own hands up to wind her fingers through his, and she gripped them tightly. As they looked at each other she repeated the words like a prayer.

'I'm here, I'm with you, Draco, you're okay.'

Eventually, she saw his chest begin to slow its rapid jerks, his eyes softened, the wide eyed panic beginning to leave them, his muscles relaxed slightly and he was able to take full breaths again.

He let his forehead drop against hers, and closed his eyes.

'I'm sorry,' he said quietly, his lips centimeters from hers.

'It happens sometimes, I can't get my walls to come up, and I can't breathe.'

'Draco, please don't apologise, it's ok,' she said, wanting to wrap her arms around him, but she was scared of his injuries.

'It's not your fault, don't ever say sorry.'

She brought her hands up to his face instead, rubbing a gentle thumb over the soft skin on his cheeks.

She couldn't stop herself from planting a soft, barely-there kiss on his lips. They were so close to hers, she could feel his breath ghosting over her face and she needed to kiss him.

He didn't move, his eyes were closed, as he continued to bring himself under control.

Draco,' she whispered against his lips.

'Oh Draco, I love you so, so much.'

She saw his face contort, that pained expression there again, like her words were knives, instead of the salve they were supposed to be.

'Let me love you Draco, please,' she whispered, beginning to feel desperate.

'Let me in. I've tried so hard to get back to you. Please stop pushing me away.'

She kissed him again and this time he responded. She felt him begin to kiss her back.

Their lips slid softly over each others, tongues pushed into mouths, Hermione could feel wetness on her face and she wasn't sure who's tears they were, but she didn't take her lips from his.

Draco kissed her like he was drowning.

The more they kissed the more she felt the desperation in him rising, matching the desperation in her. His grip on her became tighter, his breathing notched up again. His fingers came up and tangled through her curls, pulling her face to his.

He pushed her now, the few steps to the wall, and then her back was flat against it, his thigh was firm between her legs and all she could feel was the friction as she ground down onto him.

She kissed him and kissed him and kissed him, pouring all her love into his mouth. Totally and utterly consumed by him.

She realised that it wasn't enough, she needed more.

She brought her hands down to his belt buckle, her fingers clumsy as she pulled the leather from the metal, eventually sliding it through with a crack. There was barely any space between them, so he moved back a quarter of an inch to give her the space to undo the button and slide the zipper of his black suit trousers down. She gasped as her knuckles grazed against the thick, hard length of him.

Oh Merlin.

She wanted him, but he was intimidating, she'd never been with anyone even close to what she could feel now, pressing hard against her. She brought her hand down to run a finger down the taut outline of him through his boxers, making him hiss in another breath, this time not of pain.

'Granger-' her name came through a clenched jaw.

He pressed harder into her, and her ribcage barely had room to expand. She lifted his boxers over and down and gently wrapped her fingers around him, moving her wrist in long steady strokes.

He moaned into her ear, making her shiver, and her knees go weak.

His own hand came down now, to slide under the waistband of her shorts. She held her breath as he moved lower, trembling with anticipation.

When his fingers finally slid where she needed them she ground down on him and heard him swear, as he began moving his hips, rocking gently into her hand as he moved his fingers in a delicious rhythm.

Hermione buried her face into the soft skin at the base of Draco's neck and breathed him in.

She had never experienced anything like the emotions swirling through her, combined with the way he was moving his fingers, and the sound of his shaking breaths as his voice vibrated

low into her ear.

‘Hermione, oh fuck, fuck.’ he mumbled, and she shivered at the sound of her first name on his lips.

It didn’t take long before she could feel herself trembling, climbing.

She could hear Draco’s breathing growing unsteady too, his movements stuttering. She tightened her grip around him and tried not to let her rhythm falter.

She became aware of the entire room beginning to vibrate. Glasses rattled, her bedframe shook, a picture fell off the wall and she felt an unbelievable pressure build up around them. The power of it seemed to flow out from Draco and into her.

She let her head drop back as she allowed herself to give into it, rising and riding the wave as he did. She felt like she was going to lose control, like it was almost too much for her as she felt his whole body stiffen and suddenly both of them were crying out, shaking violently into each others arms as they gave into the sensation, their breaths mingling as they moaned each others names, trembling and twitching, their eyes squeezed shut.

Draco held her tightly as he shuddered against her, the aftershocks radiating out of him.

Hermione felt like she might die right there and then. She pulled him to her as hard as she could, realising as she opened her eyes that they were both now daubed in the blood that had leaked through his shirt, it was smeared on their faces, across her chest.

Draco’s eyes opened too, bloodshot and stormy, but she couldn’t see pain there, only a slightly blurry sort of pleasure, as his chest continued hitching whilst he came down from where she had taken him.

He smiled at her, his lips quirking in a beautiful, satisfied grin.

‘You have no idea how long I’ve imagined doing that, I think I might have gotten a bit carried away.’ he said, his voice hoarse.

She smiled back at him, and kissed him gently.

‘I hope it lived up to your expectations.’

He rolled his eyes, ‘My imagination didn’t even come close Granger.’

He dipped his head to kiss her again, softly now, his teeth gently nipping at her bottom lip as he looked into her eyes.

‘I think we might need to clean ourselves up,’ she said, suddenly feeling self conscious as to what she imagined she looked like to him.

He laughed quietly, and stepped back from her, pulling his wand from his pocket and vanishing everything with a quick ‘Scourgify.’

Now they were calmer, Hermione let herself think more rationally.

‘Draco, you’re still bleeding. Please, will you let me clean your wounds a little?’ She asked him hesitantly, not knowing how he would react.

He turned his eyes to her and she breathed a sigh of relief that his earlier anger was nowhere in sight.

The tension had gone slightly from his shoulders. She wondered how long it had been building in him.

He didn’t answer but came to sit on the bed, looking at her slightly suspiciously as he did.

He allowed her to gently remove his shirt, and she forced herself not to react as she saw his injuries again. She clenched her jaw and willed him not to glance up, to see the tears in her eyes.

She carefully ran her wand over the cuts, whispering an incantation she had learned, a more subtle version of the ‘Vulnera Sanentur,’ that Snape had used on him on that dreadful day.

She watched as the blood stopped seeping, and the wounds began to look slightly less raw. She saw Draco’s tensed shoulders begin to relax slightly. He never made a sound, didn’t react although she knew she must be causing him some pain.

He was right, she thought, he was an expert at bleeding.

When she’d finally finished, he reached out his hands and pulled her to him, she stepped between his thighs as he sat on the bed. He wrapped his arms around her waist, his head against her chest. She let her own head drop and buried her face into the tangle of his blonde hair, breathing in the intoxicating scent of him.

‘Thank you.’ She heard him whisper. ‘For everything.’

She kissed the top of his head, into his hair. ‘No, thank you Draco.’

‘What are we going to do?’

She stroked the soft strands, felt his breath warm against her body through the thin material of her pyjamas.

‘I’ve got a plan. We can keep your mother safe too.’

He looked up at her, and the guarded hope in his eyes hurt her heart.

She stepped gently out of his arms, and sat next to him on the bed.

‘Lie with me,’ she said. ‘It must be almost morning. Let’s go through it.’

And they lay next to each other, fingers linked as she explained her plan to him. She watched the hope dance in his cool, grey eyes and she prayed she could be the one to let that spark catch alight and burn.

They stayed there all night, talking. It took hours to convince him that she could look after herself, that her defensive skills and wand work were good enough.

She told Draco gently, what she knew about Snape, that he was a double agent. That he was working with the Order.

She saw his eyes go wide, taking in the implications.

‘Salazar, no wonder he’s so good at Occlumency is all I can say,’ Draco muttered, and she watched him go through their interactions in his mind, his face drawn in concentration as he thought about all the times Snape had helped him, and then lied to him, she imagined.

She told him to go to Snape in the morning, to tell him to find a way to get Narcissa out of the manor, and somewhere safe. It was doubtful anyone would notice she was gone with the size of the manor. Also, Narcissa’s drunkenness meant she often took to her room for hours.

Once Draco opened the cabinet she would go up and wait for Dumbledore, telling him what was going to happen, before Draco got there, giving him time to summon the Order, so that the Death Eaters could be brought under control.

No one needed to die.

Draco would play his part perfectly, so no suspicion fell on him.

Hermione wished Dumbledore wasn’t away so that she could give him more warning, but she knew from Draco’s memory that he had been away until just before the altercation in the tower.

Draco would need to buy her enough time between shooting the sparks and bringing the Death Eaters up to the tower.

It took a while to convince him, but she could see how desperately he wanted their plan to work.

‘What will I do if Snape says no?’ He asked her.

She looked at him, a small smile at her lips.

‘Draco, you forget I’ve seen what you can do. I know how powerful your magic is. I don’t know if you realise, but no one can say no to you if you don’t want them to. You call the shots. Your father has spent his life trying to take power away from you, but all he’s done is give you more. You are strong Draco. You’re terrifying.’

He snapped his eyes to hers.

‘You’re scared of me?’

‘I’m not. But other people should be. Stop letting other people make you feel less, Draco. You are unbelievably intelligent, immensely powerful, you’ve overcome so much. You are incredible and you can do this.’

She could tell her words weren’t sinking in. He didn’t believe her, he couldn’t, after all he’d been put through. She promised herself there and then that once they got through tomorrow she’d spend the rest of her life letting him know how amazing he really was.

Eventually, he seemed to be at peace with their plan, they'd gone through it time and time again.

Hermione smiled as he wrapped his long body around her, his face tucked into her collar bone and she slowly heard his breathing begin to even out, his inhales and exhales getting gradually longer.

She kissed him, small soft kisses over every part of him she could reach. She couldn't sleep, she was scared to, incase it kicked her out of the memory.

She just lay, stroking his hair back from his forehead, her eyes taking in the way his lips pouted in sleep, his eyelashes fluttered on his cheeks.

Hermione let the hours pass and she watched him, thinking of the way he had done the same thing with her, the first time they had lived through this night together.

Draco woke just before dawn. He sat bolt upright, scaring the life out of Hermione, his eyes were wild and he was on his feet before she'd even registered what had happened.

He looked at her for a moment like he was checking she was really there.

She looked back at him, blinking, waiting for him to move, unsure of how he was feeling.

After a moment he crossed the room to her and then his lips were hot on hers as he covered her with desperate, searing kisses, stealing her breath once more.

Just as she began pulling him on top of her to lay down, he suddenly pulled back and moved away from her slightly, looking like it was an incredible effort for him to do so.

'Granger, can you Occlude?' He asked, looking worried.

'Yes, Draco I can.'

'Thank fucking god. You're going to need to.' He said. 'You need to hide me Granger, it's important. Hide all the memories of me, before you came back, and last night.'

She nodded. She understood why he was so concerned.

'Shall I show you what I do?' He asked. 'The way I keep you from Voldemort?'

She swallowed and nodded, then sat next to him and listened as he told her about his scrolls, about how he wrote his memories on them mentally, and then rolled them up tight and pushed them back into the recesses of his mind, bringing simpler, more innocuous memories to the front.

She listened to the deep cadence of his voice and she concentrated as hard as she could, to do exactly as he said, following his instructions.

When she was ready, she closed her eyes and focused hard. She conjured her own mental scrolls, writing down every detail of what had happened in her life since Draco had died.

She wrote them meticulously, the same way she wrote her case notes, then she rolled them up as tightly as she could and pushed them as far back in her mind as they would go, just like he told her.

Then they sat together on her bed. Their backs straight, their hands on their thighs and they occluded. Draco's eyes clouded, became a grey stormy day, Hermione's changed from a clear honey brown to a darker shade- a murky riverbed.

By the time they both jumped in surprise, when Padma knocked on Hermione's locked door at 8am, they were ready.

Hermione shouted to Padma that she'd overslept and she spent her last ten minutes with Draco, letting him worship her with his hands and his mouth, holding him to her and trying not to let him see her cry.

Eventually, they couldn't put it off any more, she gave him one last kiss as he disillusioned, and followed her out through the portrait hole.

She strained her eyes trying to make him out as he made his way back to the Slytherin common room.

It took all she had not to go after him.

They saw each other a few times that day.

Draco completely ignored her, he looked through her like she didn't exist. It made her heart hurt even though she knew why he did it.

Eventually, at about six o'clock she went back to her room. She spent some time filling in her case notes, then she cast the powerful locking spell Draco had shown her over them, their names wound into the spell- Draco Lucius Malfoy and Hermione Jean Granger. No one who wasn't her or Draco could open them now. It was impossible.

She put them into her bag, then shrunk them all down, along with Draco's memories and transfigured the bag into a canvas satchel to make it easier to carry.

She holstered her wand, then she took a deep breath and went to the window, to wait for Draco's signal.

Hermione felt like she was going to vomit when she eventually saw the green sparks shoot up into the black sky above the astronomy tower.

Draco had given the signal. It was time.

She hoped that he had managed to get the message to Snape.

She disillusioned herself, cast a silencing charm and began to move. She took the steps two at a time, praying that Draco's distraction of telling the Death Eaters where she supposedly would be, in a usually deserted part of the school, would work.

As she arrived in the astronomy tower, she was relieved to see Dumbledore there. He looked tired and she realised how old he truly was, he was holding a withered hand to his side, his face was grey.

The wind was blowing through the astronomy tower, a storm brewing outside.

She allowed herself to become visible again.

‘Miss Granger,’ Dumbledore exclaimed, and his surprise was evident.

She knew he’d been expecting Draco.

‘You need to leave here at once, this isn’t safe for you.’

‘Forgive me professor. I do understand, but I need you to listen to me.’

‘No, Miss Granger, you need to listen to me. Something very bad is about to happen here, and I do not want you anywhere near when it does. I already have one of my students in grave danger, caught up in something he cannot control, I do not want a second. Please go back to your dormitory and stay there.’

‘Professor, I’m actually here for Draco.’

Dumbledore pause, and his sharp blue eyes snapped to Hermione.

‘He needs help professor. Voldemort is threatening his family, his life. He wants him to-‘ she swallowed. ‘To kill you. And if he doesn’t, he’ll kill him, and his mother.’

‘And you know this, how, Miss Granger?’

Dumbledore’s eyes kept flicking to the door, like they had done in the memory.

Somehow, he knew they were coming.

‘Because, I’ve seen this before Professor. It’s a long story, but I have watched these events play out. Currently, we are within an alterable memory. I’ve come back through the memory, using a Pensieve from 2006, to try and save you. To save Draco.’

She saw realisation dawn in Dumbledore’s eyes.

‘You have used Anima Adamantino’. He looked grave, ‘Oh Miss Granger. That is very dark magic indeed.’

Dumbledore looked at her imploringly, ‘Why? Why did you do it? What did you give for it?’

‘I did it to save Draco,’ She said. ‘He doesn’t deserve this. I did it to save you, to stop a war that will break out in the aftermath of today.’ Her voice was desperate. Why was he asking so many questions instead of just listening to her. Dumbledore almost seemed to be stalling.

‘Miss Granger, attempting to change the course of history is very dangerous. Every small thing you change can impact something else.’

‘I understand that professor, but I couldn’t let him die. Please, please help me, to help Draco. I love him.’

Dumbledore had almost seemed resigned to Draco’s attack. Almost like it was preordained. Hermione could see that she had taken him by surprise. His shoulders slumped. He looked even more tired.

‘What would you have me do, Miss Granger?’

‘Leave the tower, now. Summon the Order. Ensure the resistance members here are ready to fight. There are currently four Death Eaters within the castle, Draco is holding them off. They are looking for me.’

She saw Dumbledore’s sharp glance towards her, and headed off his question.

‘They want to take me back to Voldemort. He wants to use me. To use my knowledge of Harry and my academic skills to turn me into a spy. To use my body for fun. Draco killed them all to save me, the last time.

Bellatrix killed you. It triggered an attack on the castle.’

She could see the horror dawn on Dumbledore’s face. He turned towards the stairwell and Hermione felt hope stir in her heart. He was listening, he was leaving.

Dumbledore didn’t get far. He stumbled, falling down onto his knees, dropping his wand. He was weaker than Hermione had realised. She moved across the floor to help him up and as she did, she heard a sound that chilled her to the bone.

She had taken too long.

She could hear running footsteps on the stairs.

Draco appeared first and his eyes widened at the sight of her, crouched next to Dumbledore. He instantly reacted, wandlessly disillusioning her again and casting a Protego she felt surround her like a silk sheet.

Draco’s face was pale, his eyes like saucers.

Something had gone wrong downstairs too. They’d come too quickly. She could sense that he was struggling to keep calm.

Less than a second later she heard Bellatrix’s high pitched cackle as she appeared out of the gloom at the stairwell of the tower, Greyback and Lestrage skulking behind her.

‘Well, look what we have here. Well done, Draco.’ Bellatrix’s voice was like venom, leaching out from between her lips.

She moved into the room behind him, prancing on the balls of her feet, and planted a kiss on Draco’s cheek.

Draco stayed, frozen, his eyes on Dumbledore, on the spot where she was crouched at his side.

Bellatrix took in Dumbledore, collapsed on the floor and her features filled with a sick kind of joy.

‘Ah, I see you’ve gotten started without us. Good boy Draco,’ She purred, her blackened teeth bared as she grinned.

She looked utterly unhinged as she stalked closer to Draco who had now drawn his wand, playing his part. His eyes were wide, the panic there making the silver shine like glass.

Bellatrix’s hair trailed across his neck as she leant in close to his face. Draco kept his wand trained on Dumbledore, but the tip of it shook as she put her mouth close to his ear, her dry lips moving across his skin and she hissed, ‘Do it Draco!’

Greyback came into view, his back hunched, teeth glittering in the moonlight coming through into the astronomy tower.

‘He doesn’t have the stomach... just like his father. Let me finish him in my own way.’

‘No!’ Bellatrix shrieked.

The Dark Lord was clear, the boy is to do it. This is your moment. Do it! Go on, Draco! NOW!’

Hermione watched in horror as Draco narrowed his eyes and levelled his wand back at Dumbledore’s heart.

Bellatrix giggled as she danced from foot to foot. Her eyes wild.

Draco raised his wand, the Death Eaters encroached.

There was suddenly a noise from the stairwell, was it Crouch?

Hermione looked towards the stairwell. They all did, except Draco who was frozen. He didn’t know what to do. This hadn’t been the plan. Now he was in the same situation as before, except Hermione was in the line of fire. All his Occlusion ability from the last memory had abandoned him.

Draco was lost.

As Hermione looked, she heard the noise again, but there was nothing there.

Bellatrix heard it too. She hissed and aimed her wand at the stairwell.

‘Revelio!’ She screeched, and it took everything Hermione had not to scream herself, as Harry abruptly came into view, the invisibility cloak slipping from his shoulders. In his hand he held the Marauders map.

Hermione looked at it in horror.

She let her mind quickly play over what had happened. She hadn't been at dinner, Harry would have looked for her, he'd seen her, here in the astronomy tower, alongside Dumbledore's name, Draco's and the Death Eaters, and Harry, oh brave, stupid Harry had come here to try and save her.

'HARRY POTTER!' Bellatrix was positively incandescent, she screeched and she clapped her hands together, her curls bouncing wildly. 'What are you doing here? Come to save your precious Dumbledore? Well you're too late, Draco has already gotten to him. He'll be dead soon and then you'll be easy pickings for the Dark Lord!' She stalked towards Harry who backed up slightly, his wand held up.

'Harry,' Dumbledore called weakly. 'Dont-'

But it was too late, the words left Harry's mouth before she could even register that they were going to.

'Where is she, Malfoy?' He shouted.

Draco flinched, hard.

He turned his eyes to Harry, his wand still on Dumbledore. She could see the message he was trying to convey- Stop. Don't say it.

But he did.

'I know she's up here Malfoy! I can see her on the map. What have you done with her? Where have you hidden Hermione?'

The other two Death Eaters immediately sprang into action, prowling the room, looking for her, sending spells into the dark shadows of the tower.

Bellatrix kept her eyes on Harry. The whites showing around her dark irises as she stared fixedly at him.

Hermione jolted as Harry let out an anguished sob.

'I swear to god Malfoy, if you've hurt her I'll-'

'STOP POTTER!' Draco roared, and the astronomy tower shuddered, the same dull boom Hermione had heard in the memory pulsing through the room.

Everyone tipped, almost falling.

Hermione let out a small cry, the shock and power of the movement scaring her.

In a flash Bellatrix's eyes were on the spot where she was.

'REVELIO,' she screamed again, and suddenly Hermione could see herself, her hands, arms and legs as both the disillusionment charm and the Protego wore off her.

Draco's eyes flicked to her and then squeezed shut.

She felt like she could see the last shreds of his composure give way. The panic on his face was clear to see by anyone who looked. She silently willed him to get himself under control.

'Another one!' Bellatrix cackled, and she clapped her hands together.

'Oh Draco. The Dark Lord will be so *proud* of you. You've done so well! The Mudblood, Dumbledore and Potter all where we need them. You are the best little servant aren't you?'

Bellatrix now began moving towards Hermione.

'Come here Mudblood! Don't be shy.'

Hermione tried to dart away and Bellatrix danced after her, laughing maniacally.

'Granger! Don't run.' The words were out of Draco's mouth before he could seem to stop himself.

Hermione watched the realisation dawn on the Death Eater's faces at once. They knew Draco was protecting her. Greyback snarled and dived at her.

He was dead before he even made it a step. Draco had cursed him from where he stood, flicking his palm up towards him.

Hermione couldn't see Harry. She thought he must be back under the cloak. She could hear his footsteps, but couldn't see where he was.

Everything moved in slow motion then.

Bellatrix whirled away from Hermione and lunged towards Dumbledore who was reaching for his wand.

Hermione heard Harry's curse from beneath his cloak and saw the flash of green light shoot out from a darkened corner.

Bellatrix fell. Her eyes went blank and she was dead.

Lestrangle's curse flew toward the empty space with frightening speed.

Hermione heard the roar of his 'Avada Kedavra!' Just as she shot her own matching curse at Lestrangle. She watched the green light fly from the end of her wand and Rabastan fell.

Hermione didn't know if Harry had been hit by the curse. There had been too much noise to hear, she couldn't see him. Couldn't detect any movement.

Hermione didn't see, and she didn't hear Barty Crouch as he dived into the room, a terrifying grin on his face, his wand pointed firmly at her heart as he screamed the killing curse.

Hermione didn't see Draco move, she didn't see him dive, but she felt his body as he fell on top of her.

She watched Barty Crouch's curse hit him, square in his back as he threw himself forward at astonishing speed, his body covering hers.

She didn't notice Dumbledore's own weak curse kill Barty Crouch. Didn't hear Severus Snape's running footsteps as he entered the room, hissing as he surveyed the carnage.

All she saw was Draco.

His body had gone limp, his weight heavy on her as she lay under him. His eyes were still locked on hers, the bright, clear silver fading even as she scrambled to gather him to her.

'Draco! DRACO!' She screamed, but the light had already gone.

'No! No. Please oh no, no, Draco!' She scrambled to sitting and pulled him with her.

She tried to lift him up, to bring him close to her but his head lolled loosely backward, his eyes staring unseeing, up at the starry sky above the astronomy tower.

Hermione jostled him desperately as though she could wake him.

She stared into Draco's beautiful, blank face and she felt the threads of her sanity begin to slip away.

She'd failed.

All she had done was kill him quicker.

She screamed and she wailed and she wept over him, kissing his face over and over again even as she could feel him growing colder in her arms.

A blue tinge appeared around his lips even as she continued to kiss them.

She cried when Snape came to her, and tried to loosen her arms from his body. He had tears on his own face.

'We need to go, Miss Granger. Now.' He said, firmly.

'There are more death eaters in the castle.'

Hermione became dully aware of the sound of thuds, a loud banging from below them. The creaking noise of the castle doors giving way.

But she didn't care, she couldn't care because Draco was dead. She tried to reach for him, even as Snape picked her up bodily and began running with her out of the room. She realised Dumbledore had already gone. Snape must have already taken him to the medical wing.

She was so distressed that she didn't realise for a moment what the dull thud was as Snape's foot hit something on the ground as they were leaving the astronomy tower. He stopped and looked down and she realised he had kicked something. Snape put her down, and bent, feeling around for what was there.

The horrifying, desperate knowledge of what he had kicked entered Hermione's mind a nanosecond before Snape pulled off the cloak.

Hermione's mind folded in on itself then as she looked into the cold, dead eyes of another boy that she loved.

Harry Potter also lay dead on the floor of the astronomy tower. His body had come to rest a few feet from the body of his arch enemy Draco Malfoy.

Hermione screamed and screamed. She raked her nails down her cheeks as she realised she had done this to them. She had killed them both.

Snape was frozen in horror. Understanding dawning on him now too.

'No,' he whispered, 'Oh no.' He was still for a moment as the horror of the situation came over him.

She knew that Snape wouldn't mourn Harry the way he would Draco. But Harry's death would have huge repercussions for everyone.

Snape seemed to have to force himself to move. He motioned for Hermione to move again and as she did she heard the glass vials in her backpack tinkle against each other.

She let out a breath as the realisation formed in her mind.

'Dumbledore's office.' She said, her eyes locked on Snape's dark ones.

Snape was lost in his grief. He was confused.
'Miss Granger?'

'Get me there, now. Please professor. I can undo this. I can stop it from happening. Please get me there.'

Snape didn't question her. He disillusioned them both, then he took her hand and they ran, dodging Death Eaters as they sprinted through the school.
Hermione smelled smoke and she knew they didn't have much time.

As they got to the office Snape didn't hesitate, he blasted the wall with a Bombarda maxima and Hermione ran through the gap. She didn't know how much time she had.

She had to go back, to an earlier memory before it was too late.

Draco and Harry were both dead.

She couldn't live with that. She'd rather be dead herself.
Her fingers trembled as she selected the memory she needed from her bag and ran to
Dumbledore's Pensieve.

She heard running feet beyond the hole in the wall but she barely registered Snape stood, his
back to her as he fought off the encroaching Death Eaters as she tipped one drop of the
Adamantino in. She kept her eyes on the swirling liquid, willing it to turn clear.

The last thing she saw before she dipped her head in was Severus Snape, falling to the ground
and Corban Yaxley diving towards her, before she held onto the sides and pushed her face
into the memory, falling down and away from Hogwarts.

The General

Chapter Notes

Thank you all for continuing to read and comment! I am so appreciative!

I've added a few extra tags for this chapter - there is a scene where Hermione is almost attacked.

I've also added the HEA tag, as I know it sometimes seems like it will never happen!

Hermione - February 1994

Hermione fell down into the memory and felt her body revolt as she returned to being twenty five.

She stood for a second before her thin limbs collapsed inwards and she fell hard onto the ground, her head hitting the tiled floor with a crack.

She cried out, bringing her hand up to the side of her head, feeling for blood. She found none, but there was a tender lump where her skull had connected with the tile.

The pain in her head though, was nothing compared to the pain in her heart. She squeezed her eyes shut at the thought of Draco's face, his blue lips, his blank stare.

At the fact that he'd sacrificed himself for her- again.

She pushed herself up to sit for a moment, shaking, unable to make her legs work.

What if Yaxley had gotten to her?

What would her life have been?

She would have been used and abused by the Death Eaters, passed around with no blonde haired, broken hero there to save her.

Draco had told her, he'd warned her.

She'd been so sure that she could change things for him, make things better, just by the mere fact that she loved him so much and by her presence, like she alone was enough to save him.

She thought back to his words,

'I'm meant for this life. I've been bred for it. Trained for it. I'm not surprised that I killed myself, I'm just shocked I even lasted that long. You shouldn't have done this. You should have carried on as you were. Far away from me.'

He'd tried to tell her, and she hadn't listened.

'You've made it so that it was all for nothing, Granger. What if it all goes wrong this time and I fail? What if something happens to you? At least before, I'd have died happy, because you were happy.'

Had he died happy this time? She thought? No, he'd died protecting her, terrified and desperate.

She'd done that to him.

She thought of Harry, he'd come looking for her. He'd seen the Death Eaters names, he'd known the danger he was walking into, and he'd come anyway.

He'd died for his bravery too.

She was a black widow, Hermione thought. Bringing them both to the astronomy tower and leaving them staring glassy eyed at the sky.

It was too much.

Hermione leant over and vomited onto the floor of the room she found herself in. When she was finally able to open her eyes again without seeing the dead boys, she blinked and looked around her.

She wasn't seventeen anymore, and neither were Draco and Harry.

They were all still alive.

It was 1994.

Draco was thirteen, they all were.

He had not yet taken the mark. There was still hope for him. The thought bloomed in her chest.

She had to get him away from his father, from his family.

She sat on the floor of the room she was in and wrapped her hands around her knees as she thought carefully of the timeline of Draco's memory.

She couldn't afford to make any mistakes this time.

The memory was shorter. Only lasting a few hours, not the full day she'd had last time.

She had to do what she needed to do quickly. She looked down at her body, shocked to see it after spending a day in her curvy, seventeen year old self, full of health and energy.

Eventually, she was strong enough to stand. She wobbled slightly but after a second or two she was stable enough to walk.

She looked at her backpack laying on the ground, the contents of it strewn across the floor. As she tucked the vials back inside, she thanked Merlin for the strength of magical glass. She used a quick 'Reducio' to shrink it down and slipped the bag into her pocket.

Hermione passed through the bathroom door, and her heart felt like it was going to burst as she immediately became aware of a scent in the air, a sweet, burnt caramel aroma- apples, fire.

Her eyes immediately went to the person sat in the center of the room. A blonde head, still in the style he used to wear, sleek and shiny. He looked so young, the angle of his jaw not yet as sharp, his shoulders not so broad.

His arm was in a sling and he was grimacing slightly as he moved over for Blaise to join him on the Slytherin Common Room couch.

He sat between Blaise and Theo, who were asking him about the Hippogriff.

He gave short, one word answers.

'Your father's coming to Hogwarts today then Malfoy?' Blaise asked.

'To make sure the job is done on the big chicken.'

The corner of Malfoy's mouth quirked up, but he didn't look like he found it particularly funny.

'Yes, he's coming for a meeting with Dumbledore. He wants to make sure everyone knows he won't put up with anyone hurting his precious son.'

The sarcasm dripped from his voice, Blaise seemed utterly unaware of it, but Theo gave him a sidelong glance.

'Malfoy, are you going to help us with this charms work then mate?' Blaise asked.

'I swear McGonagall hates me.'

Hermione smiled. Blaise and McGonagall had a great relationship now.

She watched Draco kneel next to Blaise at the small coffee table in the centre of the room and explain the spells to him patiently and confidently, demonstrating each charm with ease.

Theo scribbled notes on parchment balanced on his knee as Draco spoke. Draco looked horrified as he looked down at Theo's scribbled work.

His own was recorded in his neat cursive script, immaculately presented in a leather-bound notebook.

She watched as they dressed in their winter robes and left the common room.

All around them was talk of Buckbeak's imminent execution. As Draco walked, Slytherins were clambering, calling his name, congratulating him, and telling him that Buckbeak deserved it.

Hermione didn't see him respond.

She watched as he agreed to go and watch the execution from the hilltop, observing the instant arrogant swagger he affected, the change in him startling.

He stood with Goyle and Theodore Nott, looking down at Hagrid's cottage.

Draco didn't look glad, he looked angry.

His face was pale, his eyes hard. His jaw was clenched as he looked down.

She saw then, in the memory, herself, Harry and Ron heading down the hill towards him. He had seen them coming.

Her heart jumped to see Harry at her side, his green eyes dancing with life, his cheeks pink in the cold, as he strutted down the hill the way that only Harry could.

It was time.

She moved towards the angry, striding version of herself.

In that second before she slipped inside, she was eye to eye with thirteen-year-old Hermione. She could see the rage in her own eyes.

She walked directly into herself, feeling that warm bath sensation, her heart shuddering, and suddenly she felt dizzy as her vision flipped 180 degrees and now she was looking down the hill, walking straight towards Draco.

She reminded herself that she hated him. She'd come to slap him, not to wrap her arms around him and cry and tell him she loved him and how sorry she was- not yet.

Draco's eyes lit up as he saw her coming, he was in full arsehole Malfoy mode.

'Ah, come to see the show?' He goaded.

She made herself scream at him, call him all the horrible words she thought she would have at that age, remembering that thirteen-year-old Hermione didn't swear.

She forced venom into her voice, watched his eyes darken as she hissed into his face.

She moved close to him, so that their eyes met.

Draco, it's me, she wanted to say. She wanted to wrap her arms around him, feel his arms around her. She could hug him tight, she thought. He didn't have any Sectumsempra scars yet.

She brought her wand out and pressed it under his chin, trying not to breathe in the scent of him, not to look at his lips, the colour of his eyes, all the things she loved about him. Draco didn't fight back, he didn't do anything. He let her point her wand at him, and he just closed his eyes and waited.

Look at me, Draco, she silently willed, meet my eyes. But he didn't.

'Mione, leave him. He's not worth it,' Ron said at her side. She looked at Ron and her heart squeezed. Thirteen-year-old Ron had been so sweet. Harry moved to her other side and Hermione knew what she needed to do now. She didn't want to do it, but she needed to get Draco into that bathroom.

She brought her hand back, and she watched Draco's eyes widen as her hand came forward and connected with his skin with a hard thwack.

He didn't drop her eyes, his grey ones burned into hers and she saw the pain bloom there, but this was nothing for Draco. As he'd told her, he was an expert.

She felt the soft skin of his young face under her palm, and she wanted to cry as she thought about the last time she had touched his face, the older version of Draco kissing her, both of them full of passion, then, later, as he lay dead in her arms.

This had to work.

She felt a sob rise in her throat.

Draco's eyes narrowed, then he dropped his gaze and she allowed Harry and Ron to pull her away whilst Draco turned from his friends, and headed in the opposite direction.

She remembered the smile he had on his face.

Hermione followed Harry and Ron back into the castle, listening to them tell her how he deserved it, how he was a pompous arsehole, a suck up- a daddy's boy.

She closed her eyes briefly.

She waited a minute or two, then she made an excuse and hurried down the hall to the boy's bathroom.

She needed to get in before he locked the door.

She tiptoed in.

Draco was in the stall. She could see his feet as he stood. She pictured his hand on his cheek, his strange smile.

Hermione barely had time to duck before suddenly the toilet cubicle exploded outwards, the noise deafening, showering her with debris.

The main toilet door slammed shut. The door shuddering in the frame with the force.

Draco hadn't noticed her huddled with her hands over her head near to the door, he cast his eyes now to each sink and they shattered one by one.

Porcelain flew up in shards, the taps exploded, water shot several feet into the air, soaking him, his hair was plastered to his face, dripping into his eyes, his robes were stuck to him.

He turned his head, hands darting forwards, every mirror cracked, exploding violently, glass showered down on him, but he didn't seem to notice.

Everywhere Draco looked there was more destruction.

He stood in the middle, a thirteen-year-old boy, his eyes blank with rage and he screamed as he destroyed the bathroom.

Hermione was terrified. She hadn't known how scary it would be. How much she would feel his power vibrate around her. She sat shaking, praying it was almost over.

She couldn't help crying out when a mirror shattered close to her head, sending more glass down onto her huddled form.

Draco abruptly stopped.

'Granger?'

Hermione finally lifted her head from where she'd buried it in her knees. She felt glass and debris fall from her hair. She turned to look at him.

'Draco.'

He looked horrified. Once again, he was caught by her. He was frozen in place.

That same rabbit in the headlights.

She saw the minute he decided to bluster it out.

'Come to apologise, have you Granger?' He spat.

'Well. Don't bother. As you can see, I can destroy you, and your little friends if I so choose. I'm doing you a favour not killing you here and now.'

He stalked towards her. She saw the mask he tried to keep up. He stopped in front of her, she looked at his shiny black shoes, his black trousers, the hem of his Slytherin robes. He frowned as he looked down at her.

'What the hell are you doing on the floor of the boys bathroom Granger?' He asked.

As she looked up, Hermione thought she knew what Draco sometimes felt when he had a panic attack.

This was all too much, so soon after watching him die. She was so overwhelmed with love for him, but she was scared of him, and she was scared of killing him again.

‘Granger?’ He sounded uncomfortable now, made unsure by her silence.

He sighed, ‘Granger? Are you ok?’

She could finally look up at him, hearing a touch of the Draco she knew in his voice. She brought her eyes up and they looked at each other.

She knew that in this memory he was already doing all he could to protect her from his father. That he had a broken shoulder, for the second time, that he had been Crucioed recently by his father.

She looked into his eyes and she willed him to drop his mask. To let her in. She didn’t have much time.

‘Draco, I need to talk to you.’

‘Draco?’ he frowned. ‘Don’t you mean Malfoy?’

‘Draco. Can we please talk?’

He just stood, his hands by his sides and he looked around the wrecked bathroom, his eyes seeming to only now take in the destruction.

He looked back down to her, and he seemed to be battling with himself. But eventually, he shrugged and offered her his hand. She looked at his long fingers, his ring firmly in place, and she took the extended hand and let him pull her up like she was weightless.

‘You’re making me feel weird Granger.’ He said. ‘Why aren’t you saying anything?’

Hermione took a deep breath.

‘Draco- Malfoy. I need to tell you something, and you’re not going to want to listen to me, but I’ve got to tell you anyway.’

He didn’t say anything, and she remembered that despite what he showed her, he was still her Draco underneath. Of course he’d listen.

‘I know, about, about your life, with your father,’

He opened his mouth, his face instantly a bright scarlet red.

‘Stop. Don’t say anything. Just let me explain.’

He stopped speaking, his face flamed, he looked absolutely horrified.

‘I know, about everything you’ve done for me, Draco. About how hard you have been fighting to keep me safe from the Death Eaters. I can’t thank you enough.’

Draco didn't respond, he looked as though he was trying desperately to think of something he could say.

'I know it's really hard for you to talk about your family, but I know, Draco, what you've been through. Please don't deny it, we don't have time, please don't feel ashamed or like you've got to hide it from me.'

He opened his mouth again, but she cut him off. 'I need to tell you that, before you say anything. Please, please don't ever feel ashamed. It's not your fault, what he's done to you. It never has been.'

Draco began backing away from her, his eyes were shining, he'd gone ghostly pale. 'What the fuck is this?'

'Draco. Listen to me, please. Keeping your father's abuse a secret isn't right. I know that the way you act in school, it's not you. It's the way you want us all to see you, this awful, spiteful bully, but that's not going to work on me any more. I know that none of it is true, that's not who you are.'

Draco moved away further. He turned from her, as if he was going to bolt from the bathroom. But he didn't, instead he put his forehead to the wall. His hands fisted above his head, and he squeezed his eyes shut. Her words were hurting him, she knew. But she had to carry on.

'Granger, I need you to stop,' he said, his jaw was clenched tight. She could see he was trembling slightly.'

'I can't Draco, you try to hide it from everyone, but you're struggling. If you don't ask for help now, that's all you'll ever do. You'll die before you even get past twenty-five, alone. You won't get to experience the happiness you deserve.'

'Why are you doing this Granger?' He said, face still turned to the wall, his voice was anguished.

'Is this a game you and Potter dreamed up? Because it's not funny. My life isn't a joke.'

She stood up then on her wobbly legs and went towards him, he didn't turn to her, but she saw him tense. She gently prised him away from the wall, he met her eyes and the pain there took Hermione's breath away.

'It's not a joke Draco. You won't believe me, but I need you to know, I care about you a lot.'

He scoffed and his eyes began shining again, she felt tears spring into her own.

'Don't say shit like that Granger, it's cruel.'

'Draco, look at me. Please, I mean it.' She held onto his forearms to keep him in place, then let go and brought one hand up to gently clasp his chin in her fingers, and bring his face to hers, forcing him to give her eye contact.

'I've done something. A spell. I've used some very dark magic, its shown me what's coming. I need you to listen to me, I know it sounds unbelievable but I promise you I'm telling you the truth.'

'Oh Granger, please stop. This is ridiculous. I don't know what the fuck you're trying to do, but its not going to work.'

Hermione could sense she was losing him. He was beginning to look edgy, glancing at the door.

'What can I say to make you believe me?' Hermione needed to make him listen. They didn't have long before Theo would walk in. 'I know that your shoulder was broken before Buckbeak kicked you, I know that you have a picture of the Falmouth Falcons above your bed and that your favourite house elf is called Moddles' she was getting louder, she needed him to listen.

Draco's eyes practically bugged out of his head.

'You-' he couldn't finish. He was speechless.

'Draco, I know, we haven't been friends at school. I know we've both been awful to each other, but, I know more about you now. I know you aren't who I thought you were. I've seen the real you. I know what you do for people, that despite everything you've got a good heart. You don't need to settle for this life Draco. Please let me help you.'

She saw a small flash of hope spark in his eyes, he stilled, his fists bunched at his sides.

'I want to save you, from your father, from Voldemort, from yourself. Please Draco, will you come with me and tell Dumbledore what's going on? Just tell someone, so you aren't alone?'

He began shaking his head. 'You need to stop Granger. My life is perfectly fine, you need to leave, I don't want to do this.' Hermione looked at him, there was no anger there, he just looked tired. She had to keep trying.

'Draco, you can do this, you don't have to suffer in silence, you can escape from it. Please, just listen to me.' She was practically begging him, she didn't know how to get through to him.

Draco seemed to teeter on a precipice for a moment, she knew he wanted to believe her. He looked at Hermione and the agony on his young face was too much.

She stepped quickly towards him, and wrapped her arms around him. Draco tensed for a moment, and she thought he might push her away, but then he sagged against her, the years of holding himself up suddenly seeming to be too much.

He brought his arms up and around her now too, she could feel him trembling slightly, he was hesitant, he didn't trust her, even though she could feel that he wanted to.

'Granger, is this real?'

He looked at her, and there was fear in his eyes.

‘Because I don’t think I’ll survive it if it's not.’

His words sent a jolt through her. He'd said them before.

‘Will you do it? I’ll be there with you. Nothing needs to happen today. We just need to speak to Dumbledore, to see what can be done.’

Draco looked doubtful, but when she stood up on her tiptoes and gently planted a soft kiss on his lips he wavered. He looked into her eyes, holding her gaze with a burning intensity and she felt like he was begging her, without words, not to let him down.

‘I'm worried Granger. You don't know my father. He's not a good guy’ He laughed ruefully. ‘You don't realise how dangerous he is.’

‘Draco, Dumbledore is a powerful wizard. He'd keep you safe, he won't let your father hurt you, you've got to tell people. No-one can help you if they don't know what's happening.’

Draco put a hand up to fist anxiously through his hair, turning from her and pacing. ‘We don't have to do anything else today? Just tell him?’

‘Nothing else, just what you're comfortable with. I just want you to tell an adult Draco.’

He seemed to come to a decision, finally.

‘Ok. I'll come.’

‘You will?’

Draco smiled, it was a sad smile, resigned, ‘I’d probably do anything you asked me to do Granger.’

Hermione’s heart felt like it might burst. He’d agreed. He was going to let her help. She could have cried with relief.

She left him then, to put the bathroom back together, almost bumping into Theodore Nott on her way back down the corridor.

He noticed her as she passed, his blue eyes tracking her, she looked back at him keeping her gaze neutral, wishing that she could tell Theo how grateful she was to him, for being there for Draco.

Hermione looked up at the big clock on the wall, she didn’t have much time. She headed towards Dumbledore’s office. She was going to wait, out of sight down the corridor for Draco while he spoke to his father, then they were going to go in together and speak to Dumbledore.

She watched as Lucius appeared from the office, half out of the door. He had his back to her, speaking to Dumbledore. Where was Draco? He was supposed to be here by now.

She waited, heard Dumbledore's mumbled response, and looked down the corridor. Draco wasn't coming, where was he?

She watched as Lucius looked at his own watch, then stepped into the corridor, he was looking for Draco too. She was running out of time.

She swore silently, as Lucius left the place where he had spoken to Draco before. He looked furious as he marched down the opposite corridor and out of sight.

Draco hadn't come.

What had changed his mind? Was he too worried about his father?

What should she do?

Hermione didn't have much time. She knocked quickly on Dumbledore's office door.

'Come in,'

She entered, still looking around for Draco.

'Ah Miss Granger, come in. How can I help you?'

Hermione bit her lip, what was the best course of action? Should she tell Dumbledore without Draco?

She had to. Dumbledore had the power to stop Draco getting the Dark Mark, stop the abuse. She needed to tell him.

'Umm, I'm here to speak to you professor, about Draco Malfoy.'

She saw Dumbledore's eyes sharpen.

'Has he been giving you some trouble Miss Granger? I heard there was an incident this morning?'

'Oh, no. I'm not here about that.'

'Very well, what is it?'

Hermione sat, and took a deep breath. She told Dumbledore about Draco, about what she knew about him, the things that were happening at home, the things she knew about his future. Dumbledore didn't ask her how she knew, but his face became darker and more grave with each word she spoke. She saw how much her descriptions of Draco's suffering upset him.

'Does Mr Malfoy know that you are here? Miss Granger?'

'Yes, he does. He was supposed to be here, but he hasn't come. I don't know why, but professor I'm running out of time. I need to help him.'

‘What would you have me do, Miss Granger?’

But Hermione couldn’t tell him, the timeframe for the memory was ending. She felt herself begin to fade, her mouth was moving, but no sound was coming out.

She was leaving herself behind.

She had no more control over what happened in 1994.

Hermione realised she would have no idea if Dumbledore had listened to her, what he did with the information. She’d never know if Draco had ever turned up at his office. The memory was ending and the time was set.

She prayed that Draco was alive. That her message to Dumbledore had gotten through and he had taken some action to keep Draco from his dangerous household, from his terrible future.

Hermione felt the opposite sensation as she was thrown from her thirteen year old body, like she was suddenly immersed in cold water, she felt the shock, like jumping into an ice bath, and then everything went black.

June 2006

The first thing Hermione became aware of as she awoke was skull crushing pain of her headache, a searing, agonising pain that caused her to squeeze her eyes shut and drop to the floor.

Her eyes rolled back into her head, her jaw clenched and she bit her tongue, her teeth cutting a sharp slice at the tip.

Hermione lay on the floor and convulsed, blood poured from her nose, spreading out around her.

The seizure went on for several minutes. Hermione was partially aware of what was happening to her, but she was powerless to stop it.

She waited for it to be over, eventually laying there, sobbing and twitching, the pain in her head agonising as the last convulsions left her body.

As her mind slowly came back to her, she realised that she was in the new timeline, one that had been altered by her actions.

She was twenty five again, living in a new reality. She just had to hope that she had done enough.

‘Hermione,’ a whispered voice.

Was it Draco?

‘Hermione? Please answer me!’

No, it was female.

She tried hard to open her eyes, but they felt swollen shut. She forced them open, at least she thought they were open. It was dark.

Pitch black.

Where was she? The voice came again, 'Hermione?'
Ginny.

She finally recognised her voice, why had it taken her so long? She was disoriented from the memory, the darkness.

She struggled to sit up.

'Ginny?'

'Oh thank Merlin, you're ok!' Ginny exclaimed, 'I couldn't get you to answer. You were having another seizure. Are you alright?'

Another seizure?

'Yes, I'm ok. What's going on? Where are we?'

Ginny didn't respond. There was a sudden silence.

Hermione began trying to move around, she felt her way along the floor, feeling nothing but cold stone beneath her fingers, she moved her way up to the walls, more cold stone.

She suddenly became aware of a pressure at her ankle. She touched it, there was a sharp sting of pain, broken skin, and a cold ring of metal around her ankle. She was chained.

Hermione felt herself begin to panic.

'Ginny, where are we?'

She heard Ginny's voice come out of the darkness.

'Hermione, you're scaring me. What do you mean where are we? You know where we are.'

Hermione couldn't answer, what the hell had she gotten them into?

'Hermione, that seizure, it was bad. I'm worried. Maybe you need to ask the guards for help?'

Ginny coughed, it was a wet sound, Hermione thought from the damp.

They were in a cell, she realised. She and Ginny, chained by their ankles. Hermione felt her chest contract with fear.

She wanted to ask Ginny more, but she could sense that her questions had scared her already. She was supposed to know where they were, and why they were there.

She couldn't speak, her throat closed, and she felt herself begin to panic. How was she supposed to check on Draco if she was chained up in a cell?

She became aware of the cold, of the dank smell of the cell and Hermione felt hopeless as she was struck by another terrifying thought. Her backpack, Draco's memories, where were they?

She felt tears begin to roll down her cheeks, she'd made another mistake. This wasn't right.

Hermione suddenly had to cover her ears as an awful screeching sound filled the cell. She squeezed her eyes shut as a rectangle of light appeared in the darkness. The cell door opened.

She squinted up at the person opening the door, they were wearing black, steel toe capped boots, thick black trousers, and some sort of Dragon skin armour, like a fighter would wear, with a cape.

They were tall with broad shoulders, muscular and powerful looking. She watched as the person strode into the cell, and she could see them clearly.

'Blaise!' she exclaimed, and she moved towards him, feeling relief flood through her body.

Hermione didn't feel the spell until it hit her in the chest, 'Everte Statum!'

Blaise sent her flying back against the wall of the cell. She felt her ribs connect with the hard stone, her head crack against it and her teeth clack together.

She sat in a heap, trying to make sense of what was happening.

With the door open, she could make out Ginny, thin and dirty, cringing against the far wall of the cell, a red, raw ring around her ankle where she was shackled.

She was wearing nothing but dirty grey coloured robes, her red hair lank about her face. There was no light in Ginny's eyes at all. She looked absolutely terrified of Blaise.

Hermione looked up as Blaise stalked towards her. His kind, brown eyes were nowhere to be seen, instead they were cold, unblinking. His jaw was set, a spiteful, thin lipped expression on his face.

Hermione could barely look at him.

This couldn't be Blaise.

It couldn't be her best friend, the nonstop talking, warm hugging, chocolate pastry enthusiast.

It simply couldn't.

The man walking towards her looked stiff, his face cruel, like he'd never hugged anyone in his life.

Blaise crouched down next to her, his voice low and dangerous, 'Who the fuck do you think you are Mudblood? He said. 'To think you can address me, let alone call me by my first

name?’

Hermione tried to meet his eye, but she was too scared. She could never imagine her best friend acting this way. It made her feel dizzy, like she might vomit.

Blaise looked at her, his lip curled in disgust.

‘You’re covered in blood again Granger. Haven’t I told you to stop that. It’s disgusting. Now, get up. The Dark Lord wants to see you.’

Blaise hauled Hermione up by her arm, and she could see that she was also wearing the same dirty grey robes as Ginny.

Blaise aimed his wand at her shackle, and she felt the relief of it coming away from her skin, the sharp bite of it gone temporarily.

He yanked her firmly by the arm, and began dragging her down a dank, gloomy hallway, there were cells either side. She tried to get a glimpse inside.

Everyone was shackled, laying or sitting on the floor, the same grey robes. Hermione almost cried out when she recognised Dean Thomas in one cell, George Weasley in another, rocking slowly back and forth.

Blaise yanked her harder as she paused, trying to meet George’s eye.

Hermione was suddenly overcome with an awful feeling, a true sensation of utter sorrow, her vision filled with Draco’s face, rotating between the sight of him, hanging, purple and bloated in the Hogs Head, interspersed with images of him, diving in front of her at Hogwarts, his silver eyes losing their light, his lips blue-tinged. She began to shiver, a bone-deep cold taking over her.

It took her a minute to realise that there were Dementors at the end of the hallway, blocking the exit. In that moment Hermione understood, with horrifying clarity where she was.

She was in Azkaban.

She stumbled as Blaise pulled her, the hopelessness of her situation fully hitting her.

She looked at him out of the corner of her eye, taking in his features, usually so comforting and familiar to her. His face was now so alien, set in its immovable stony grimace.

Eventually he stopped. They were outside a heavy wooden door. Blaise knocked twice, a hard rap and Hermione heard footsteps from within. The door was suddenly yanked forcefully open and the person on the other side stepped out.

Hermione felt herself sway. She tipped forwards, causing Blaise to renew his hard grip on her arm and yank her upwards.

‘What the fuck are you doing Mudblood? He said viciously.

‘Where do you want her, Malfoy?’

Hermione let her eyes travel slowly up to Draco’s face.

He stood in front of her, wearing a matching expression of disgust to the one Blaise had had in the cell.

‘Why is she covered in blood, Zabini?’

‘I don’t know, it was all over the floor as well, not sure if she’s doing it to herself, thinking that if she’s dying or dead, then she can get out of here.’ Blaise laughed a cruel laugh and pushed her towards Draco, letting her stumble.

Neither man made any attempt to catch her.

‘No dying yet. The Dark Lord has questions for you,’ Draco drawled.

He looked down his nose at her, the sneer she remembered so well from school marring his features.

There was absolutely no sign in his eyes that to him, she was anything other than a dirty, blood-covered prisoner.

He didn’t hold her eye, nor avoid it, he simply looked at her with mild disgust, his nose wrinkled as though she smelled.

Looking at him made Hermione’s heart hurt.

She hadn’t seen Draco at this age whilst he’d been alive. She had only seen him when she was asleep and, even through his disgusted expression she could see how beautiful he was, that he was exactly as she’d seen him in her dreams.

He was exceptionally tall and broad, his shoulders squared, hard ridges of muscle visible through the fighting leathers he wore over a long sleeved black top, his cape falling down his back.

His hair was longer than she’d seen it before, unstyled and thick, falling over his eyes. He was not as pale as she remembered.

He looked like he spent a lot of time outside.

He was a slightly golden shade, his eyes looking more of an unnatural silver against the olive tone of his skin.

She looked at his lips, full and pink, rather than the bloodless white they had been when she’d last seen him at this age, during his autopsy.

She thought about how those lips had kissed her, worshipped her. He had loved her, spent his childhood protecting her, and now he looked through her.

Hermione thought back to the way he had ignored her during their failed attempt in the first memory, could he be doing that? Was he pretending?

Even through her fear Hermione's heart stuttered at the beauty of him, she inhaled the familiar scent, so unmistakably Draco that she felt her throat closing, tears threatening at the corner of her eyes. She wanted to reach out to him so badly.

Draco did not seem to be feeling the same way about her, the look of disdain on his face clear. He looked at her like she were vermin, like he didn't want to stand too close to her.

'I'll take it from here, Zabini.' he said.

Blaise nodded and Apparated away with a crack, leaving Hermione alone with Draco.

Draco let his eyes drift over her again. Hermione looked back at him, willing him to say something, to even give an indication that he knew her, but he simply flicked his wand at her, and suddenly she was encased in shackles again, this time on her wrists and ankles.

She cried out as they whipped around her, the metal links hitting her ankle bones then closing, cold and biting against her skin. He didn't even look at her, just used his wand to drag her forward as he opened the door to a room.

It appeared to be an office, the brass plate on the door labelled as 'Warden.'

'Move,' Draco pushed her violently into the room, stalking behind her and crowding her. He pushed her again as she stopped, until she fell forward, her knees cracking painfully onto the tiles.

'I've got the one you wanted, Father. Zabini thinks it's her. Potter's Mudblood. She was brought in by the snatchers yesterday,' he said, leaving Hermione on the ground and walking over to where Lucius Malfoy stood, next to a large oak desk, flanked by several Death Eaters, their masks pushed up off their faces.

Lucius looked at Hermione, a matching look of disdain on his face. He prowled slowly towards her, his mouth turned down in disgust. Hermione met his eyes, and a jolt ran through her, a physical reaction as she looked into the clear silver of Lucius's irises, so much like Draco's, but much, much colder. Hermione felt herself wither under his gaze.

'Gods, what are they doing to them here?' he asked, to nobody in particular, it seemed. 'She looks like she'll be dead before we can even do the extraction. Are you sure this is her? Hermione Granger? She doesn't look like I remember her.'

She shuddered as Lucius picked up a strand of her limp hair between his fingers, inspecting it, then dropped it, wrinkling his nose and then taking out a black silk handkerchief from his pocket and wiping his fingers on it.

'What do you think Draco?' Lucius asked, a cruel smile on his face. He lifted his eyebrows expectantly.

Hermione followed Draco as he walked across the room towards her, he moved like a cat, graceful, fluid. He looked her up and down, his eyes snagging on her hair for a moment before sliding away.

‘I’ve got no idea.’ He replied. ‘She looks familiar, but it’s been years. It’s hard to tell with all the blood.’ Draco waved a hand at her face.

Hermione wondered why Draco wasn’t telling his father that it was her, he was pretending not to recognise her. She saw Lucius smile again, a smug smile.

A nervous looking John Dawlish hovered nearby, cringing into the corner. Lucius looked to him now.

‘Dawlish, can you confirm one hundred percent that this prisoner is Hermione Granger? No one seems to be able to provide me with her records?’

Dawlish looked at Hermione, his eyes were terrified.
‘Yes, Lord Malfoy.’ He stuttered. ‘That is definitely her.’

‘I hope for your sake that you aren’t mistaken, Warden. If I find out that anyone here has lied to me, there will be consequences.’

Lucius looked pointedly at Draco, who moved from his position next to the door to come and stand close behind Dawlish.

She saw the utter terror cross Dawlish’s face as he watched his approach. He closed his eyes as Draco stood behind him and leant into his ear.

‘You know what happens when people disappoint us Dawlish.’ He hissed.

She watched as Dawlish’s knees appeared to fail him, he dropped and had to catch himself. Draco leaned in closer, bringing a hand up to stroke one fingertip down Dawlish’s face, trailing down to travel horizontally across his neck, miming a beheading motion. Hermione watched Dawlish’s face screw up in fear.

A dark stain appeared as Hermione watched, spreading across the front of Dawlish’s trousers. He had urinated himself, she realised.

‘Please, Mr Malfoy’ he begged. ‘It’s her. I promise, I wouldn’t lie to you.’

Draco looked up at her from his position behind Dawlish. His eyes met hers, and he smiled, a cruel light dancing there. Hermione felt her own knees weaken.

Lucius flicked his hand dismissively at Dawlish. ‘Leave us.’

Dawlish practically ran to the door, tripping over his feet in his haste to leave the room.

She watched as the corners of Lucius’ mouth curled up, his eyes glinting with satisfaction as he smiled at her, and it made her stomach instantly turn to liquid.

‘Finally,’ he breathed. ‘I’ve been looking for you Mudblood.’

‘Draco, I want her kept alive until we are ready for her. The other ingredients are being prepared so it should be only a matter of days. This is of the utmost importance, so I will

entrust her to you. Be sure to let the guards know that if anything should happen to her between now and then, it's you they will have to answer to.'

Draco smiled back at his father and nodded his head deferentially.

'Of course father. I'll have her moved to an isolation cell.' Draco replied.

'Good. You may take her,' Lucius said, 'I'll see you back at the manor later for a debrief. Your mother is expecting to see you, Draco.'

Draco nodded but didn't reply. He turned his cold, flat eyes to her and motioned for her to leave the room.

He walked behind her as he corralled her down the corridor back towards her cell, the chains on her ankles dragging, biting painfully into her skin.

She was aware of the closeness of him, of the fact that they were alone. This was her only chance.

She stopped walking.

Draco put out a hand and shoved her, hard. 'No-one said you could stop, Mudblood,' he said. Hermione took a deep breath and turned around.

'Draco, please,'

She saw his eyes widen, the anger flash across them before she was suddenly slammed against the wall.

The air left her body in a rush, she saw stars.

Draco grabbed hold of her face roughly, tilting her chin up. His own face was inches from hers, his eyes staring so that she could see every fleck of colour in them, but they weren't the eyes she knew.

They were cold, hate filled.

There was no sign of her Draco in them at all.

He loomed over her, his large body pressing her into the stone, his fingers digging painfully into her chin, his other palm flat against the wall.

'You DARE to address me, Mudblood.' He snarled. 'If my father hadn't ordered me specifically to keep you alive, they would be mopping your blood off this floor as we speak. You do not ever address me. Do you understand?'

Hermione felt a sob rise in her throat, she couldn't answer him, just nodded, unable to tear her eyes away from his.

She suddenly felt a sensation begin creeping over her, a sensation of not being able to breathe. It was like tendrils, snaking their way up her body, to wrap around her throat. She instantly began to panic, her chest expanding as she struggled to take a breath.

The tendrils snaked tighter, constricting her windpipe. Her eyes grew wide as she fought to breathe, her chest heaved against his.

She scrabbled, trying to bring her own hands up to her neck, but the chains didn't let her move her hands high enough, and there was nothing to grab.

Draco didn't let go of her, he watched her struggle, a sly smile appearing on his face.

He was doing it, she realised, he was strangling her.

He pushed his body closer to hers as she fought, pushing her harder against the wall. Hermione could feel her vision begin to white out.

Draco didn't drop her gaze, even as her eyelids fluttered and she struggled to stay conscious.

His smile widened, and he pressed harder against her, wedging a thigh between hers, his fingers on her face tightened further, his nails digging into her skin.

Hermione saw spots begin to float across her vision, felt herself beginning to float away from her body, and just before she finally slipped under, she felt the tendrils release her. She slumped onto the floor.

Draco quickly stepped away letting her fall, standing and looking down at her as she fought to stay conscious.

She saw him bring a hand up to sweep the hair that had fallen into his eyes off his face.

'For someone who was supposedly so intelligent, you don't learn very quickly do you. He drawled and in a flash he was kneeling next to her.

'You are scum' He hissed. 'You are alive for one purpose. For what we can get from you, take from you. And once we've got it, you'll be useless. We will throw you away like the trash that you are Mudblood.'

Hermione felt the tears track their way down her face. Don't you remember? She wanted to ask him, don't you remember me, everything you did for me?

But she didn't, she couldn't speak.

They were alone, his father wasn't around. There was no need for him to keep up a pretence, this was who he was.

He grabbed her arm and hauled her up off the floor, pushing her the final steps towards her cell. She barely registered him speaking to the guards, telling them to prepare her an isolation cell. Telling them of her importance, threatening them.

The two guards snapped to attention, nodding and agreeing, sending her nervous glances.

‘Of course General Malfoy. What should we do if she has another seizure? Or her nose starts bleeding again?’

‘Have me summoned immediately and get the mediwizards here. We need her kept alive, just until my father can get what he needs from her, and hurry up with that isolation room.’

Draco waited while they unlocked the door and pushed her roughly into the cell. She ran towards Ginny, sobbing with relief and huddled next to her on the floor. Ginny’s fingers came up to link with hers, gripping tightly between them.

‘I have to return to the manor but I will be back later.’ Draco said. He sent her a final disgusted glance. ‘And clean her up. She’s foul.’

The door slammed, and she heard his footsteps echo away. Only then did Hermione let herself cry.

She clung to Ginny as the huge wracking sobs left her body. Her terror and devastation ripping from her sore throat. Ginny said nothing, just smoothed her hair and rubbed her back, Hermione could hear her own soft sobs.

‘Hermione, Ginny sobbed. ‘I’m so glad you’re here. I couldn’t believe it was actually you when they brought you in. Where have you been?’

Hermione didn’t know, where had she been? She didn’t know how the new timeline worked. She could only remember her own memories, her first ones.

‘What’s happening Ginny?’ she whispered. ‘Why are we here? I think- the seizures- I can’t remember.’

Ginny was silent for a moment, her grip on Hermione’s fingers tightened.

‘You really don’t know?’ she whispered.

‘No, please Ginny. The seizures, they affect my memory. Please, just tell me.’

‘Oh Hermione,’ Ginny cried. Hermione waited again as Ginny sobbed for a moment.

‘Voldemort is dead.’ She said eventually. ‘Killed by Lucius Malfoy so that he could take power. The Malfoy family, they run everything, the ministry, the prisons. Lucius ordered Hogwarts to be shut down. He hated it ever since, you know- what happened with Dumbledore.

He’s taken it over- instated his own teachers, own curriculum. Purebloods only.’

Hermione listened, her eyes widening in horror.

‘He’s had anyone who doesn’t like his way killed, most of the Muggleborns or Halfbloods are either dead or kept here, used for whatever sick thing he does with people in the medical wing.

His Death Eaters have killed most of the Order. I hear them speaking sometimes, outside the cell. They go on raids. Missions to take out anyone who goes against Lucius.

We thought that Voldemort was bad, but Lucius Malfoy is a million times worse, Hermione. Him and his evil son.'

'Draco-' Hermione said.

'Draco.' Ginny spat, and her hatred was palpable.

'What happened with Dumbledore? She asked. 'Why does Lucius hate Hogwarts so much.'

'Oh, no. You can't remember that either? Hermione, it was a huge thing back then.' Ginny's voice was filled with worry.

'Dumbledore went to the manor and basically accused Lucius of mistreating Draco. Threatened to get the ministry involved or something.

Lucius took Draco out of Hogwarts and had him homeschooled, so that he could train him up. People say that he obliterated him, so he didn't remember anything about school.

He doesn't recognise any of us. He's basically just his father's trained security dog. Dumbledore tried for years to get to Lucius, but he was protected by Voldemort. Dumbledore was the first one to go when Malfoy took power.'

Hermione felt the horror of what Ginny was saying steal over her.

She was the one who had done this.

Again.

Draco was acting like he didn't recognise her, because he didn't. He had no idea who she was.

She felt her stomach contract and she was sure she'd have vomited if there was anything in her stomach.

'Ginny, where is everyone? Harry, Ron? Your family?'

'Ron's dead.' Ginny said, her voice flat. 'Harry, captured, taken somewhere with some of the other stronger prisoners. I don't know where.'

'Oh no, oh Ginny.' Hermione couldn't believe what Ginny was telling her.

'I don't know about my parents. We were taken during a raid, we were trying to enter Hogwarts, to take back control of it. Snape was leading the attack. He was killed and we were brought here, me and George, a few weeks ago. I don't know about anyone else.'

Ginny's voice broke. 'It's been so awful Hermione. We've been looking for you. You and Harry. You really don't know where you've been?'

‘No.’ Hermione answered. She couldn’t say anything else, she couldn’t explain to Ginny that this was all her fault.

‘What are they doing on the medical wing?’ She asked eventually.

‘I don’t know, exactly.’ Ginny said. ‘It’s some sort of procedure. They take part of your magic from you. Use it to make a stone. They are very valuable.

Lucius has been dealing in them for years apparently, on the black market. It’s part of how they made the Malfoy millions.’

Hermione’s heart stopped.

‘Essentiaspis Magicae.’

‘Yes, I think that’s what they’re called.’ Ginny replied. ‘He’s been taking witches and wizards for years. Making the stones and selling them. The bastard.’

‘What happens to the people he uses to make them?’ Hermione asked, a cold fear stealing over her.

‘No idea. I don’t think they get brought back here.’

Hermione couldn’t speak. Her mind raced. Was Lucius planning to use her to make a stone?

She thought about what Casalia had said, about how valuable her stone would be. Was that what he had wanted all these years?

Could you use the same person to make two stones? What would happen to her if he did?

Hermione felt any hope she had fade. She had kept Draco alive, but left him wide open to his father’s clutches.

His father had him brainwashed.

He didn’t know her, let alone know that he loved her. She had no idea where the memory vials were or if they still even existed, her notebooks, the cufflink.

She was going to die, possibly even at Draco’s hands, and he’d never know that they had loved each other.

That he had died for her, once, that he had sacrificed so much for her, and she for him.

Hermione thought back to what Ginny had told her, of the chaos she had unleashed by her simple action. One she had done simply to help Draco.

Every time she had tried to help him, she had made things worse, and now she was going to pay for it.

She and Ginny sat then, their heads on each-others shoulders, fingers linked until the guards opened the door.

One marched in, shining his wand into their faces. He was short, with greasy looking black hair and a pinched, nasty looking face.

“Which one of you is Granger?”

Hermione struggled to her feet.

‘Get here. The Commander wants you cleaned up. You’re going to isolation.’

No.

Hermione turned, tried to run back to Ginny, but she tripped as the shackles caught on her feet. She fell, reaching towards Ginny as Ginny scrambled towards her.

‘Get back!’ the guard shouted, shooting a hex at Ginny, who shrieked and scooted back into a corner.

The guard stormed forward and grabbed Hermione by her hair, twisting his fingers and pulling it tight.

He turned and marched her out of the cell.

‘Ginny! I’m sorry!’ Hermione screamed as he dragged her, earning herself a punch to her stomach. She bent over in agony feeling all the air leave her at once.

The guard marched her down the corridor, back past the dementors, Hermione’s feet dragged, she couldn’t hold herself up. It was too much.

He pushed her into a damp, brightly lit room, the walls were tiled, a dirty grey porcelain, the grout brown with age. The tiled floor filthy with blood, dirt and hair. There were several shower heads mounted on the wall.

‘Strip.’ He commanded.

‘Oh, please no.’ Hermione begged him. ‘Please don’t.’ The guard raised his wand, stepping menacingly towards her.

Hermione stepped back, almost slipping on the grime covering the floor. She sobbed quietly as she lifted her dirty robes up, and over her head. She wasn’t wearing a bra, just a pair of thin cotton underwear. The guard watched her, licking his lips appreciatively. Hermione felt bile rise in her throat.

‘And those.’ He said, raking his eyes over her and smiling, a foul, yellow toothed smile.

Hermione’s hands trembled as she lowered her underwear.

‘Very nice.’ The guard said. ‘Hermione cringed as he stepped closer, she could smell his body odor, his dirty black hair, the foul smell of the unwashed.’

She could feel herself beginning to sway again. She didn't know when she had last eaten or drunk anything. Her fingers began to tingle.

'Let's get you clean first,' he said. 'Then we can have some fun. Over there'. He pointed towards the showers.

Hermione walked and stood underneath one of the rusty shower heads, she cried out as she was suddenly doused in freezing cold water that gushed from above. She heard the guard laugh.

He threw her a grimy bar of soap.

'Get yourself nice and clean Mudblood.' He said.

Hermione stood and trembled under the cold stream as she rubbed the soap over her body.

She tried not to look at the guard, rubbing himself through his uniform as he watched her.

She shook with a mixture of cold and fear until he eventually turned the faucet off with a flick of his wand.

'Much better.' He said. Hermione stayed as she was, trying to cover herself with her hands as the guard approached.

'Let's see what makes you so special.' He grunted, still rubbing himself. Hermione cringed back against the wall.

'Please-' she croaked out. She was terrified. She felt herself begin to float again, like she had when Draco had choked her against the wall.

The black spots appeared, her legs turned to jelly.

She was going to faint.

The guard came closer, she could smell his breath now too, foul and rotten as he breathed heavily, his beady brown eyes fixed on her chest. She should push him away, run, do something, but she couldn't.

She was drifting away, up and out of her body, the fear making her sluggish. She saw his face looming next to hers, she slumped against the wall, cringing in on herself.

Hermione didn't hear a spell, there was no flash of light.

But the guard suddenly dropped, down to the ground, limp.

He was dead.

Hermione struggled to stop herself dropping too, she was swimming, her consciousness trying hard to pull her down, away from what she was experiencing.

She looked up, towards the door, to the shape emerging there and moving towards her. She couldn't focus, couldn't breathe.

The shape moved closer, and just before she lost consciousness she realised who it was, looking down on her, silver eyes fixed on her face.

Draco.

Hermione gratefully fell down into the blackness.

I Know You

Chapter Notes

I couldn't leave them hanging after the last chapter! It was too much! So I'm just going to leave this one here, a day early and have a little rest from my writing marathon for a day or two!

Thank you all for reading along and staying with me, even when I keep torturing these poor souls! Hopefully this one isn't quite so traumatic!

Hermione - June 2006

Hermione rose out of the darkness reluctantly.

She felt the near constant pain in her head return, the sharpness of the cold air on the exposed parts of her skin, her legs and arms.

She slowly became aware of the feeling of being jostled slightly and realised that she was being carried.

She tried to force her mind to remember where she was and what was happening, but thinking too much made her head hurt.

As she rose further into consciousness it all came back to her in a rush, hitting her with dizzying speed. Azkaban, Ginny, Lucius Malfoy, the shower, the guard, Draco.

Draco.

She forced her eyes to open, blinking against the light as she looked up.

He was carrying her.

He wasn't looking down at her so he hadn't noticed she was awake. Hermione looked up, she looked at the shape of his sharp jaw, the column of his throat, the silver clasp of the cloak around his neck and then her eyes fell to the blonde hair curling slightly around his ears, it was so much longer than she'd ever seen it.

She could feel the steel of his arms around her, the firmness of his body against hers as he carried her.

He wandlessly pushed the heavy prison doors open, making his way determinedly wherever he was going.

She didn't know why Draco was carrying her, and for that moment she didn't care.

She allowed herself the brief moment to just give in, to close her eyes and breathe in the scent of him, to soak up the warmth of his body heat.

She didn't want to think about what had almost happened in the shower room, about what might be happening to her right now, if Draco hadn't come. She felt goosebumps break out on her skin, as the image of the guards face loomed in her mind.

She wanted to turn and bury her face in Draco's chest, but she didn't want him to know she was awake incase he put her down.

As he pushed through a second set of doors, she heard approaching footsteps, heels clicking on the tiles.

'General Malfoy- what can I do?'

'Take her. She's been unconscious for the past five minutes.' He said, his chest rumbling against her ear with his words.

'It appears that she's losing significant amounts of blood at regular intervals, the guards believe she has been having seizures.'

'Ok, put her here in this bed. Do you know how long this has been happening?'

'No, this prisoner was only processed yesterday. It's apparently happened several times since then. Last night, this morning, and another just now.'

Hermione's eyes flashed open. She could see it now, blood, down his front, and on her arms, she was wrapped in some sort of blanket, or maybe it was a towel? She could see the blood there too.

'Name?'

'Hermione Granger. She is a high priority prisoner. Ensure she receives the highest level of care. Inform me if she needs more than you can handle here. My father will require her to be ready to leave within three to four days maximum.'

'Of course General.'

Hermione felt Draco walk a few further steps, and set her down, felt the hard mattress under her bare legs, the scratchiness of the towel wrapped around her. She wished she was back in his arms, where it was warm and comfortable.

She reluctantly opened her eyes.

Draco's arms may have been warm, but his eyes were not. He glared down at her on the bed, his face a picture of cold distain, nothing but resentment in his expression.

'Let me know if there are any significant changes in her condition.' He said, his voice clipped, 'If not, I will return tomorrow. Ensure there are guards at her bed, and feed her up, she looks half starved.'

A second later, Hermione heard the crack of Apparition, and he was gone.

She lay on the bed and watched as the guards approached and shackled her to the bed, then settled themselves on chairs, their backs to her, talking in low voices. They were wary of her, she realised. They must know what had happened to the other guard.

She was important to the Malfoys, so she was off limits.

She lifted her hands, trying to get comfortable, the shackles digging in where her skin was already raw.

Over the next two days, the healers came and went, waving their wands over her at intervals and discussing what they saw. They fed her various potions, but it was basic healing at best. They never spoke to her and were rough, uncaring.

This was a prison medical ward, not a hospital, Hermione reminded herself. She was in Azkaban not Madame Pomfrey's wing at Hogwarts.

Hermione was a prisoner, and no one here cared for her.

She had never felt so alone, or so hopeless.

Draco came, three times over the course of the two days. He spoke to the healers, ensured that she hadn't had another seizure and asked them questions about the possible cause. The general consensus was that it was most likely a curse. The seizures were either a direct, or indirect result of the curse, and that it would either get better on its own, or that she would need treatment at a proper hospital, with more experienced healers.

He looked at her as the healers spoke, his eyes moving over her. He seemed to always come back to her hair. His eyes would snag on it momentarily, then he'd see her looking at him and his eyes would harden before flicking away.

Hermione saw how terrified everyone was of him. He was powerful, as he always had been but this Draco didn't keep it hidden.

He flaunted it.

He used it.

Hermione wondered whether Lucius was proud. Draco was exactly as he would have wanted him, how he had made him.

Hogwarts had been the only thing keeping Draco somewhat safe, she realised, Snape was there, looking over him, keeping under the radar but still there.

He had his friends, they loved him, they all had his back. She hadn't helped him, she'd destroyed him.

What she had done by speaking to Dumbledore was just to drop him directly into the jaws of the beast.

This version of Draco was simply what the beast had chewed up and spat out.

After the second day the healers informed him that she hadn't had any more seizures and that there was nothing they could do for her. They had rehydrated her, given her plenty of blood replenishing potions and Pepper-Up, and she was ready to go.

She lay and listened to them talk about her and she pretended to sleep as she felt the terror seep into her veins, if she was well enough, that meant that they would be performing the procedure on her in the coming days.

They would be taking more of her magic, her essence, to make the stone. She didn't know what the consequence of it would be, whether she'd even survive it.

She realised belatedly that she should have asked more questions before going ahead the first time.

She'd gone in blindly, so desperate to get to Draco that she had done the exact opposite of what Hermione Granger would have usually done. She'd been irrational.

She was terrified of the thought of going through the extraction procedure. She hadn't forgotten the trauma of the first time. She already felt so weak, so much *less* since the last time. She knew she had given something important of herself away.

She couldn't tell quite what it was, but there was a space inside her, a feeling of being unfinished.

'I'll return for her in an hour.' Draco's drawl interrupted her thoughts. 'I've got business to deal with first.'

She lay on the bed and waited for him to return while her mind turned over her options.

They were extremely limited.

She could tell them she had already made a stone, she thought. It may stop them from doing the procedure, but they might just kill her there and then if they had no use for her.

Could she convince them she had another use, maybe as a double agent, like Snape? She could possibly find a way to stay alive long enough to get out.

There was a chance that the Order were still active and defending themselves against Lucius Malfoy's Death Eaters.

She realised that she was desperate, that her brain was futilely trying to convince her that there was hope, when realistically there was none.

She was in Azkaban, half the people she knew were dead or captured. No one would care about her. She was just another prisoner, someone to be utilised and then thrown away. Draco had told her that himself.

She almost laughed at the irony as she thought back to Draco's words. He had felt like that, once. That he only had one purpose, that he only existed to be used. She knew now how much of a hopeless feeling that truly was.

She still kept her eyes resolutely shut as she heard the crack of Apparition an hour later and Draco's footsteps approached the bed. He seemed to stand there for a while not doing anything.

She waited, eyes closed, trying to keep her breathing even.

He sighed and then she heard him click his fingers several times, 'Mudblood, up. We're going.' He said.

She let her eyes open, he stood, looming over the bed, looking down at her, his face serious.

He was in his fighting leathers again. His cape clasped at his neck, the hood down. He was wearing black leather gloves which he began removing a finger at a time, tucking them into his back pocket. His hair was windswept, his cheeks pink, he still carried the chill of outside with him.

She sat up, feeling the headache instantly return, although not as bad as it had been. She swung her legs around and stood. The world tipped and she fell forward.

Draco's arms shot out and he righted her. Standing her back on her feet. She looked up at him in surprise, but he had already turned, moving towards the door.

'Move,' he commanded.

She walked and he waited for her to catch up to him before moving out into the corridor again. He didn't chain her this time. He didn't speak to her, didn't look at her.

They went through several sets of doors, passing the cells. She recognised more of her friends, Cho Chang, Oliver Wood, they all sat, chained, their eyes haunted as they watched her pass. They all seemed to cringe back as Draco strode through the blocks, he didn't appear to notice.

Hermione saw the Dementors circling above them, at the top level of the prison. She noticed that they moved away as Draco passed too, almost like they were repelled from him. She'd never seen them do that before.

He seemed to have a forcefield around him, pushing everyone and everything away, the fear of him a weapon in itself.

Eventually they came to the isolation cells.

Draco waited while the guards unlocked the cell and then stood at the door, motioning for her to go inside.

Hermione felt herself tremble as she looked into the pitch black room. She could see nothing at all, not even her hand in front of her face.

'In, Mudblood- Now.' He ordered. 'There's nothing in there you need to be scared of, it's what's out here you should be more worried about.'

When Hermione still hesitated she heard him sigh again before she felt a hand on her back and she went sprawling in. The door slammed shut, sealing her away from the world.

The cell was terrifying. She could hear nothing, see nothing. It was disorienting, she fell several times, tipping forward as she felt for the corner. She wanted to get there, to feel something solid on either side of her to stop her slipping sideways, to combat the awful feeling of losing all her senses. She felt drunk.

She ran her hands along the walls until she came to the corner of the cell and she slid down the wall, curling in on herself and hugging her knees. She stared blindly out into the darkness. There was nothing. It was just her, alone in the silence. Nothing to do, but wait and think.

Hermione felt like her brain was failing her. She had always been able to see things from a hundred different angles. She could remember facts, spells, charms and potion recipes, she could plan and strategise. Her mind had always been the thing that set her apart, both in school and as an Auror, but it just wasn't working the way she needed it to.

She realised that none of her recent decisions had been thought through properly.

She'd been blinded by love, by her desperation to help Draco. Since the moment she decided she'd go back and help him she'd made bad decision after bad decision. She hadn't thought about the consequences, hadn't considered the 'what if's' and now it was too late.

For both her and Draco.

She was probably going to die, here in Azkaban and his life was still not his own. He was his father's marionette, just a puppet, even if, she thought sadly, he seemed as though he enjoyed hurting people.

She wondered how much he remembered about his own life. Had Lucius Obliviated Draco's memories of his childhood too? Did he know what his life had been? What Lucius had done to him?

He appeared totally loyal to his father, their relationship looked like that of father and son- a united team.

Hermione thought back to what she had learned at Hogwarts. It was possible to use a spell to break an Obviate charm, but there were severe consequences for the person's mind, there would be irreparable damage mentally and physically, especially if the charm had been in place a long time. Hermione wondered how long it had been for Draco. Twelve years?

It was too long.

Hermione wanted to scream and rage with the despair she felt. All she had wanted to do was help him, she had felt like he'd left those memories for a reason.

She had thought that they were meant to be together.

But she hadn't done what she was supposed to do. She'd failed them both and killed or imprisoned half of her friends.

She thought of Ron and felt a fresh pain in her chest.

Hermione felt exhausted by the hopelessness of it all.

She was ready to just give up.

She lay down onto her side, feeling the tears run down her face, dripping into her hair, and she waited for them to come for her. She couldn't fight it, so she was just going to let it happen.

Dying would be a relief, an escape from the relentless guilt and misery.

Eventually Hermione thought she must have fallen asleep. It was hard to tell, in the cell, if she was awake or asleep. The cell was so dark, so quiet.

She lay on the floor and shivered, blinking into the darkness.

Eventually she realised that she must be asleep because she could smell bonfires, apples, the spicy, manly smell that she only associated with one person.

She was hallucinating, she thought. Her mind was playing tricks on her. She inhaled deeply, savouring the scent of what she wanted most in the world, letting it wrap around her and comfort her, taking away her loneliness with the images it conjured.

She let herself drift down into her memories and back to the relief of sleep.

When she woke again a few hours later the scent was gone, all she could smell now was the dank dampness of the cell.

Hermione wasn't sure how long she lay in the cell. There was no way of knowing.

When she did sleep, she dreamed of Draco, of Harry, of her old life, comfortable in Ron and Harry's house, eating home cooked food, working with Blaise on a case, sat together, heads bent over the files, sharing a chocolate pastry.

She felt like she was losing her mind, torturing herself with thoughts of what she'd sacrificed. She almost wanted the Death Eaters to just come for her. To get it over with so she could stop thinking, stop counting her regrets.

When she awakened again, she wasn't sure how much later, she could smell it again, the scent had entered into her consciousness and woken her.

She breathed deeply, savouring the memories it conjured.

Suddenly, there was a noise in the dark.

A scraping sound.

Hermione's breath caught in her throat. She scrabbled up to sitting, and pushed herself back into the corner. Her heart pounding frantically.

Something was in the room with her.

She waited, frozen. Feeling her blood pump through her veins, she could hear her own heart beat. She strained her ears and her eyes. It was so terribly dark. She couldn't make out anything at all.

She almost screamed when the noise came again.

Whatever it was, it was across the room from her. She began edging her way slowly across the wall, her back pressed against the stone. She thought if she could maybe get to the door and bang loudly enough the guards might come.

She heard it then, a soft 'Lumos'.

The cell suddenly flared with a dim light.

Hermione closed her eyes against the brightness after so long, and when she opened them, she lost every chance of catching her breath.

Draco was sat, opposite her in the cell.

His back was against the wall, his long legs out in front of him. He was wearing his usual fighting attire, minus his hooded cloak.

One hand held his wand up, the light from it casting his face into relief in the shadows. His hair hung over his eyes again, but she could see the intensity in them regardless.

He was staring at her.

She wondered how long he'd been there in the dark. The thought made her shiver. This was not the same person who had watched her sleep many years before.

Draco said nothing, he just looked at her.

Hermione couldn't move. She couldn't breathe, she was paralysed with fear, his facial expression was intense, questioning.

What did he want?

Draco's eyes moved over her, he started at her feet and let his eyes travel up and over her, over the grubby grey robes she wore, the raw red wounds on her ankle and wrist, her neck, her face.

He seemed to be taking in every detail, like she was a mystery he needed to solve.

His gaze eventually settled on her hair. He seemed to study it, his eyes moving over it for several painfully long seconds before he came back to meet her eyes.

Hermione was frozen under his gaze. She felt like she was an animal being hunted by a dangerous predator, waiting for it to pounce.

‘I know you.’

His words made her jump. She’d been so focused on watching him, she was tensed, ready to defend herself.

‘What?’

‘I know you. I’ve never seen you before, until you were brought in. But I feel like I know you and it’s driving me insane.’

Hermione didn’t know how to answer him. Should she tell him the truth?

Draco stood up. He began pacing.

‘I know that you are Hermione Granger, that you went to Hogwarts. Top of your class, friends with Potter. Those things I know, I’ve been told. But there’s something else about you. It’s like it’s there in my head, but I can’t get to it.’

Hermione opened her mouth, and closed it again. She didn’t know what the best thing was to do. She’d made so many mistakes so far.

He stopped pacing and just stood still, looking at her. His hand up in his hair, tugging at the strands at the front. She knew she needed to speak, but she couldn’t.

Draco stood a moment more and then turned, opened the cell door and left.

Hermione breathed out all the air she’d been holding in, one large exhale. She brought her hands up to her face, and she let out a loud sob.

He remembered her.

He hated her, but he remembered her, or at least he remembered the idea of her.

She had been so scared whilst he was there, so afraid of saying the wrong thing.

She needed to remember that this version of Draco hadn’t had any external influences, he was a product of the Malfoy household only, she knew what that was like, and therefore she couldn’t guarantee he was the same person underneath. She couldn’t let her guard down, she would need to be ready if he came again.

He did come again.

She wasn’t sure how long it had been before she heard the dull crack, possibly hours, maybe longer. She knew immediately, that it was him that had Apparated into her cell. Not least for the fact that she doubted anyone else had the clearance to Apparate in and out of Azkaban at will.

She’d had a plan, for what she might say to him. But when his face appeared, illuminated by his wand, he looked angry, and she lost all her words.

He stood, in the middle of the cell where he had Apparated, and he just stared at her. She stared back, feeling her breath come short.

Her chest constricted, and she felt a cold sweat spring up on her brow, despite the damp chill of the cell.

To have his full attention was thrilling and terrifying in equal measure. She couldn't stop thinking about the corridor, where he had choked her, seemingly for fun.

'Are they feeding you?' He asked.

'No, not yet.'

He was silent for a moment.

'For fucks sake.' His voice was low, angry.

She had a feeling someone was going to be regretting their life decisions later that day.

'I'll have food sent to your cell. You must eat it.' He said.

She nodded, before she realised he probably couldn't see her, stood back in the shadows.

She stepped towards him, before she even realised what she'd done.

Draco stepped back.

She realised that he thought she was dirty, that her blood was unclean. He'd called her Mudblood, he'd looked at her with disgust. He didn't want to be close to her.

So why did he keep coming?

Why wouldn't he stop looking at her?

She wished he'd speak. These times stood in the dark with him, waiting for him to say something were too much. She positively trembled with anxious anticipation, the tension radiating from him making her feel light headed.

When he eventually Apparated away she burst into tears.

When was this going to end? When were they just going to come for her?

Food began appearing.

She would hear a pop, across the room in the dark, and then she would begin to smell something delicious and follow her nose, crawling across the floor of the cell until she found the plate and devoured the meal that had been left for her, gulping down the water and letting it strengthen her, sharpen her mind.

She hadn't realised how hungry she had been. She couldn't remember when she had eaten her last meal.

The next time Draco came, she felt stronger.

She was waiting for him.

He Apparated in, this time appearing much closer to her.

She stayed where she was, she didn't move back from him.

He didn't cast a Lumos, this time. So she couldn't see him. She could smell him, and she could sense him, but she couldn't see him.

She wanted to say his name, '*Draco*', '*Malfoy*', either. To ask him what he was doing. But he'd told her not to address him and she didn't know if that still stood.

She could hear him, breathing in the dark. It made her think of the first memory she had changed, of sweet seventeen year old Draco, sat on the end of her bed, and it made her heart hurt.

She felt, rather than heard him move closer to her.

'Your hair,' he said. His deep voice reverberating in the dark.

He was close, she could feel him. She began trembling slightly, she couldn't help it.

'I remember your hair,' he said, and she felt him getting closer still.

'You do?'

'Yes. I've been thinking about it, driving myself fucking insane. Trying to think about how I know you. I think it's your hair.'

His last words were close to her ear. She closed her eyes, she could feel him, inches from her in the dark.

She didn't know which emotion was coursing through her body, setting her nerve endings on fire. It was a mixture of fear, anticipation and, despite everything she had seen of him- desire.

She wanted him to come closer.

The knowledge of the danger of him, the thought that he could kill her just as likely as he could kiss her, was making her legs go weak.

The knowledge that he was his father's General, that he had murdered countless people, no doubt some that she had cared about, people that had been her friends, should have been enough to kill that ember of want, to fill her with hatred for him.

But it didn't.

She couldn't separate this man from the one she loved, and her body certainly couldn't differentiate.

So, she stood and waited.

She jolted when she suddenly felt his hand brush softly against her face.

She began shaking further, trembling as the hand moved to her hair. She felt him run a lock of her hair through his fingers, letting it slide between his finger and thumb, the way his father had, but her body's response to Draco couldn't be further from the revulsion she had felt for Lucius Malfoy.

She let out a shuddering breath.

'I think, I do know you,' Draco said, his voice almost a purr into her ear.

'Do I know you, Granger?'

He was right up against her now, his face in her hair, the faintest press of his body against hers.

'Yes,' her voice came out a whisper.

Draco's exhale ghosted over the sensitive spot just behind her ear. She closed her eyes and felt an uncomfortable heat bloom low in her belly. She clenched her legs together.

She wondered at the way he made her feel, even in the situation they were in. Even when she knew who he was now, she was still weak for him.

His hand came up, and he swept her hair away from her neck, flipping it over her other shoulder.

Their bodies were just touching. Hermione's nipples were stiff against the rough material of her robes, she could feel Draco against her, the hard muscle of his chest, the equally hard tent in his trousers, as he lowered his lips to her neck.

She let out an involuntarily sigh, which sounded a lot like a moan.

Draco kissed his way slowly from her collarbone, up the column of her neck, he didn't come any closer, only just allowing the rest of their bodies to brush lightly against each other, but he kept his lips on her, kissing up her jaw, his breath tickling her skin, making goosebumps rise all over her.

Once he got to her face, he stopped, his own lips millimeters from hers.

She felt his words against her mouth as he said them, and they made her blood run cold.

'Are you a spy Granger?'

She stepped back violently from him, and he suddenly grabbed hold of her, grabbed her wrists and pushed her back, so that she was pressed against the stone of the cell wall.

Once again she was pinned by him.

This time he pushed his body hard against her, she felt him, all of him, as he held both her wrists in one hand caged to the wall. Her breath came fast, her heart pounding against his chest.

His voice was hoarse in her ear, his breath hot on her skin.

‘Because that’s the only explanation I’ve been able to come up with, Granger,’ he whispered, the side of his face pressing into hers.

‘I can’t think of another fucking way I could possibly know what you sound like, what you smell like, what you fucking taste like, if you weren’t a spy.

I’ve driven myself mad. Trying to figure out how I know you, and it’s the only one that makes sense. You’ve put a spell on me, you’re tricking me into wanting you, so that I tell you things about me, about my father. What are you, an Order member?’

He pushed her back, harder still, pushing his hips forward ‘I should fucking kill you right now.’

Hermione turned her face away from him, pressed it into the wall as he hissed his words into her ear. She felt the frustration, the longing, the misery take over her, make her reckless.

She forgot to be afraid, forgot how easily he could kill her.

She suddenly pushed back against him, propelling herself violently off the wall, catching him off guard.

‘I’m not a fucking spy, Malfoy.’ She spat, an equal amount of venom in her own voice.

‘And I can prove it. Use Legilimency on me, do it. And then let’s see what you fucking think I am.’

His hands had loosened on her wrists, he had moved back, slightly away from her as she had spoken. She wished she could see him, to let him see her face.

He didn’t even give her a second before he dove into her mind.

She felt him, pushing through, ripping through her memories, violently, desperately.

She allowed him in, opening her mind and quickly pulling the scrolls they had pushed into the recesses of her mind, together on her bed in the Gryffindor dormitory, and thrusting them forward.

She unrolled the scrolls and let him tear through them. She let him see the memories of himself, aged six, being thrown against the wall by his father, of his nails breaking as he was dragged across the floor, the sound of him screaming as Lucius’s boot stomped down on him.

If he was going to hurt her, she’d hurt him, she decided.

She showed him Narcissa, ignoring his desperate cries, watching his father as he Crucioed him on the manor floor.

Then, she moved onto the memories of him, protecting her, hiding her from his father. The ones of him desperately reaching for her in Flourish and Blotts, stuffing the note into Harry's pocket, casting a disillusionment charm over her in the Hogwarts corridors.

She showed him them both, stood in the ruined bathroom at Hogwarts, him pressed up against the wall, the agony on his face as she tried to convince him to tell Dumbledore about his father. She felt him begin to falter, the pace at which he ripped through her mind slowing.

He went back, and ran through her memories carefully, as if taking in every detail and by the time he finally withdrew Hermione was drained.

Draco cast a Lumos and stood, looking at her. His face was a picture of confused shock. She imagined how it must feel to have your whole life disproven in mere minutes, to realise that your parents had lied to you, that they had hurt you. That every action you had committed was as a result of a lie you had been fed, that had taken away any hope of a normal life.

Draco looked horrified, his eyes were wide, unblinking.

He looked down at Hermione, then up at his hands, holding hers against the wall and he suddenly stepped back. Letting her slump down. She brought her wrists in front of her, massaging each one with the other.

He didn't say anything, and she could see his mind running over what he had seen.

'Bullshit.' He said, eventually.

Hermione snapped her gaze to his, he couldn't be serious.

'What?'

'I said that's bullshit. You've shown me some manipulated memories, made up what you want me to see, to hide who you really are.'

Hermione looked at him, and she realised what he was doing. His brain couldn't process it.

'That's not true. I wouldn't do that.'

'What the fuck is that supposed to mean? How would I know what you would and wouldn't do? You're hiding shit from me. I know you are.'

He began to look angry, she saw a change come over him. His shock from the previous memories, replaced by a raw, hurt anger.

He came back towards her and she shrunk against the wall. She felt his anger like a force field, felt the rage flowing off him, making the air around them ripple.

'What the fuck are you hiding from me *Hermione Granger*?'

He said her name as though that too was a lie. He held his wand up to her face, looking at her, studying her like the answer might be in her eyes.

‘I’ve obviously been too gentle with you,’ he sneered, his face right back up in hers, spitting the words at her like poison. ‘I can see I’m going to have to use force.’

Hermione shrieked, as she felt the agonising pain of having her mind invaded again, this time with much more violence and fury. Her eyes rolled back in her head, she heard screaming, and she was unsure if it was her screaming or if it was Draco.

He ignored the ones she had showed him before, and forced his way to the back of her mind, to the place she had stashed her sacred memories of both of them, rolled up tight on scrolls.

He tore through them, watching them kissing, during spin the bottle and later on, in her room, her hand moving up and down over him as his fingers slipped beneath her shorts. Their desperate kisses, their tears for one another.

She showed him both versions of that fateful night, of the things he had done for her and what she had done for him too, the sacrifices she had made.

She let him watch her find him, hanging, from the rafters of the Hogs Head, showed him Blaise’s tears, Theo, Pansy.

Then she let him see her, making her trade with Casalia, explaining to Casalia why she had to do it, that she’d do anything for him.

She didn’t know how long he was in her mind, he went through each and every thing she showed him, the violence with which he had started, slowing, the more he saw.

As he finally left her mind Hermione slumped, down onto the ground, utterly incapable of holding herself up. Her head screaming with pain.

Draco stood, his eyes were glassy as he looked down at Hermione, crumpled on the floor, blood pouring from her nose and leaking from her ears and he crouched on the ground next to her, his own body shaking, his breathing uneven.

His face was deathly pale as he reached down and gathered her up from the floor. He pulled her to him, bringing his arms up around her to hold her close. He suddenly turned his head to heave violently onto the floor of the cell, his stomach contracting, his eyes streaming.

Hermione was barely conscious, the pain in her head obliterating her ability for any rational thought.

Draco pulled her tight, and he swiped the blood from her face, even as it continued to gush steadily from her nose, he looked down at her, his hair falling over his face, tears streaming from his eyes, dripping into her hair as he rocked her slowly.

‘I’m sorry, fuck, Granger, I’m sorry, I think I remember.’ He whispered into the darkness, he stroked her face, her hair and he squeezed his eyes shut, ‘I’m sorry, I’m sorry.’

The Manor

Hermione - June 2006

The first thing Hermione became aware of when she next awoke was the noise.

It wasn't silent, as it had been in the cell.
She could hear.. was that birds?... she listened intently.

She could hear birds.

She lay for a moment and waited for the pain in her head to come, to slice through her vision and leave her screaming, but it never came.

She lay there a moment more, listening. She could still hear the birds, chirruping and twittering happily, it wasn't her imagination.

It was real.

She frowned and allowed her eyes to flutter open.
She wasn't in her cell. She looked around her, her eyes wide.

She was in a darkened room. The heavy velvet curtains at the window had been drawn but she could see a sliver of daylight in the crack between them.

She was lying in a bed.

She looked up at the four poster- intricately carved mahogany, with heavy green drapes. She was laying on crisp white sheets, a thick black velvet comforter over her legs.

Beyond the bed she could see damask wallpaper covering high- ceilinged walls. The furniture in the room was all large and imposing- more mahogany. A grand desk sat in one corner, paperwork and scrolls neatly organised on top, there was an armoire on the opposite wall.

The realisation that she recognised the room, came the same second she also became aware of the scent that permeated it, she flicked her eyes upwards, already knowing what she'd see. The Falmouth Falcons poster was still there, faded and curling on the wall above her head.

Hermione sat up, her heart pounding.

She was in Draco's room at Malfoy manor.

As soon as she was upright, she saw him. Draco sat across the room from her. His long body folded into a wingback chair in the corner, his elbows were on his knees, his neck bent. One hand fisted in his hair as he rested his forehead on his palm. He appeared to be deep in thought, anxious.

Hermione's breath caught in her throat.

He heard her shift in the bed and looked up. He rose from the chair and was at her side in a flash. Hermione registered Draco moving abruptly towards her and she cringed, she curled in on herself on the bed, into a defensive position, she held her hands up and squeezed her eyes shut.

‘Don’t!’ she blurted out.

She waited.

Nothing.

When she opened her eyes, he was stood next to the bed, his eyes dark with an emotion she couldn’t decipher.

‘I’m not going to hurt you.’

She blinked up at him, lowering her hands slowly, her heart hammering in her chest.

Draco’s face was grave, his eyes looked tired, and he gave a resigned sigh as he looked down at her, chewing slightly on his bottom lip. Hermione let her eyes drift over him. Draco was covered in dried blood. It was crusted on his hands, and under his nails, there were smears on his face, patches of his black shirt hardened with it.

He saw her looking him over.

‘It’s all your blood.’ He said flatly.

Hermione looked down at herself, she was also covered in blood. Her grubby, grey prison robes were coated in it. Deep rust coloured stains dripped down her front, and she could feel the now familiar sensation of it crusting across her face too,

‘You had a seizure, I think it was the Legilimency. The blood was coming out of your nose and I couldn’t get it to stop,’ Draco told her, ‘I had to get you out, before you died in there.’

Hermione looked at him. ‘You got me out of Azkaban? How?’

He looked at her pointedly. ‘I am who I am. If I want to do something, I do it. There aren’t many people with the power to stop me.’

She swallowed, thinking of the swiftness with which he had disposed of the guard in the shower room. She couldn’t imagine anyone would have argued with Draco Malfoy.

She was suddenly struck with a thought that froze her blood in her veins.

‘Your father.’

‘Away. On business for two more days. I’ll deal with him when the time comes.’

At odds with the way he’d been coming to her cell to stare at her for days, he now seemed to almost not be able to look at her.

‘How do you feel?’ He asked, his fingers moving to pick at a piece of imaginary fluff on the bedspread, his eyes cast down.

She thought about it.

‘I feel- ok. I actually feel better than I have since- since I got to Azkaban.’

He met her eyes then and she saw them soften. Relief smoothed his features.

She waited for him to say something else. He hovered at the side of the bed, he was tense, the anxiety coming off him in waves.

Hermione felt her own anxiety beginning to overwhelm her. She didn’t know whether to be scared, or to cry with relief. This version of Draco had lived a whole life she knew nothing about. Everyone was terrified of this man, and here he was, standing nervously at her bedside after breaking her out of Azkaban.

Eventually, after what felt like an eternity, he spoke.

‘The memories I saw in your head. I can’t- I can’t remember them all. But I keep getting fragments. The things you showed me- my father. I’ve had dreams.. over the years, nightmares. And, Hogwarts, it feels real. Like I was there, but I can’t grasp on to anything solid.’

She nodded. ‘You had those memories taken from you, Draco. You were there.’

He pinched his lips together in a tight line.

‘My father. He’s only ever wanted one thing, and I’ve always known that he would go to any lengths to get it. I think. I just- ’ He was struggling.

Eventually he said ‘I thought I was worth more than that, that I meant more to him.’ The words were bitter.

‘My father has always paraded me about. Using my magic as a show of our strength. Everything I did was designed to let everyone know that the Malfoys were the most powerful wizarding family, so that no one dared go against us. I’ve killed, and hurt and destroyed people- destroyed whole families, and I did it all for him. To make him proud the way he told me I did.’

Draco’s voice broke on his words.

‘What I can remember, from when I was a child. I’m not saying he was kind, or loving. But he’s always made me feel valuable. I thought- I thought that was as good as love.’

His eyes fell to her hands resting on the comforter, then up to the bruises that had begun to bloom along her wrists, a ring of purple and blue encircling the bone where his fingers had been.

He closed his eyes and didn’t open them for a long minute.

‘I’m a trained killer Granger. I’m bred to be a deadly weapon. Utilised, in order to cause the most destruction and damage. The things you’ve shown me. I don’t know what to do with them, It’s too late. This is who I am. I don’t know anything else.’

Hermione didn’t know what gave her the courage to reach out her hand and grasp Draco’s fingers. His eyes flashed to hers. He swallowed. She felt him move as if to jerk away, but he didn’t. He kept his hand there.

Hermione squeezed his fingers gently, the rust coloured stains beginning to flake from their skin.

‘I know you, Draco.’

He seemed to startle at her use of his first name.

Hermione held his eyes. ‘I’ve known you in different lives, in different times. This isn’t who you really are. You’ve been conditioned to think that this is all there is for you, but you’ve never been given any choice.’

He shook his head. ‘That’s not true. The things I’ve done. No one forced me.’

‘But you didn’t know any different!’ She said, ‘All your chances to become a good person have been stolen from you. Time and time again.’ She sat forward, moving towards him on the bed.

‘I don’t know who you are, in this life Draco. I don’t know what you’ve done, but I do know your heart.’ She reached forward, emboldened by her need to get through to him.

She tentatively placed one of her palms over his heart. He remained as still as stone. He watched her, looked down at her hand as she pressed it gently to his chest.

His jaw clenched slightly and she almost snatched her hand away, still feeling the fear of this unknown version of him, but she forced herself to hold it there, pressing against the hard, tensed muscle.

She gradually became aware of the thudding of his heartbeat, strong and steady under her palm. She moved her eyes slowly upwards. His eyes tracked hers, until suddenly they were looking into each other’s eyes for the first time since he’d brought her to the manor.

The thudding under her palm began to increase in pace, she pressed harder, feeling each beat, the pounding of her own heart speeding up to match the rapid cadence of his.

The sly malevolence she’d seen in his eyes at Azkaban was gone. What she saw there now was a confused and hesitant disquiet.

‘I’ll hurt you.’

The words were practically a whisper.

‘It’s what I do, Granger. I hurt people. I curse and I cut and I make the hits so that other people don’t have to, and I’ve done a good job of it. Until I saw you, saw that fucking hair, I knew who I was, what I was meant for.’

He looked up at the ceiling, his eyebrows pinched together, then back to her. When he spoke again his voice was rough.

‘But ever since I first saw you, when Zabini brought you to me, I haven’t been able to think about anything else. I have these dreams about you. I see you, in different places, I see you smiling, I see you crying, but I also see you, covered in blood, it’s in your hair, dripping down your face- and I think that I’m the one who did that to you.’

He rubbed a hand roughly over his face.

‘I’ve been fucking obsessed with you. I haven’t been able to concentrate on what I’ve needed to do. I thought you’d put a spell on me, like you’d put the images in my head to trick me. But now I don’t know. They feel so real. You feel so real.’ His voice broke, ‘Those memories, they-’

‘I don’t think you’ll hurt me, Draco.’ She interrupted.

‘Not any more. I think, somewhere inside you. You know. You know me.’ She could hear the desperation begin to creep into her voice. How many times, in how many different situations was she going to have to convince Draco Malfoy of this.

He stepped back from her.

She could see the internal battle he was having with himself.

She moved towards him, but he stepped away again.

‘I need to go.’ He said. ‘I’ve got business. I need to sort out some things at Azkaban. I left in a rush. There’s some, mess, I need to deal with.’

She felt a jolt at his words, not wanting to think too much about what he was referring to. He jerked his head to a door on the far wall. There’s a bathroom through there. You can freshen up. The house elves will be along with food and anything else you need. Do not leave this room.’

She nodded. He made to leave but then came back.

‘Oh, and this is important. Do not, under any circumstances, remove the necklace you are wearing.’

Hermine glanced down, her eyes flared wide when she felt, rather than saw the pendant under her robes. She reached her hand in and pulled it out. The stone was black, a swirling, smoky iridescence curled around within it, seeming to pull towards her fingers as she held it. The stone was held within a silver setting and threaded onto a delicate silver chain.

It was beautiful.

She looked at it in horror, immediately knowing what it was. Her fingers instantly fumbled behind her neck to the clasp, she needed to get it off.

‘No!’ Draco’s shout made her jump. She cried out and dropped the pendant back against her chest.

‘Leave it on.’ He said. ‘It’s the only thing that stopped you bleeding. That pendant could well be keeping you alive right now.’

She stared at him. ‘Essentiaspis Magicae’ she said. ‘This is a soul stone. I don’t want this on.’

‘I don’t care what you want.’ His eyes were hard, he stepped back towards her. ‘You are not to take it off.’

She felt anger rise in her. ‘This has been taken from someone, it’s a part of who they are. It was probably taken by force! I’ve heard what you and your father have been doing. I don’t want to wear someone’s soul around my neck!’

He stared at her for a moment. His eyes flashing as he watched her hold it away from her skin.

‘It’s not their soul. It’s their essence, their magic. The person who gave it-‘

‘Who it was taken from.’

He grimaced.

‘They’re dead. They can’t have it back. It’s currently keeping you alive. You are to keep it on.’

‘They’re dead?’ She felt sick, it washed over her in a wave at his words.

‘Yes.’

‘How did they die?’

He looked at her, his face a mask of indifference. ‘It doesn’t matter how they died, the fact is, if you take it off you could die too. Please. Keep it on.’

‘Why?’ She shouted, and she felt tears prick at her eyes.

‘Because your father wants me? Because I’m valuable? Is that why you’ve brought me here? To keep me alive until your father can use me to make another stone, to make you more money?’

‘No.’

His face hardened as he looked at her.

‘He will not touch you. I can guarantee you that. No one will touch you.’

She couldn't hold her tears in any longer. They spilled out, cascading over her cheeks, dripping off her chin and onto her chest. Draco watched them fall.

She didn't say anything. There was nothing to say. There was no turning it around, painting him as someone better. She had given him this life. Her misguided attempt at helping him couldn't be undone.

The silver of his eyes flashed.

'You are important to me, Granger. I've known it since I first saw you. I didn't know why then, but I do now, and no one will touch you, or even look at you without my say so.'

She cried harder as she listened to his words.

He was right, he was irredeemable. He was a monster, and now the monster had decided she belonged to him.

She wanted to feel horror, to feel fear. She needed to. But she didn't, she felt something else.

Still.

And she was so ashamed.

She couldn't justify how much she still wanted him. Couldn't reach for him the way she wanted to, knowing that her friends were suffering, had suffered, because of him.

Draco watched her, seemed to see her thoughts as they entered her mind and travelled over her face. He nodded.

'I'll be back soon,' he said, and then he disappeared with a crack.

She had wanted to ask him more, to ask him what was going to happen to her, but she didn't think she wanted to know the answer.

She sat back down onto the bed, still gingerly holding the pendant away from her skin. She could already feel a headache forming in the base of her skull. She reluctantly let the pendant fall again to her chest and the pain in her head eased instantly.

She heaved in a deep breath. Hardly able to process what had happened in the last few hours.

She brought her hand up again to the hateful pendant around her neck.

Who had made this? Did it contain the essence of one of her friends? She swallowed back the bile at the thought of Ron's magic swirling inside the stone.

She got up from the bed, relishing the feeling of strength in her legs, even as she bitterly thought of the reason why.

She made her way to the bathroom. It was decorated predictably with black, shiny tiles, floor to ceiling.

The deep roll top bath in the center looked extremely inviting. She walked towards it and put the plug in, turning on the gold faucet, steaming hot water immediately gushing out.

There were white fluffy towels folded on the side, and a collection of expensive looking bottles of bubble bath and shampoos lined up on the shelf.

Her eye caught on a bottle of aftershave, in a black bottle with a gold label. She couldn't help herself as she moved towards it. She took the lid off and put the neck to her nose, breathing deeply.

She closed her eyes as the intoxicating aroma filled her head. That sweet, woody apple scent assaulted her senses, making her breathe out a quiet sigh. It was so very Draco, and only Draco, that it made her want to cry.

He smelled like magic, a dark, dangerous, beautiful magic, sparking inside her and filling her with desire.

She reluctantly put the lid on and put the bottle down, selecting a bottle of bubble bath instead, squirting in a generous amount and filling the bath with sweet smelling, decadent bubbles.

She turned off the taps and gratefully slipped out of her dirty prison robes. She caught sight of herself in the mirror and stopped. Staring at herself in horror.

Her arms and legs were bone thin, her ribs clearly showing. There was blood, all over her face, and on her hands and arms, it had also dripped down the center of her chest, below the pendant. The purple bruises on her wrists were stark against her pale skin.

Her breasts were small where they used to be full. Her hips narrow. Her hair was long and lank. Her curls weighed down by dirt and grime. Her face was pallid, the dark circles under her eyes startling. Her eyes stared out, large and haunted, she looked like she was already dead.

She turned away from herself, not wanting to look any more, and stepped into the bath, groaning with pleasure at the burning heat of the water.

She sank into it, watching the steam rise around her, relishing the simple joy of feeling clean for the first time in so long.

After ten minutes of leisurely soaking Hermione got to work, washing her hair several times and running her fingers through the conditioner until her hair wasn't a tangled mess any more. She soaped up her hands and washed the blood off her face and body, smoothing the soap over her until she was clean.

Eventually, she stepped out, grimacing at the pink stained, grimy water she had left behind her. She emptied the bath and stood in the tub, turning on the large gold shower head above to rinse. She eventually stepped out and wrapped herself in one of the fluffy white towels, sighing at the softness of it.

She moved into the bedroom. There was a plate on the desk, a metal cloche on top. Silver cutlery wrapped in a napkin and a wine glass stood next to it.

She could smell a mouthwatering aroma that instantly made her stomach turn inside out with hunger.

She took the lid off and took in the sight of the perfectly cooked steak and crispy potatoes, the vegetables looked buttery and perfectly cooked. She attacked the meal with gusto, her hungry stomach relishing every mouthful. She washed it down with the rich red wine from the carafe left next to it.

Eventually, full and tired, she collapsed onto the bed and fell asleep.

She dreamed of Ron, his face replacing Draco's, staring eyes and blue lips. She dreamed of her friends still at Azkaban, rocking slowly back and forth in their cells, while she lay in a warm bed, clean and well fed. She awoke with a start, barely making it to the bathroom before she vomited all the food she had eaten into the toilet bowl.

Her stomach kept contracting until there was nothing left.

Hermione hung her head in shame.

How could she have allowed herself to focus so exclusively on Draco, as though he was the only thing that mattered in the world? How could she sit here, in this warm bed, safe and protected, while they rotted in Azkaban?

She had caused this. She had created this reality for them.

She closed her eyes again, and folded violently over the toilet, retching, tears streaming down her face as she thought of them.

Eventually, drained and exhausted, she returned to lay on the bed and she waited for him to come back, drifting in and out of a fitful sleep.

She awoke a few hours later, hearing the crack of Apparition.

Draco appeared, his eyes casting over her warily.

He was wearing different clothes. His fighting leathers were gone. Replaced with a soft looking, grey knitted sweater, round neck, a shirt collar peeking from underneath, he smelled divinely clean and fresh.

The cuffs of his sweater were pushed up so she could see the godforsaken Dark Mark back on his arm where it had been before. He didn't seem ashamed of it in this life, making no attempt to move his arm when he saw her looking at it.

The colour of his jumper set off his eyes, making the silver unnaturally bright.

He let his eyes travel over her, glancing at her body, wrapped in the towel, seeming to linger momentarily on the gap where the two sides of the towel overlapped, then snapping quickly

away.

He looked at her hair, now curly, and fluffy again where it was clean. He spent a long time focusing on it, seeming to study it, before eventually moving to her face.

She stared back at him. Wanting to scream with how much she had to say to him, but feeling unable to say any of it, her words stuck in her throat.

Gods, he was so beautiful, she thought, as her eyes swept over the damp hair brushing the back of his shirt collar. The blonde strands flicking outwards.

She looked to his lips, the shape of them, full and soft and then to his eyes, wide open now, studying her as she studied him.

He was like an angel of death, she thought. So beautiful, and yet so terrifyingly dangerous.

‘Granger,’ his voice was low. His eyes burning into hers.

‘Malfoy.’ She sounded as exhausted as she felt.

Neither of them spoke for a moment, they just looked at each other.

‘This is yours, I think.’ He said, and he bent and picked something up from the ground.

It was her backpack.

She felt her stomach swoop with joy as she heard the memories inside it tinkle together.

He had brought it. She hadn’t asked him to, but he’d brought it.

She had no idea how Draco had known it was hers, but she had it now. She had a chance to save them all.

She jumped from the bed and before she even knew what she was doing, she had flung her arms around him. She buried her face in his neck, and she held onto him tightly.

Draco stood, his hands by his sides, rigid for a moment, before suddenly his hands were on her hips, sliding around, until his arms were wrapped tightly around her too, crossing over her back.

He buried his face in her hair. She heard him inhale, a long deep breath and he squeezed her harder.

She lifted her head, so that they were face to face, their eyes millimeters from each other’s. She could see the different colours in his irises, her own reflection in his pupils, they were huge, blown wide.

She brought her hands up and wound her fingers back into the place they always seemed to find themselves, tangled in the hair at the nape of his neck.

She pulled him closer to her, and this version of Draco didn't hesitate.

He opened his mouth and kissed her.

His tongue slipped in through her lips, sliding over hers as one of his hands came up to her neck and he slid it up to cradle her head in his palm and fist her hair, gripping it tightly, angling her head up towards him, pulling her lips harder to his, the other hand curled possessively around her waist.

They kissed like they would each die without the other, and Hermione thought that it was true.

She felt like she would die without him in that moment.

Draco's hand dropped from her hair and the other moved from her waist, both sliding around to her hips. He took hold of both sides of her towel and gently tugged at them, breaking the kiss to look down at her as the towel fell away and down onto the floor.

His eyes moved over her body, and she had to resist the urge to hide herself away from his burning gaze.

Draco looked at her like she were made of solid gold, his eyes growing darker, the longer he looked.

'Fucking hell Granger,' he said, and it was almost a growl it was so low in his throat.

His hands came back to her hips, they were large, strong and sure, and she felt like she was made of glass, a delicate breakable thing, the way he slid them slowly, reverently up her body to her breasts.

He ran his hands gently over them, his thumbs grazing her nipples as he brought his head down. She gasped as she felt the hot, wet sensation of his mouth as he took her nipple gently into it, sucking lightly and swiping his tongue over and around the hard peak. She pressed her face into the tousled hair on top of his head and squeezed her eyes shut.

'Oh, *oh*,' She was incapable of any coherent thought or speech as he moved to the other nipple, his tongue flicking gently, as his other hand came up to squeeze lightly, cupping her breast in his large palm. She could feel the callous from where he held his wand and the slight friction of it made her grit her teeth with pleasure.

He came back up now to kiss her, his mouth hot and hungry, their lips sliding wet and soft over each other, he sucked her tongue gently, making her moan.

She was painfully aware of her nakedness compared to Draco's fully dressed body. She knelt up on the bed as he pulled her closer to him. His hands slid around to travel down, splaying over her thighs and suddenly lifting her, so her legs were wrapped around him.

She locked her legs, feeling the wetness at her center immediately begin to soak through the front of his trousers. He groaned into her mouth and she could feel how hard he was, remembered how big he was, as she ground down onto him.

His hands slid up her thighs, fingertips gripping tightly as he came to cup her cheeks, spreading his fingers out over her ass, pulling her harder against him, his hips bucking slightly against her.

She cried out with the friction, wriggling onto him, desperate to feel more.

‘Draco, please...’ she was begging him, but she didn’t care. She didn’t even know what she was begging for, except more of him. She needed to feel him, needed to be filled by him.

Finally, after wanting him for so long. It wasn’t a want any more, it was a need.

She pushed away from him, unlocking her legs and stepping down. He didn’t let her stop kissing him, he pulled her back, his hands still in her hair, but she pushed him away just far enough so that she could lower her fingers to his waist and grab hold of his shirt, lifting it up.

As she did she caught a glimpse of his Adonis belt, the v of muscle pointing down below the waistband of his trousers.

She felt the heat bloom in her lower belly, a new wetness between her legs, she was slick with it.

Draco took over from her fumbling fingers and lifted his jumper and shirt over his head in one go.

She stopped to look at his body. Noticing immediately that there were no Sectumsempra scars.

Of course, he hadn’t been at Hogwarts for Harry to curse him.

That didn’t mean he wasn’t scarred.

Draco was still marked, in a hundred different places she thought. Slashes, big and small danced across his body, what looked like a bullet hole in his upper arm, although she thought that must be impossible.

There was a starburst of small scars smattered over his one hip, and a deep gouge below his lower left rib. Countless other smaller marks marred his pale smooth skin.

He was broad, muscular but lean.

She could count every one of his ribs, along with the bumps of his obliques. She ran her finger gently down his side, earning herself a shiver from him. The tall tent in his trousers jerked in response to her touch.

She brought her hands to his belt buckle. Trying to hide the slight tremble in them. His stomach rose and fell with his breaths and he flinched slightly as her fingers brushed against him as she slid the leather though the metal.

She brought her eyes up to his. They were blazing, the silver absolutely molten.

She swallowed and dropped her eyes again to his trousers, unhooking the clasp, and pulling the buttons apart, her eyes widening as he sprang free, the thin material of his boxers doing nothing to hide the large straining bulge of his cock.

Draco's breathing grew heavier, quicker as she ran her finger over his head, through the cotton, feeling the precum leak through.

'Fuck- Hermione' it was barely a whisper, hissed through his teeth.

She lifted his boxers up and over his cock, her eyes widening as she finally saw him, for the first time as he bent to kick off his trousers and boxers, and then stood in front of her, both of them completely naked now.

She didn't know if she could do it.

His cock was straining, thick and smooth, pulsing and twitching as she looked at it. It was so big. She'd never experienced anything even close.

She raised her eyes to look at him. His jaw was clenched, his eyes absolutely burning, his breath was hitching, every muscle in his body taut.

He was waiting for her, she realised.

He was holding himself back, waiting for her to give the word.

She stepped towards him, hearing his sharp intake of breath as she put her hands on his shoulders and pulled him to her.

It was all he needed.

Before she even knew what was happening he had pulled her back towards the bed. He sat down, knees out, and he pulled her on top of him, straddling him. She was up on her own knees, poised above him. Her hands on his shoulders, looking into his eyes.

He didn't drop eye contact as he brought one hand down to take hold of himself. She let her eyes flick downwards and closed them momentarily at the sight of Draco Malfoy, his cock in his hand, sat beneath her.

She suddenly let out a gasp as he angled himself towards her. But he didn't push inside.

Instead, he brought the head of his cock between her spread legs and he dragged it up the slick, wetness of her core.

As soon as she felt the soft skin of his head slide against her clit she threw her head back, unable to keep in the moan that left her lips.

Draco smiled and did it again, making her cry out a second time.

She trembled as she held herself up, waiting, anticipating the feel of it, groaning with pleasure when it came.

Hermione couldn't help herself, she began rocking her hips. Sliding over the soft head of his cock, coating him with her wetness.

'Look at me, Hermione,' he said and she tried to.

She opened her eyes and looked into his.

The grey was stormy, his eyes glassy with desire, heavy lidded.

Draco's lips were pink and swollen from kissing her, even fuller than usual. She brought her face down and sucked his bottom lip, running her tongue over it, her insides squeezing tighter at the sight of his beautiful face, flushed with desire for her.

She rocked herself faster onto the smooth head of his cock, feeling it slide against her clit, the most delicious sensation, an almost painful pleasure.

Draco held himself in his fist, gripping tightly, his eyes flicking from hers down to watch his cock appear between her legs and disappear again as she moved.

His jaw clenched and his forearm flexed as he curled his fingers around his cock, pumping slowly up and down, sliding the head against her clit. She could see in his eyes that he was struggling to keep himself under control.

The sight of Draco, so clearly turned on by her, was too much and Hermione felt herself beginning to build.

She moved faster and faster, fucking herself on him as he breathed raggedly, watching her intently.

It didn't take long until she felt herself begin to clench, her muscles tensed. She dug her nails into his shoulders as she felt her orgasm crest within her.

She felt the first rhythmic pulses begin and she squeezed her eyes shut.

Draco watched her, and then, just as she began to come, he pushed his hips forward and slowly slid inside her, in increments, filling her, stretching her.

She cried out, loudly as suddenly, she was coming around his cock.

It made her orgasm ramp up one hundred degrees. The thickness of him filling her up so completely that as she clenched around him she felt every inch of him. She ground down on him, fluttering onto him, making him grit his teeth and swear, his eyes falling closed.

He waited until she had finished, her head hanging down, forehead pressed against his shoulder, and then he finally moved inside her.

The feel of it, when she was already so sensitive, was so intense it was almost painful, she moaned and brought a hand up to press against her mouth.

Draco stopped and looked at her.

‘Are you ok?’ He asked.

‘Yes,’ she breathed, ‘Please don’t stop.’

She moved slightly as encouragement and it was all he needed.

He pulled himself out slightly, and then pushed back in, bottoming out. She let her head drop back to his shoulder as he continued moving. He was so hard, so thick.

His movements came quicker now, his thrusts picking up in pace.

She heard his breath shuddering in and out. He put his hands on her hips and he began moving her along with him, lifting her up and down on his cock.

She moved with the pace he set, lifting up and dropping down onto him, in time with the way his hands moved on her hips, feeling the pendant bounce against her chest as she did.

She felt it begin to build in her again. The sensation of her clit hitting the base of his stomach, his balls, was almost too much.

She closed her eyes and gave into the rhythm, her breathing stuttering, her body totally in tune with his.

She could tell when Draco was about to come. She felt him thicken and swell even further inside her, there was no room, and she squeezed around him, feeling her own orgasm begin to crest again.

She opened her eyes to look at him, just as he groaned her name and she began to feel him release inside her, feeling the pulses of his orgasm, the cum pumping out of him and into her, as he thrust in and out, his eyes squeezed shut and his head tipped back.

‘Oh, Draco.’ She moaned, as he drove into her, and swore over and over again, his hands gripping her so tightly she thought she might have bruises on her hips from his fingertips.

Eventually, they were both spent. She sat, still on top of him. Her legs wide, knees either side of his hips.

Draco lifted his head up, and opened his eyes to meet hers. They were slightly bloodshot, his face and body coated with a sheen of sweat, the scent of him sparking in her nose, mingling with the smell of sex and desire.

After a few moments she kissed him gently on the tip of his nose, and climbed off him, unimpaling herself, hearing him hiss slightly as he slipped out of her.

She moved to the bed, needing to lay down.

Draco fell to lie next to her. His chest still heaving. He put hand down to grab hold of the comforter, bringing it up and over her, tucking it in slightly around them both.

Then they lay, their heads on the pillow, just looking at each other.

‘Are you ok?’ He asked.

‘Yes.’ She smiled and she brought her hand up to touch his face. She could already feel a soreness beginning between her legs. She hadn’t noticed in the moment but she knew she’d been stretched to capacity. She smiled at the thought.

‘I’ve not- it’s not usually like that for me.’ He said.

‘It’s normally rougher, more impersonal. I was worried I was going to hurt you.’

‘You didn’t hurt me Draco. Far from it,’ she said, and he smiled.

‘Your bag.’ He said. ‘It’s got the memories in?’

‘Yes, and your diaries. You left them.’

He frowned. ‘Diaries? That doesn’t sound like something I’d do, in any timeline.’

She smiled at his confused expression.

‘Well they say your name on them, and you left them with your body.’ She realised even as she said it, how bizarre that sentence was.

He sat up, ‘Let’s see them’ he said.

Hermione rose from the bed, feeling Draco’s come sliding out and down between her legs. She clenched them shut as she grabbed the backpack and returned to the bed.

Draco’s eyes were on her, and she saw his cock stir slightly where it lay now, soft along his belly.

She felt her own wave of desire as she saw his eyes darken, but she forced herself to ignore it and focus on the diaries as she lifted them from the bag.

‘My wand.’ She said suddenly, realising with a jolt of despair that she didn’t have it. ‘It’s in the bag, I think,’ Draco said. ‘At least I think it’s the right one. I went and got all your things from the processing room. I held it, and it felt like you, I sensed you through it.’

She looked at him in amazement. That was an incredible skill to have, and it required a significantly powerful magical ability.

She reached in and took out her wand, smiling. It was definitely hers, she’d recognise it in an instant. Like she’d recognise her own face in the mirror.

She used her wand to bring the books back to normal size and then they both sat up and looked at them, resting them on their knees under the comforter.

‘Do you know how to open them?’ He asked, trying and failing to pull the pages of the diaries apart with brute strength.

‘I think so. I think it’s the same spell you showed me’ she said, smiling as she pulled it out of his hands.

She set the first diary down and tapped her wand onto it.

She recited the incantation, as she remembered it, including their names: Draco Lucius Malfoy, and Hermione Jean Granger.

They both watched as the clasp sprung open.

She smiled, feeling the thrill of success.

‘Shall we read it together?’ She asked him. Desperate to find out what he had written.

‘Go for it.’ Draco said, curiosity on his own face.

He moved closer to her on the bed, so they could both read the notebook together.

Hermione flipped to the first page and frowned.

She turned a few more pages, and turned back again. Draco flicked his eyes to her, looking at her expression, and then back down to the pages.

The writing on the front of the notebook was Draco’s, but the pages inside were lined with row after row of her own neat handwriting. These weren’t her case notes though. They were still in the bag.

Hermione was confused as she checked the front cover again, reading Draco’s elegant cursive script- How on earth was this happening?

She cast her eyes down and read, Draco did too. They both read fast and turned the pages quickly. Their eyes growing wider as they read.

They sat for an hour, poring over each notebook, their faces growing paler as they moved on to later pages.

Eventually, Hermione closed the final notebook.

She felt sick, her throat beginning to close. She looked up at Draco who looked down at the closed book, his own eyes shiny with horror.

They reached for each other’s hands, clasping them together on the bed and their eyes met again.

‘Oh fuck Hermione, I’m so sorry’ Draco said.

She could barely speak. Her shock at what she’d just read, leaving her numb.

‘It’s not- it’s not your fault Draco.’ She said, the words stuttering out between her lips.

Draco stood then, he rose from the bed.

She didn't even have time to react before he closed his eyes and lifted his hand. The notebook rose from the bed and flung through the air, hitting a mirror with a sharp crack, sending shards of glass shattering, exploding outwards into the room.

'Draco, stop, please,' She said weakly, tears cascading down her face again.

Draco heaved a huge sob but didn't stop. He closed his eyes, the tears tracking slowly down his cheeks as he destroyed the room around them.

The bed Hermione sat in, was the only thing in the room untouched by his devastated rage.

'Draco,'

She tried again.

'FUCKING BASTARD!' He roared. 'I'm going to kill him. I'll fucking murder him, rip him limb from limb.'

'Please, stop,' she sobbed.

Draco turned to her, the tears glinting on his cheeks, his eyes wild.

'I've only just got you back,' he said, and his voice wasn't angry now. It was distraught.

'I can't let him take you away.'

The Notebooks

Hermione - June 2006

Hermione sat on Draco's bed in his ruined bedroom at the manor, and stared blankly at the ground as he continued to rage.

She couldn't bring herself to react, even as all around her, wood splintered, and glass shattered as the room was torn to pieces. She watched as pieces of the Falmouth Falcons poster fluttered around her onto the bed like confetti.

Draco had clearly cast a Protego over her, as nothing came near her. She was in a bubble, in a dream, only just registering what was going on around her.

This was what he did, she realised dully.

When he was overwhelmed, Draco broke things. On any timeline and at any age. She had seen him do this so many times.

She wondered what that said about how he had been taught to deal with his emotions. Or rather how he'd been taught to hide them. When they became too much, this is what he did- he destroyed things.

Hermione was still trying and failing to process what she had read in the journals.

The first notebooks, the things they had read, she knew now that they were true, she saw the images, saw the situations in her head, and she realised that some of the things she had thought had been dreams over the past few months, were in fact memories.

This feeling she had, of being utterly in love with Draco, this obsession she had with him, it wasn't fantasy, brought on by the memories he had left, it was their life together, trying to break through the curse that Lucius Malfoy had cast on her- on both of them.

She let her mind flit back to the last notebook, those devastating last few pages.

The hastily scribbled notes, changing from her small, neat handwriting to Draco's sweeping cursive, had simultaneously filled her with horror and cracked her heart in two.

She had read what Draco had written, and she had felt the blood freeze in her veins.

She knew now, why Draco had felt he had no choice but to take his own life, she knew why he had left her the memories, and she knew why the notebooks were for her eyes only.

They contained their love story, the beginning and the end, for Hermione to read after Draco was gone.

So that she knew, he had written, that she had been loved.

That Draco had loved her more than he had loved anything else. That he had taken himself away, to end the curse his father had cast on her and give her the chance to live.

He wanted her to live.

But she hadn't watched all the memories, she hadn't waited until the end of the story. She'd jumped ahead.

The fact that she couldn't remember that she loved him, hadn't stopped her from loving him.

She'd been classic Hermione Granger and refused to accept the truth of the situation, that Draco was dead. She had done what she always did and looked for a solution, a way around the impossible.

And now here they were, together again, but he was still a murderer, she was dying, and half of her friends were either dead or rotting in Azkaban.

She noticed that silence had finally fallen and looked up.

Draco had worn himself out.

He stood in the middle of the room, shoulders slumped, face pale, hands limply hanging at his sides.

'Draco-'

He turned to look at her, his eyes dull, he didn't speak, there was nothing to say.

She felt pain lance through her chest as she saw how broken he was, how much his father's betrayal had hurt him.

He moved towards the bed and lay down, folding his long body along hers. She wrapped her arms around him and buried her face in his neck as she held him as tightly as she could.

She felt his hand come up to find the pendant at her neck, he placed his palm over it and pressed it tight against her skin, she looked into his eyes, as they lay, foreheads pressed together.

Draco's breath shuddered in and out as he held her gaze.

Hermione knew as she looked at him, that she would love him forever, alive or dead, no matter what he did.

She lay with Draco in her arms and she let the truth of the notebooks wash over her, allowing the memories they had unlocked to come forward, finally.

Hermione - November 1998

'Hermione! Fuck that was close. That last bastard was right next to you. Are you ok?'

Charlie was breathing heavily, a sheen of sweat on his face as he waited to be healed. His blue eyes were bright with adrenaline as he paced back and forth around the dark living room of Grimmauld place, still pumped from the skirmish.

Actually, Hermione thought, she really wasn't ok.

She felt sick. She didn't feed off of fear the way Charlie seemed to.

Even now, hours later, her nerves still felt frayed. The realisation of how close they had come to being killed by the Death Eaters was not lost on her. It had been a matter of inches.

She had seen one of the Death Eaters come flying, sending hexes at Charlie and Lupin, then watched as he seemed to just drop.

One minute he was aiming towards them like a bullet, the next he was falling, a rag doll spinning downwards to crunch on the ground.

The sight of Lupin, locked in battle with another one of them, would not leave her mind. She felt ill at the thought that Remus or Charlie could have been killed protecting her. She couldn't imagine the guilt of coming back to Grimmauld place without one of them.

Luckily, Charlie's injury was minor, he only needed a simple healing charm on his arm. Lupin had been looked over, and then taken to the medical wing at Hogwarts as a precaution.

Hermione hadn't told Charlie that she knew who the last Death Eater was, the one who had flown at a terrifying speed towards her on his broom, then pulled up and stopped, staring wildly into her eyes before being hexed himself.

She had recognised his eyes immediately, the unique shade of silver blazing out from the eyeholes of the Death Eater mask he wore.

Draco Malfoy had been inches from her, within arms reach, and instead of taking her, he'd taken a curse from Lupin and fallen from his broom, down to the ground.

She wasn't sure if Malfoy was alive or dead, but she did know that if it wasn't for that momentary pause he'd taken, she wouldn't be sat in Grimmauld place now.

She paced the floor, much as Charlie did, but for different reasons.

Both Lupin and Charlie had volunteered to bring her here from Hogwarts. None of them had thought it was a risky journey.

The attack had come from nowhere, and Hermione was relieved that someone within the order had felt she was high priority enough to assign protection to, and that extra people had been added at the last minute.

She knew that she had them to thank for her life, but she couldn't help the nagging thought that it wouldn't have been enough if Draco Malfoy had decided to act. The speed with which he had streaked across the sky on his broom had been terrifying, none of them could have out flown him.

She wondered who Malfoy was now.

She hadn't seen him since he had turned his back on them all and walked out of Hogwarts with the Death Eaters, after letting them into their school and enabling Bellatrix Lestrange to kill Dumbledore.

She felt a pulse of venomous anger at him flash through her at the memory, smothering her gratitude that he hadn't killed her tonight.

She sat now on the squashy leather sofa in the sitting room and accepted the whisky that Arthur Weasley pushed into her shaking hand.

'That was a very close call, Hermione,' he said gently.

'How are you feeling?'

Hermione opened her mouth to answer but her response was drowned out suddenly by banging downstairs, quickly followed by shouting.

Hermione stood in alarm, both Charlie and Arthur making for the doorway, poking their heads out into the stairwell to see what was going on, wands drawn.

'He's fucking dead!' Fred Weasley shouted from the I entryway where he had just charged through the door.

'Voldemort. We've got word. He's dead!'

Every Order member dotted about the house came out of the room they were in, gathering in the hallway, the stunned silence immediately giving way to a cacophony of questions and shouts of disbelief.

They were just waiting for confirmation, Fred said, but their intelligence led them to believe it was an accurate report.

Overwhelmed by the noise, Hermione returned to the sitting room to wait, hardly daring to believe it could be true.

Within the hour, every Order member and seemingly half of the resistance were gathered at Grimmauld, Harry and Ron included. That was the thing that convinced Hermione the most. They would have never dared bring Harry out of hiding if they hadn't been certain Voldemort was gone.

Snape arrived and a hush fell over Grimmauld Place as he told them all what had happened.

Draco Malfoy had been brought back from a skirmish, injured and unconscious. When he had come round he had been tortured by Voldemort for information. They had no idea what the information had been, but Malfoy hadn't wanted to give it.

He had sliced off Nagini's head and then somehow managed, in his weakened state, to Avada Voldemort, and kill half of the Death Eaters at Malfoy manor.

He'd turned, they said.

Finally, Malfoy had done the right thing and turned. They already had word that he was not taking over Voldemort's regime and he had no interest in Harry.

Malfoy had already handed himself in to be interviewed by Aurors, seemingly having no fear of Azkaban, or any of the repercussions of his actions over the past few years.

No-one in the Order trusted the Malfoy family. There was loud discussion about Lucius, about his part in all of it.

For now, the general consensus was that Draco Malfoy was not as much of a threat as Voldemort had been but that they would be foolish to trust him. There were Aurors dispatched immediately to the manor.

There was a party that night.

Grimmauld place was full of people, the Firewhisky was flowing and the celebrations were in full swing. Hermione felt like she was living in a dream. For so many years they had been living under the threat of Voldemort, and now he was gone? Just like that? It seemed too good to be true.

She looked over at Harry and Ron. Her heart swelling with love for them as she watched them smiling and laughing, their heads close together, almost giddy with easily accepted relief.

She couldn't imagine how Harry must be feeling, he was finally free. She understood his willingness to accept it, to not question it.

But in their friendship group, it was always up to her to say the things no one wanted to hear, to be the unwanted voice of reason.

Hermione thought about it, Lucius Malfoy had been a Death Eater for years, Draco Malfoy since he was sixteen. Were they really supposed to just believe he had suddenly turned, and now posed no threat to the Wizarding world?

She sat with Ron and Harry later, and she smiled and she raised her glass when they did, but she was uneasy, she just didn't think it could be that simple, that the Death Eaters were just going to fade away, that the Malfoys held no threat.

Much, much later on, when the house had finally gone silent, and most people had either gone home, or fallen into a drunken stupor, Hermione made her way down to the kitchen. She needed a hot drink, something to help her sleep.

Her mind was whirling with the new possibilities of what life was going to be like, they were entering into a whole new world.

She shuffled towards the dark kitchen, her mind still wandering, when suddenly she became aware of low voices, coming from the sitting room. She peered through the gap in the door and saw Snape, sitting on one of the squashy armchairs. He was slumped slightly, a glass of Firewhisky in his hand, his eyes were glazed, his jaw slack.

He was extremely drunk, she realised.

She had never seen Snape drunk before, never seen him relax in any situation.

Her interactions with him had been limited to mainly at Hogwarts, and she still viewed him as her professor, glaring down his hooked nose at her, while ignoring her hand waving in the air to answer his questions.

She knew that he came back and forth on Order business, sharing information, but he had to be careful, his job was a risky one.

So it felt very strange, to see him as he was now, so drunk he appeared almost sloppy, his usually stiff manner nowhere to be seen. Kingsley Shacklebolt was sat opposite him, his own glass of whisky tilting slightly as he listed to one side. He had clearly had more than one or two drinks also.

‘What do you think Severus?’ Kingsley asked. ‘Do you think Draco really has turned? Or do you think he’s got his own plans for stepping into Voldemort’s shoes? You’ve always said the kid is powerful. Did you expect he could do this?’

Snape appeared deep in thought. His black hair hanging in his eyes as he stared into the embers of the fire burning low in the hearth. He seemed to be considering his answer very carefully. Eventually, he spoke.

‘No, I do not believe Draco Malfoy is looking to take over.’ He said. ‘As I have told you before Kingsley, he has suffered greatly, for many years. Mr Malfoy received very little choice in joining the Death Eaters, and as you well know, he has made significant sacrifices in order to protect certain people, here within the order.’

‘Yes, but his father-’ Kingsley interjected.

‘His father has made life almost impossible for Draco over the years,’ Snape barked, his voice growing louder. Hermione shrank back against the door frame.

‘That boy, has been a victim of his father since he was born, refusing to fight back due to some sort of misplaced loyalty.’ Hermione could see that Snape was becoming emotional.

‘I have done my best to protect him, but there have been things out of my control. I truly believe, that Draco Malfoy’s actions tonight are for one reason and one reason only, to bring himself some autonomy, so that for once, he is not at someone else’s mercy.

He is a soldier, he has been used since he was old enough to be utilised and I think he finally deserves some peace.’

Hermione’s eyes widened as she listened. Could that be true? Draco had always appeared so spoiled, so loved.

She thought about his arrogance, his spitefulness, those things would be impossible to fake for so long, surely.

She wondered whether Snape was in on whatever plan the Malfoys had. Whether the things he was saying to Kingsley were part of a larger deceit.

Her mind was working over it when she suddenly heard a noise.

She wasn't sure what it was initially, but then she realised that it had come from Snape. He had released a sob, a gut wrenching exhale that had bent him over in his chair, his head bowed. Kingsley got up and made his way unsteadily to where Snape sat.

'Severus,' he put a hand on Snape's shoulder. Hermione was shocked to see Snape show so much emotion. She felt like she should look away, but she couldn't.

'I know the past few years have been hard on you. What you have done for the order, is something we can never repay.' Kingsley said. His words were slightly slurred but she heard the sentiment behind them all the same.

'And I'm sure Draco is grateful. You have kept that boy alive, you've healed him time and time again and you've given him support, when Merlin knows he has needed it. The things you told me, about his suffering, the things his father did to him-' Kingsley himself now sounded emotional.

'How he has survived it, I'll never know. But he has, and you can stand down now. Draco is strong, he will be alright.'

Snape seemed unable to respond. Hermione watched his shoulders hitch, his hands over his face, as Kingsley stood, one hand clapped on his shoulder, while he got himself under control.

'Lucius will need to be watched.' Snape said eventually, seeming to gather himself slightly.

'He's afraid of Draco now, but he cannot be trusted. He will always be plotting. He will not leave that boy in peace.' Kingsley nodded and the two men continued discussing Draco and Lucius for several minutes.

Hermione listened a while longer then returned to her room, her drink forgotten.

She lay in bed and thought about Draco Malfoy. Had he really lived the life that Snape had described? And who had he been protecting?

She couldn't get her head around it.

She lay in bed and mentally went through her memories of Draco at school. She couldn't find any chinks in his armour. She could only remember him sneering, laughing, looking down at everyone else.

She thought briefly about the game of spin the bottle, her most shameful, drunken moment, and she pushed the memory immediately from her head.

The only time she had ever seen him be anything other than unflappable was when he had been cursed by Harry in their sixth year. Harry had used a slicing curse- Sectumsempra, on

him and he had been badly injured.

Hermione shuddered at the memory of the copious amount of his blood coating the bathroom floor. How pale and sickly Malfoy had looked for weeks afterwards.

Harry had felt so much guilt over it, but it hadn't been long after that when Malfoy had opened the vanishing cabinet and allowed the Death Eaters into Hogwarts. Life had never been the same since.

She eventually fell asleep, dreaming fitfully of silver eyes behind a Death Eater mask, Voldemort, and Lucius Malfoy, his calculating smile as he clapped his hand down onto his son's shoulder at Borgin and Burkes.

The next day, Grimmauld Place was again, a hive of activity. Hermione sat with Harry and Ron eating breakfast at the rickety wooden kitchen table, listening as Arthur and Kingsley discussed the plan for the day.

They were going to join the Aurors at Malfoy manor where Draco, Lucius and Narcissa Malfoy were under house arrest.

There had been warrants put out for several further arrests for known Death Eaters and their families, but it was currently unconfirmed who was actually alive and who was dead.

Apparently Theodore Nott had been badly hurt either during the skirmish or afterwards. Draco Malfoy had taken him via Floo to St Mungo's before handing himself into the Aurors at the DMLE.

Ron busied himself eating. He laughed and joked with his brothers, chiming in occasionally with opinions on who had done what, and what he thought should happen to Draco Malfoy now.

'Give him the kiss,' he said, his mouth full of bacon roll. 'He only killed Voldemort to save his own skin, you watch, he'll come for the rest of us. Probably got some 'Purebloods only' plan in place.'

'I don't know if he deserves the kiss Ron,' Harry replied, 'But I don't trust him either, the guy is a snake. It's because of him that Dumbledore died. He let those Death Eaters into Hogwarts, he can't just pretend that he didn't.'

Hermione had to interject, 'But how do we know he had a choice?' She said, 'His mother and father have been Voldemort supporters for years, he couldn't exactly go against them,'

The two boys turned to stare at her, their eyes bulging out of their heads. Ron even stopped chewing momentarily.

'You can't be seriously defending him Hermione,' Ron spluttered, 'After the way he treated you? The names he called you?' Hermione bristled at the memory, the word 'Mudblood' spat from Malfoy's lips.

‘Well yes, but I think we need to let the Aurors decide what punishment he gets. The fact of the matter is, Draco Malfoy managed to do what no one else could and he killed Voldemort,’ she could still barely believe the words, even as she said them, ‘We can all at least be grateful for that.’

The conversation ended abruptly then as Ginny and Blaise came into the kitchen. Although Blaise was no longer friends with Malfoy it was still a subject that they avoided around him. Blaise looked uneasy, but he flashed Hermione his trademark warm smile as he helped himself to some bacon and eggs from the huge platter at the center of the table. Hermione smiled back, and stood to give Ginny a hug before turning to make everyone more tea.

She wondered what would happen today, and what the Aurors would decide about Malfoy.

The day passed in a blur.

Plans were put in place for everybody to move out of Grimmauld and back to their homes.

Harry was going to stay at the Burrow.

There was even talk of them returning to Hogwarts to catch up on missed work. Their education the past year had been patchy at best. McGonagall had done her best to repair the damage to the school but many wizarding families didn’t want their children returning, and the ongoing threat meant that they were in and out of school often.

Hermione, Blaise and Harry had applied for Auror training. They had all been accepted to the course but it wouldn’t start until September, as part of their final year, they would train part time along with school.

Hermione was in the kitchen preparing dinner, when she heard Kingsley return later that evening. They all gathered in the living room to hear the verdict.

Apparently, Narcissa Malfoy had turned up at the DMLE with Cornelius Fudge and what sounded like the wizarding version of a lawyer. She had claimed that Draco had been forced to become a Death Eater and gave evidence via memories which had been viewed in the Pensieve at the DMLE.

Narcissa had given information on Voldemort’s plans and his inner circle, divulging the locations of other high ranking Death Eaters, including Goyle Snr, Bulstrode and Rowle.

From what Hermione could gather, Narcissa had spent the day bartering with money and political influence as well as giving copious amounts of evidence, in order to ensure Draco’s freedom along with her own.

She had insisted that Draco’s actions had proven that he had been under duress and that Severus Snape could vouch for him. She had argued that their home had been taken over by Voldemort without their permission whilst Lucius had been in Azkaban.

The Aurors could not be convinced on Lucius Malfoy, but he had been granted a reduced penalty due to time already served, and a lack of evidence regarding his whereabouts since

his release.

The DMLE had Lucius in custody where he would be magically tagged. The tag would remain on him for life, so that he could be traced at all times. Any curses he cast would also be traceable, with the DMLE receiving immediate notification of his location. A breach of the conditions of his tag would guarantee him a return to Azkaban and the Dementors kiss.

There was general outrage that Draco and Narcissa were to receive no penalty, but Kingsley was vehement in his insistence that following the memory viewings provided by Narcissa, the Aurors had made the right decision, regarding Draco at least.

Hermione listened to the discussions and wondered what the Aurors had found out in order to convince them. She asked Kingsley questions, interested in the interview process and how the legal side of it would work.

The next day she was packing, ready to leave Grimmauld, when she heard a knock at her door. It was Arthur Weasley.

‘How are you doing, Hermione? He asked. You’ve been very quiet these past few days, which is highly unlike you.’ She smiled at him, knowing she couldn’t argue with his assessment of her.

‘I’m surprised you haven’t had more to say on what’s happened,’ Arthur said. ‘I’m just a bit concerned.’

Hermione felt a rush of love for Arthur, he had stepped in as a parental figure for her in the wizarding world, and he and Molly always looked out for her.

‘I’m ok thank you Mr Weasley.’ She replied. ‘I’m just in shock, I suppose. None of us were expecting what happened, for Malfoy to do what he did. I think I’m just concerned for his motives. I just wish we knew more about who he is now, I guess.’

‘The Aurors are highly trained, Hermione.’ Arthur reassured her.

‘They know what they are doing. I know that you are wanting to do your Auror training, why don’t you go along tomorrow and watch the interviews with Draco Malfoy? It might give you a better insight, and help to put your mind at rest?’

Hermione looked at him, her eyes widened. Go to the manor? To see Malfoy? She was intrigued, but unsure.

‘I’m friends with Johnson, the Auror on the case,’ Arthur said. ‘He’d be glad to have you along. Harry and Blaise too, although I’m not sure either will take me up on it. Too much history there for both, I imagine.’

But you should go, it will be good preparation for you, for your course. You can see how the process works.’

So that was how Hermione found herself the next day, standing outside the imposing doors of Malfoy manor, with the two Aurors in charge of interviewing Draco Malfoy, stepping

anxiously from foot to foot as she held tightly onto her notebook and quill. She smoothed her hair down and stood up straight, trying to look composed as she heard footsteps approaching on the opposite side of the door.

Draco Malfoy himself swung the heavy oak door open, greeting the two Aurors warily before looking behind them and noticing her nervously waiting.

Malfoy looked momentarily alarmed at her presence and she saw him swallow visibly as he moved back to allow her inside, she felt him tense, as she passed by, his eyes on the floor.

Malfoy had grown since she had last seen him. He was taller than she remembered, broader and more muscular, although she could see that he was still lean. He wore a pale blue dress shirt, open at the neck, and black trousers.

His blonde hair was slightly longer than at school, and not slicked back the way she remembered. It fell over his eyes repeatedly, and he brushed it back, appearing nervous.

She tried to covertly study him as he ushered them down the hallway. His features didn't look as pointy as she remembered, with all traces of the spiteful arrogance she recalled gone from his face.

All in all, Hermione thought, he just looked tired. He was pale and drawn, and he seemed exhausted. As though the events of the last few days had all been too much for him.

His grey eyes kept flicking to her, looking her up and down before darting away. She pretended not to notice.

Hermione followed behind Johnson and his colleague Howe as Malfoy led them all into a huge sitting room, motioning for them to sit down on the large velvet sofa. They all obliged, but Draco remained standing.

'This is Miss Granger, she is here to observe the interview as part of her Auror training preparations,' Johnson said, motioning to her. 'She will be taking notes for us today.'

'Yes, I'm aware of who she is.' Came the familiar drawl, 'How are you, Miss Granger? I hope life has been treating you well?' He raised an enquiring eyebrow.

She looked at him, frowning at his false politeness.

Malfoy stared back at her benignly, his face impassive, seeming to challenge her slightly.

'I'm fine thank you, *Mr* Malfoy.' She answered, equally as politely. 'It seems that my life has been a little less eventful than yours of late.'

Draco smiled, the corners of his mouth lifting slightly, but it didn't quite reach his eyes.

'Yes, quite.' He replied dourly.

His attention turned from her then as he focused on answering the endless amounts of questions Johnson and Howe directed at him.

Hermione listened intently, shocked to hear Malfoy speak so frankly about receiving the Mark and the jobs he had been assigned to do. He told the Aurors about the night the Death Eaters had entered Hogwarts, about how his family had been threatened if he didn't let them in.

She was aware that his eyes kept sliding to her. She wasn't sure if he was embarrassed for her to listen to his confessions, or if he was uncomfortable with her writing notes, but regardless he seemed to be being completely honest with the Aurors, admitting to everything he had done at Voldemort's request with an openness she found unnerving.

She recorded his account of the night he had killed Voldemort and she struggled not to react as he explained the job he had been tasked with.

He didn't look at her as he told of how he had gone to Grimmauld Place with instructions to bring back a particular Order member Voldemort wanted, to use as a spy, among other things.

He refused to name the target, or go into further details, for their own privacy he said, and the Aurors agreed that it was of little consequence, that they would view it in the memories later.

She was the Order member, she knew.

She was amazed to see the way his face flamed briefly as he explained the job and he detailed his actions, describing how he had deliberately botched the mission and that he had taken a curse to the chest and been brought back to the manor, unconscious, by Theodore Nott.

He explained how they had been regularly subjected to the Cruciatus curse, as well as Legillimency in order for Voldemort to keep them in line.

Hermione couldn't take her eyes off him while he spoke about being tortured in a flat monotone, his voice calm and level, as though it were perfectly normal.

The only time Malfoy showed any kind of emotion was when he talked about Theodore Nott and how he had thought that Voldemort was going to kill him. His expression was pained, guilt crossing his features.

Malfoy went on to speak about his suspicion that Nagini was the final Horcrux and what happened to Voldemort after he had killed her, about how it had weakened him, allowing Malfoy to curse him.

Hermione listened, rapt as he spoke, astounded by how unaffected by it all he appeared to be.

She wondered whether he was occluding. His eyes seemed blank, the colour a flat grey compared to the bright, clear silver she had seen when he looked at her in the entrance hall. She made copious notes, her quill flying over the parchment as he spoke.

Malfoy insisted that his parents had supported him in his goal of killing Voldemort, and that all of them had been secretly plotting his downfall since his occupation of the manor the year before.

Lucius and Narcissa had been at the DMLE all day, giving their own evidence and were due to leave for France, as agreed, in the coming weeks.

Eventually the Aurors decided that they had enough information for the day, and it was agreed that Draco would return to the DMLE in two days for the viewing of the memories he had already given. He was to be tagged in the meantime.

Howe caught Hermione off guard, asking her to help him as he applied the tag.

Hermione nodded and moved towards Malfoy, feeling her breath catch slightly as she watched him roll up his sleeve.

The Dark Mark stood out against his pale skin, it was faded now, a silvery grey, but still very obviously there. He would never be able to hide it. She thought- that was a sentence in itself.

He looked down at her fingers as they closed around his arm, tracking her movements closely.

She took hold of the cool skin of his wrist and held it gently as Howe moved his wand in a complicated motion, activating the trace.

She hadn't been this close to Malfoy since their drunken kiss, and her nose sparked slightly as she breathed in his scent. It reminded her of bonfire night when she was young, caramel apples and sparklers. It made her think of curling smoke and dark magic.

She raised her eyes up and felt a jolt as she was met with his, they were clear again now, a bright silver. He was looking into her face intently.

She stared back, unable to drop his gaze until he seemed to frown slightly and look away.

He was stiff and tense as the trace was fitted, seeming to let out a held breath as she eventually let go of his wrist and moved back to the sofa.

He absentmindedly rubbed his fingers slowly over the skin where she had been holding him and Hermione had a horrifying thought that he probably hadn't wanted her touching him, her being a Mudblood and all.

Johnson checked that the trace was working on their end, ensuring that Draco's movements were being recorded on the scroll he held in front of him, until they were satisfied that the spell was working effectively.

Hermione rose, as Draco moved to show them out.

She followed behind Howe and Johnson but hesitated at the door, allowing them to be led out of the main door by the house elf and continue down the long drive without her.

Draco stopped, his hand on the door jamb and looked at her, appearing to be waiting for her to speak.

'Thank you Malfoy, for allowing me to sit in on the interview.' Hermione said.

‘Did you get enough information in your notes?’ He asked enquiringly, his eyebrows raised.

‘Yes, thank you for being so honest.’

He shrugged. ‘I’ve got nothing to hide.’

He looked down at her notes and his eyes widened. ‘Merlin Granger, you’ve got my whole life story in there.’

‘Not quite,’ she replied. ‘I haven’t written down how you stopped your Death Eater friend from getting to me the other night, or how you could have taken me yourself, but you didn’t.’ She had, actually. But she didn’t tell him that.

His breath seemed to stutter slightly, and for the first time she saw an emotion cross his face, a brief flash of something that looked a little bit like panic. He instantly quashed it. The calm composed look he had affected all day back in place in seconds.

He didn’t say anything. He just held her gaze. She wanted to look away, but found that she couldn’t.

‘Well,’ he said quietly, ‘They’ll see it in the memories anyway won’t they. There was no need.’

‘Thank you, Malfoy,’ she said, and she gave him a small, hesitant smile.

They both stood, Draco leant over her slightly, his hand on the doorframe, just above her shoulder.

They just looked at each other for a moment.

Draco seemed to be appraising her. There was a slight frown on his face, but the overall impression she got from him was a reluctant confusion, rather than malevolence or dislike.

Eventually, she remembered herself, she jumped as she realised that the Aurors were waiting at the bottom of the manor driveway for her.

She turned to leave, but as she did, his hand suddenly shot out and she felt his long fingers wrap around her wrist.

‘Granger,’

She looked down at his hand, and he dropped her arm like he’d been burned.

‘I’m sorry.’ He said, ‘For all the things I did to you, at school, for all of it.’

She looked up at him in amazement.

Did he mean it? She wondered. He certainly looked like he did. What would he possibly have to gain from apologising if he didn’t?

‘I’m sorry too.’ She replied, and she couldn’t help her cheeks curling up slightly, ‘For the slap of course.’

She watched as his face broke into a smile. She saw straight white teeth, a light dancing in his eyes. He looked like a different person when he smiled, she thought.

‘I don’t think you’re sorry for that Granger,’ he said. ‘I deserved it.’

‘Ok, I’m not.’ She grinned properly now.

‘But thank you.’ Draco said, ‘For the sentiment.’

They stood, smiling at each other on the stone steps of the manor for another second before Malfoy tilted his head. ‘They’ll go without you,’ he said, indicating the two impatient looking Aurors staring up the driveway.

‘Oh!’ Hermione jolted. She headed down the long driveway quickly, calling out a goodbye.

She wanted to Avada herself when she realised a moment later, that she was hoping Malfoy would still be watching her when she turned around.

She couldn’t help herself, she looked back towards the manor door.

He was.

Feed me to the Acromantula

Draco- November 1998

Fuck.

Draco shut the door of the manor and stood with his back against the wall for several minutes, just focusing on breathing.

He needed to get a hold of himself.

He had NOT been expecting to see Hermione Granger when he'd opened the door earlier that day. He didn't think he'd been able to keep the shock off his face when he had caught sight of her loitering behind the two Aurors, her hair catching his eye first.

He saw a puff of a curl catch on the wind, and initially, he wondered if he'd finally lost the plot and started imagining Granger during the day instead of just when he was alone at night. He had almost fallen over when she had stepped out from behind them and given him a small, nervous smile.

As Draco stood back to let the Aurors in, he couldn't look directly at her; he hadn't had enough time to prepare himself. He'd stared down at the floor instead, trying to look less like someone who had just stopped a bludger with his face.

He'd held his breath as she'd walked past, not ready for the delicate wave of her scent that floated towards him.

He had led them all down the manor hallways and desperately attempted to Occlude, although he should know by now that she made it almost impossible. Instead, he focused on trying not to look at her too much.

He was shit at that too.

He let his eyes slide to her as often as he could without her catching him. He just wanted to look at her a little bit. It had been so long since he had seen her properly, a year at least - the night of the skirmish notwithstanding.

Fuck, she was so beautiful. Did other people tell her she was beautiful? He wondered.

He would tell her every day if he could.

Draco took in all the details about her that he had missed, obviously starting with the hair. It was so long now, brushing against the curve of her lower back, still soft and floaty like a cloud. He loved how some parts of it were golden, and the rest a deep chocolate brown.

Her eyes, the colour of Firewhiskey, long dark eyelashes, her little nose, her lips.

He couldn't help his eyes travelling downwards. She was wearing a thin knitted jumper and a skirt that stopped just below her knee, both of them clung to her body, nothing like the robes he'd always seen her in at Hogwarts.

Draco accidentally slowed down so that he was behind her for a moment, watching her as she walked towards the parlour.

It was- , she was-

He had to stop looking.

He led them into the parlour and motioned for them to sit.

His mouth went dry as the Aurors introduced her, he didn't know how to respond. He heard the words leave him before he even knew what he was saying.

'How are you, Miss Granger? I hope life has been treating you well?'

He almost clapped a hand over his mouth, to push the words back in. What the fuck was that? He sounded like an idiot, awkward and formal. She looked at him, and he saw on her face, she thought it was weird, too.

He tried not to smile at her acerbic response, only fair. 'I'm fine, thank you, Mr Malfoy. It seems that my life has been a little less eventful than yours of late.'

Draco felt himself twitch at the sound of his name on her lips again after so long.

It was easier when the Aurors actually started interviewing him. He could lose himself in his memories and focus on the questions.

He was so painfully aware of her though. He could hear her quill scratching on the parchment, the same sound as when she was in school, always busy writing.

He desperately wanted to know what was on those pages, what her assessment of him was. He couldn't stop looking over to her, the noise of the quill interrupting his flow of thoughts. He kept trying to glance quickly at her, but several times, he found her brown eyes already on him, a questioning, wary expression on her face.

He wondered if she was scared of him, wondered how much she hated him.

He was disappointed when the questions stopped, even though they were making his brain hurt, because it meant that she would be leaving.

He swallowed it down.

He needed to be grateful for these new memories of her, make them last.

So, when they asked her to help to tag him, Draco almost bolted. It was too much, she would be too close. He couldn't tear his eyes away as she approached him and he felt her gentle,

warm fingers on his wrist. They felt like they were burning through his skin, heating his blood, making it pump around his body, hot and fast. He swallowed hard.

He tried to think of something else, anything else except her proximity. He talked himself down using every bit of Occlumency he had, told his body not to respond, to stay calm.

He didn't mean to look at her face, but his eyes found their way up anyway.

She was looking back at him.

She actually looked into his eyes.

Draco wanted to rip his arm away, he wanted to summon his broom and fly into a wall, to feed himself to an Acromantula, maybe wake up Voldemort so that he would Avada Kedavra him to another realm.

Because he didn't want to ever look into another set of eyes. He didn't want anyone else to ever touch him.

It was only ever going to be Hermione for him.

Draco had known it since he was eleven years old.

Even this touch was more than he could have ever hoped for, and it fucking hurt. This hurt as much as his father had ever hurt him, because he wanted her so badly, and he was never, ever going to have her.

She'd let go of his arm, he realised.

She'd moved away, looking at him with that same curious, confused expression. He brought his fingers up to the place where hers had been, still feeling the warmth of her touch on his wrist.

Once everything was done and the time for the memory viewings arranged, he saw them out, feeling like a man going to the gallows.

Granger had hesitated at the door on her way out.

Draco stood, heart pounding, unsure of what to do with his hands. He decided on putting up a palm to rest on the door jamb. It made it so that he was kind of leaning over her. He knew he should move, that maybe he was being slightly intimidating, but she hadn't seemed to mind, so he stayed there.

During their conversation, she had to look up into his face to speak, he leaned slightly closer.

He thought he did a good job of keeping it casual when she mentioned the skirmish, she knew he had been sent to collect her, and she knew he hadn't done it. There was no point in hiding it.

Draco didn't want her to leave, he wasn't ready for her to disappear from his life again without saying the words. When she turned to go, before he even knew what he was he was

doing, his hand shot out and pulled her back. She looked at his hand, large on her delicate wrist, and he thought he might have hurt her. He felt a jolt of panic lance through him.

He couldn't take it back.

But she didn't start screaming, she let him finally say sorry to her, for his dickhead behaviour at Hogwarts.

When she apologised for slapping him, Draco couldn't stop the smile that spread across his face.

Fuck, don't apologise, he wanted to say, that slap was the source of many hours of boyhood fantasy. That slap kept me going through some pretty shit times.

He didn't say that though.

When she smiled back at him, Draco tried to capture it in his mind, the image of her face, to keep safe forever. That moment- for the first time, after all his years of loving her, that she had actually smiled at him. It was one for the books. It was history making, he wanted to owl Rita Skeeter and tell her he was finally ready to be on her front page.

Fuck, fuck, *fuck*.

And when, as he was watching her walk away, his brains leaking steadily out of his ears, she turned around, and looked at him, this look, that wasn't a look of hate, it was.. he didn't know what it was, but it finished him. He could curse a hundred people, take a thousand hexes in return, and they wouldn't affect him the way that look did.

All his hard work had paid off. Granger was alive, she was safe, and- she had smiled at him.

Eventually, when he recovered enough to push himself away from the door, Draco made his way back through the empty manor to his bedroom. He needed some release before he went to see Theo.

'And she actually smiled at you? Granger?'

Theo was lying in his bed at St Mungo's, weakly talking to thin air.

Draco had Apparated in, remaining disillusioned. He did not want any kind of attention, positive or negative. He was so used to being feared, hated, reverently respected- He didn't like this new fascination with him. He had killed Voldemort. Half of the wizarding world wanted to thank him, the other half wanted him dead, and none of them wanted to actually be too near him.

He'd reached a new level of infamy.

Draco didn't think he'd ever want to walk around as himself again.

Last night, Pansy had gleefully read him the newspaper articles as they sat together by Theo's bed. Her in the chair, Draco, sat cross legged and invisible on the floor.

On the same page they had painted him as a tragic hero, a deranged killer, and some sort of sex symbol. It boggled Draco's mind.

Pansy had taken great pleasure in reading the description of him Skeeter had written- broad shouldered and stoic, serious but sensitive, devilishly good looking. She had cackled at the predictions of who he might marry. Astoria Greengrass being at the top of that list.

Draco had blanched.

Astoria was like a dog with a bone. Literally. They'd had a small thing back in Hogwarts, but Draco had never thought it was anything more. She had been determined, since coming to help his mother at the manor, that something could happen between them. The problem was, Draco was so touch starved, and she knew exactly where to come looking to get him alone. She would rub her hand on him, and when his body responded, she took that to mean that his mind did too. He had had to tell her firmly the last time she had tried to pin him into a corner and grab his dick through his trousers, that he wasn't interested.

It hadn't gone down well.

Pansy absolutely detested her.

It had been very awkward at the manor in the weeks leading up to Voldemort's death. The two women had had their claws out at every opportunity.

Draco was okay with murdering people, but he balked at getting in between two women, each hellbent on getting the better of the other.

He was beyond relieved that the occupation of the manor had ended the night he had killed Voldemort, but he struggled to sleep alone. In the time since, he had spent the night just wandering the halls or walking the grounds, like he had when he was young.

He could never tell anyone, but he missed Theo's annoying habit of coming into his bed for conversations at four am, which seemed to be the only time Theo wanted to talk. Draco would have liked Pansy and Theo to come back to the manor once they let Theo out of the hospital, but they had been talking about getting their own place, so he didn't say anything.

'How are you feeling?' He asked, hanging his face over the side of Theo's bed.

'Fuck, where are you?' Theo said, jumping at the sound of Draco's disembodied voice.

Draco grinned and dodged Theo's swiping hand.

'I'm alright. They said the one leg- the tibia and fibula is almost regrown. The other, the femur, it's taking longer.'

'How's the pain?'

Theo grimaced, 'Not the best, but better. They're keeping up with the murtlap and dittany,'

‘No, I meant Pansy. Has she forgiven us yet?’

‘For both almost dying? No.’

Now, it was Draco’s turn to grimace.

Pansy had been aware that the skirmish had gone wrong, but she’d been pulled away from the room they had brought Draco and Theo back to, kept away from them, not knowing what had happened for hours. She had cried continuously for days, even when she knew Draco was alright and that Theo’s injuries weren’t life threatening. Every time she looked at either of them, she just burst into tears.

Draco had apologised to both Pansy and Theo a hundred times. He felt so much guilt that their involvement with him had gotten Theo hurt. But they both always insisted it was their choice, they had known the risks.

‘Where is she now?’ Draco asked.

‘She’s gone to view a house for us to move into when I’m out.’

Draco pasted an upbeat expression on his face.

‘That’s amazing for you both. I can’t wait to see how soon she’ll have you housetrained.’ Theo smiled, and Draco could see he was still in pain. Nagini had wrapped herself so tightly around him that three of his ribs had broken, and Theo wasn’t used to being Crucioed the way Draco was. He still had tremors in his fingers.

‘She’ll be whipping out the puppy pads before I know it.’ He said.

Draco reached out a hand and clapped Theo on the shoulder, making him jump again.

‘I’ll pray for you.’ He said into Theo’s ear.

And then he Disapparated back to the manor.

He had a horrible shock when he arrived.

His mother and father were stood in the foyer, their cases piled high. Draco stalked towards them, feeling the painful anger flare within him. His mother’s eyes widened, she put her hands up as if to placate him, calm him down. She positioned herself in front of Lucius, who smirked icily at Draco.

‘We’re leaving.’ She said. ‘I just wanted to say goodbye.’

Draco appraised her coldly. ‘Goodbye then.’

He knew his mother was trying, she had gone to the DMLE all guns blazing, once again, giving the impression of a doting mother, who would do anything for her son.

Draco thought she did love him, in her own way. But she loved Lucius more. He would always win, and Draco would always lose when it came to Narcissa.

‘I’d expect you to be more grateful to your mother, Draco,’ came his father’s hateful drawl from behind her. ‘She has ensured your freedom. You’ve got the manor, Wizarding Britain no longer hates you. You have everything we ever wanted for you.’

Draco couldn’t answer.

Still, after all this time, his father made him feel mute. He managed to find a rationale for every fucked up action, for every decision they had made as parents. Lucius truly believed that they had done him a favour.

Draco knew his father would never have willingly given up the manor. He was running away, that was all, there was no Voldemort now, the surviving Death Eaters knew the Malfoys had turned and Draco was a loose cannon.

Lucius Malfoy was leaving to save his own skin, nothing more.

‘Yes,’ he said eventually through a clenched jaw. ‘I’m very lucky.’

He saw Narcissa place a hand on Lucius’s arm.

‘We will be staying at the Chateau if you need anything.’ She said, her voice soft.

What could she possibly think he would need or want from them, other than for them to take themselves, and all the pain they brought with them, away from him?

Draco needed to walk away. He hadn’t planned on this encounter. He just wanted them gone, before he changed his mind about killing his father.

‘Make us proud, son.’

Lucius’s words were designed to elicit a reaction.

‘Take this opportunity, and make us proud. You are a Malfoy, never forget it.’

Draco felt the dragon within him stir. He turned and looked into his father’s eyes and he thought again how easy it would be. He could just kill him where he stood, just like Lucius could have killed him the other night. He had had his wand pointed at him, Draco wouldn’t have even seen it coming.

He knew the only reason that he was still alive was because of his mother, and for the selfish reason that Lucius wanted a life. He didn’t want to be on the run, or go back to Azkaban.

Draco had nothing more to say, everything he wanted to scream and shout turned to stone in his mouth.

He wanted to ask them why they couldn’t have just loved him. Why this manor, the money they had couldn’t have just been enough?

He didn't want to rule Wizarding Britain, he didn't want to be powerful, he didn't care about money, and he certainly didn't want the manor.

He would give it all up just to be happy, to be normal.

But, he'd been wondering that his whole life. So he didn't ask, he just walked away, and hoped he wouldn't see either of them for a long time.

Draco heard the Floo roar to life half an hour later, and he went and stood where his parents had been, looking at the empty space in the hallway.

He sat down on the floor, put his head between his knees, a hand on his heart, and he waited until he could breathe again, until he felt the bands around his chest loosen and the shaking stop. He stayed there for a very long time, staring into the fireplace. He stayed there until it got dark, until he was cold, and his limbs went stiff, then eventually he stood up and went to get his broom.

Draco spent most of the night and into the next day flying off his feelings. He soared through the sky around the manor on his broom, feeling the adrenaline as the wind whipped his hair, going faster and dipping lower.

He spent the time picturing Granger's smile, ruminating over every word between them until he felt calmer, more able to process their interaction.

It was just a smile. He told himself. Granger wasn't like him, she probably didn't save up her smiles and keep them close like precious stones, only to be given to very special people. She hadn't lived a life like his, her smiles probably came easy.

Draco doubted she had given him another thought.

Hermione - November 1998

Draco Malfoy.

Why could she not stop thinking about him?

Hermione was furious with herself about it.

It was something so out of character for her. She was always so rational, so sensible. She didn't spend hours thinking about people who she knew were confirmed murderers, acquitted or not.

She had told Harry and Ron that the interview had been uneventful, which she supposed technically it had been.

Malfoy had spoken in a calm, quiet voice, he hadn't been angry or defensive. The Aurors had been satisfied with his answers.

The things which had happened had only happened to her.

That flutter in her belly at the sight of his smile, a smile she'd never seen before, one that wasn't spiteful or sly, or at someone else's expense.

It was a smile full of humour, his eyes crinkling at the sides.

It had been impossible not to smile back, even as she had felt her insides swoop at the sight of his white teeth, his Adam's apple bobbing over his shirt collar, his eyes sparkling with something she couldn't define.

The look on his face when she had glanced back as she left - a dark, almost hungry look, had nearly made her stumble.

She had walked back to the Aurors, and she was flustered.

The feeling hadn't left her.

She still didn't know why Draco hadn't snatched her that night above Grimmauld. She desperately wanted to see his memories, to find out more about Draco Malfoy and who he was now.

She thought about Snape's words, about how much Malfoy had suffered, about his lack of choice in many of the things he had done.

It didn't excuse his behaviour over the years, but it made them understandable, and Draco's apology had seemed genuine.

Hermione had always been good at looking at situations from both sides. It was why she wanted to be an Auror.

Harry and Ron, they saw things in black and white- people were good or they were evil. Hermione was more interested in those shades of grey, she wanted to know what made people do things or act in a certain way.

And that was the problem.

She had never met anyone with as many shades of grey as Draco Malfoy.

Hermione was desperate to know more about him. He was like a mystery to be solved, clue by clue, piece by piece.

When Arthur Weasley asked her how the interview had gone, she made sure to only talk about how interesting she had found the process, how useful she had found shadowing the Aurors.

It was all true, of course, but she couldn't tell Arthur that she was also fascinated with the subject of the interviews, that she needed to find out more.

She felt her stomach clench with nerves when Arthur told her to go along to the memory viewing the next day.

That night, Hermione went to the Burrow for dinner.

They sat and ate, and it was incredible to be together without the threat of Voldemort hanging over their heads. Everyone seemed almost drunk with it.

The dinner was loud and boisterous, full of laughter. Fred and George were on form, some of their rude jokes making Molly shriek and whip them with her tea towel. Hermione ate her meal and felt the warmth of contentment settle in her stomach along with the delicious food.

While she sat, Hermione watched Harry and Ron.

They couldn't take their eyes off each other.

She had noticed a shift in their relationship recently. It had always been there of course, they had both always been pulled to each other, from the second they met.

They always looked to the other for back up in an argument, always took the other's side, regardless of if they were right or not.

Hermione had seen the way they were defensive of each other in relationships too, no one was good enough for their friend, not even her, it had seemed.

Harry had told Hermione very early on in her short relationship with Ron that it was never going to work, and he had been right, the small spark very quickly fizzled out.

Ron had always seemed distracted, never fully present in the relationship. Hermione had been fine with it, she hadn't felt it either. But she felt she knew now, watching them, maybe why that was.

Hermione watched the way they talked, their knees touching, always finding an excuse to put their hand on the other, the way they picked from each other's plates, the eye contact held for slightly longer than was needed.

She wondered if she knew before they did, or if they were both hoping, waiting for the other to be the one to make that first crucial move.

She wondered if Voldemort's death would push them to take that risk. She hoped so, she couldn't think of two people better for each other.

She sat later, in the Burrow's cosy living room, Harry's arm slung around her shoulder as they sat on the squashy sofa, and she let her mind wander to Malfoy.

She wondered what he was doing at the manor by himself, if he even was by himself, or if he had a girlfriend, someone to talk to about everything that was going on in his life.

Harry had noticed that she was distracted and asked if she was ok. She wondered if she should tell him about Malfoy, if maybe she could talk to him about the things she was finding out.

Eventually, after struggling internally for a minute or two, she decided not to, not yet. She wanted to find out more about Malfoy herself first.

Hermione left the Burrow earlier than she normally would, wanting to go home to her own thoughts.

She let herself back into her house. It felt good to be there after spending so long being moved between safe houses and Hogwarts, although she was a little lonely after the noise and warmth of the Burrow.

She made herself go straight to bed, anticipating the next day eagerly. Her fascination and intrigue had gotten the better of her, she knew. But, she told herself, she wasn't the only person interested in finding out more about the person who had killed Voldemort.

Malfoy was on the front page of the Daily Prophet, and there were countless articles inside, detailing his life, making predictions about what he would do now.

He would be the focus of the Wizarding world's attention for a long time to come.

She wondered how Malfoy felt about that. She imagined that he loved it.

He had always had attention on him in school too, always had a presence. Girls fawned over him, even when he was awful to them.

Hermione remembered with a flush, the time she had seen him, in the hallway late at night. He had had his back pressed against the wall. His hair, bright against the stone had been what caught her attention in the dim light.

His eyes had been closed, squeezed shut, his sharp jaw slack with pleasure, his lips parted.

He was holding his robes up for the girl who was on her knees in front of him, her head bobbing up and down, whilst his fist wound into her hair, gripping tightly.

Hermione hadn't been able to stop the gasp that had escaped her. Her face flamed even now as she remembered the way his eyes had flown open, his angry expression as he had pushed the girl off him.

She had run away before he could say something spiteful to her.

She returned immediately to her room where she had lay, hot and uncomfortable, in her bed, thinking about the way his face had looked, and imagining herself giving someone that much pleasure.

Malfoy, in school, had had a group of friends that seemed to hang on his every, spiteful word. Laughing at his jokes, looming behind him, always ready to back him up. Clearly, she thought, Theodore Nott had remained one of those people, to his detriment.

She wondered what Blaise thought about what had happened. She was only just getting to know him through Ginny and she really liked him. He was funny and warm, nothing like she had thought he was in school.

The next morning, Hermione rose early, showered, and dressed, feeling the fizz of something in her veins, a nervous anticipation.

She dressed how she thought an Auror in training would, a pair of tight suit trousers and a shirt, tucked in, the top two buttons undone. She looked in the mirror and braided her hair back, a slick of gloss on her lips and she was ready to go.

She arrived at the DMLE early, and was welcomed inside by the receptionist. She made her way to the third floor, where she was due to meet Johnson, trying not to look as nervous as she felt.

All around her Aurors were busy discussing cases, heads bent over desks, talking intensely in low voices. The Floo network seemed to be continually flashing green with people coming and going, everyone looked very busy and important.

Hermione held onto her notebook and quill tightly.

As she reached the third floor she was greeted warmly by Johnson, who introduced her to Robards, the Head of Department.

‘I know who you are, Miss Granger,’ Robards said, smiling kindly, ‘And if the stories are to be believed, I’m sure you will be an excellent addition to our team if you decide to go forward with Auror training. We could do with a mind like yours.’

Hermione felt herself swell with an embarrassed pride. She knew that it was vain of her, but when people said nice things about her academic ability, it felt so good.

She didn’t care if people thought she was the prettiest or the funniest, but she felt a glow when they complimented her in that way.

It was who she was, she worked hard at it, and it meant a lot to her.

‘Thank you so much,’ she stuttered.

Robards disappeared into his office, and Hermione followed Johnson down the corridor.

Her attention was caught by a flash of blonde hair in one of the side rooms, Draco Malfoy was here.

They met Howe a little further down the corridor, coming out of another side room, shuffling parchments.

‘Hi, Hermione,’ he glanced up at her briefly. ‘I’ve got the transcripts of his interviews,’ he directed this at Johnson.

‘I’ve also read over the parents’ statements. We will watch his memories now and check it all corroborates. They’re talking about keeping the trace on him, at least temporarily. If not for others safety, then for his own. If accounts are true, then some of the Death Eaters might be out for Malfoy blood.’

Johnson nodded. ‘Good point. Let’s watch these memories and make a decision.’ He turned to her, ‘Hermione, have you used a Pensieve before?’

Hermione shook her head.

‘Ok, I’ll talk you through it. One thing first, we need to get permission from Malfoy himself for you to look in on these. You aren’t an Auror, so we can’t let you view it without his saying so. He’s just down here.’

‘Of course,’ Hermione nodded nervously and followed the two men back to the room where she had seen Malfoy.

He was sat at the table, his back straight, palms flat on his knees. His eyes were blank, staring down at the table. He didn’t seem to have noticed them come in.

Hermione let her eyes flicker over him.

He was in a white dress shirt today, his hair just brushing the crisp collar, flicking outwards. The cuffs were rolled up to his forearms.

Johnson cleared his throat noisily, causing Malfoy to jump slightly. He looked up, and his eyes immediately cleared.

They flared wide as he took them in, stood in the doorway, immediately landing on her and staying there.

He looked tired, she thought. Even more so than last time. He was pinched, heavy dark circles under his eyes.

He reminded her of how he had looked in school, in the days after the Sectumsempra and before he opened the cabinet.

He opened his mouth, as if he was going to speak, and then snapped it shut again. His eyes were wide, still not leaving her. He clearly hadn’t expected to see her.

‘Mr Malfoy, how are you doing?’ Howe asked.

Draco seemed to take a minute, drawing himself up, his face visibly changing into his usual affect, snarky, sarcastic, and droll.

‘Peachy, thanks.’

‘We are aware that there is a lot of media speculation at the moment. How are you coping with that?’

Malfoy rolled his eyes, he didn’t answer, just holding his palms up and shrugging.

‘Useful.’ Johnson said, and Hermione got the feeling he was keeping his professional face on, that he didn’t particularly like Malfoy, didn’t trust him. It was understandable.

‘So, we are going down to watch the memories now, and we will be back up to interview you once we are done, Ok? Do you want anything? A hot drink?’

Malfoy shook his head.

‘How long will this take? I’ve got things I need to do today.’ The arrogance was back.

Howe fixed him with a stare. ‘It will take as long as it takes Mr Malfoy.’

Johnson interjected, 'We need to ask your permission, for Miss Granger to view the memories, as part of her training. Do you give permission? If so, sign here,' he slapped down a piece of parchment in front of Malfoy, who paled even further as he looked down at it.

He pushed himself back from the table, 'Oh, no.. that's not-' he looked flustered for the first time.

He looked to her, back down at the parchment, then back up. He seemed to be debating with himself.

He put a hand up into his hair, gripping it tightly.

Was that panic she could see in his grey eyes?

She looked at him, trying to hold his gaze.

Let me see, she wanted to say. Help me to understand you.

After a moment, he seemed to come to a decision. His shoulders sagged, he kept the hand in his hair and looked down at the table.

'Fine.' He muttered quietly. 'What the fuck have I got to lose?' Hermione frowned, what did he mean?

He motioned his hand for a quill, which appeared instantly and he signed the paper, a large looping signature.

Hermione felt a pleased satisfaction. It would have been so frustrating if he had said no. She watched him sign, looking at the top of his tousled head.

He raised his eyes but didn't meet hers. His face was tense.

'Thank you.' She said, not waiting for him to respond, and followed the Aurors out, down the corridor to the Pensieve room.

Draco - November 1998

Draco waited in that room for what felt like an eternity.

His knee jiggled, the only sign of his anxiety he would allow out.

He desperately Occluded, using his old technique for keeping calm when all he wanted to do was roar with frustrated anxiety, flip the table, and rip the room to pieces.

His emotions were simmering beneath the surface, the dragon curling and whipping its tail. He felt the smoke rising up his throat, felt it burning as he exhaled it from his nostrils.

Why the fuck had he let Granger view the memories? Why hadn't he said no?

He didn't know what had come over him, he had looked into her huge brown eyes, and he had lost all conscious thought. He had melted.

Some stupid part of him had given up, it had been long enough. He was fed up with secrets. He had spent his life keeping them.

His father, his life at the manor, his feelings for Granger, always secrets.

He just didn't have the energy for it any more. Since what had happened in the astronomy tower, his battle to keep her safe, and now the skirmish, Voldemort, all of it.

He was sick of it he had realised. She already knew he hadn't taken her during the mission, what harm would it do to let her finally see the truth?

But even though Draco tried to tell himself that, he was panicking.

Granger hated him. She always had, one smile didn't change that.

She, Potter and Weasley had been his enemies. Just because he felt differently didn't mean that she ever would.

He needed to stop letting himself hope.

So, he forced himself to get his breathing under control, forced the dragon down, doused it with the cold water of his Occlumency.

He made himself sink so far down into himself that he actually didn't hear when the door opened a second time.

He jumped as he heard his name.

The Aurors stood, faces grim, their eyes reproachful, motioning for him to follow them. Granger was nowhere in sight.

Draco rose, anxiety in the pit of his stomach.

He followed the Aurors down the corridor, fighting to hide his emotions. Where was she? She would have seen him getting the mark, seen him letting the Death Eaters in, what had happened that night and what he had done. He had made sure to leave out the part with Potter.'

She would have seen Voldemort ask him for her, watched Draco kill Voldemort, kill all of them.

She was probably with Potter right now, he thought. Crying to him about how creepy Draco was, or maybe they were together, laughing at him for all the things he had done for someone who couldn't stand him.

He went through into the interview room and sat meekly, not even able to form a sarcastic response when they asked him if he was aware, when he had seen Miss Granger yesterday, that allowing her into the interview was a conflict of interest.

He got through the rest of the interview in a daze.

Giving simple yes or no answers. Not even caring when they told him he had to keep the trace on longer, until the attention died down.

Apparently, Hermione Granger had been made to sign a vow of secrecy, about the things he had done, due to the risk she could be under from other Death Eaters if his protection of her got out.

That gave him a jolt. Fuck. He hadn't thought of that.

Draco didn't think any of them would have the guts to go after Granger. They knew it would send him on a one way mission to their door, and he was sure those that had survived two nights ago would know that he would not be merciful.

But Granger didn't know that.

He wanted to ask if she was ok, how she had responded to what she had seen, but obviously he couldn't do that.

He was free to go, they told him.

Draco Apparated back to the manor, about ready to lose his shit.

It was too much, all of it.

He wanted to scream, wanted to rage, he wanted to hurt someone, to hurt himself.

He felt the sudden need for pain, he knew physical pain, knew the flare of it in his gut, the feeling of fighting against it, obliterating every other thought and emotion.

Draco needed to go, he had to find what he needed, maybe in a muggle pub, or at the door of one of his father's friends.

He marched towards the manor door and wrenched it open, his chest heaving, nostrils flaring.

Hermione Granger was stood on his doorstep.

She stepped back in alarm, her eyes wide as she took in his puffed up chest, the rage clouding his features.

Draco stopped dead.

He stood, the shock of seeing her on his doorstep for the second time freezing him in place.

What was she doing there?

Granger looked back at him, she was pale, he could see tears tracked on her cheeks, dried and fresh.

Her hair had come loose from her braid, and soft tendrils curled in wisps around her face. Her cheeks were pink, so was the tip of her small nose.

Draco looked at her in horror, why was she crying?

'Granger?' He asked, all the anger gone from him.

'Are you ok?'

She sniffed, her brown eyes filling with tears again as she looked at him.

Draco didn't know what to do. He just stood there, he tried to open his mouth to speak, but the sight of her distress had stolen his words.

'Draco-' the word came out on a shaky exhale.

'Granger, what are you doing here?' He tried again. 'Is this about the memories? I'm sorry,' he said.

'I shouldn't have let you see.'

She stepped towards him then, and Draco felt his face go numb. She was looking at him, looking into his eyes.

The tears in her own eyes spilled over, running down her face. He wanted to wipe them away, he couldn't stand to see her upset.

Draco didn't even realise what she was going to do until it happened. Her delicate arms came up, they brushed his shoulders as she brought them around him, and then suddenly, Granger was on her tiptoes, hugging him. She was pulling him tightly to her, her face pressed into his neck. She was sobbing, her little puffs of breath on his skin making him shiver and his stomach tighten.

He was so taken aback that he didn't hug her back at first. He just stood there, hands by his sides, punch drunk with disbelief at what was happening.

'Draco,' he heard his name again, felt her mouth move against his skin.

Merlin.

'Thank you,' she said. 'For all of it, I didn't know- thank you.'

He finally came to himself enough to bring his arms up. He let them snake around her waist, pulling her close to him.

He lost himself in the hug, dropping his face into her hair and inhaling, feeling her shuddering breaths against him, her ribs move under his hands. He didn't know how he'd gotten to be so lucky, but he was going to take every second he could get.

Eventually, she let him go.

He released her straight away and let her step back. She swiped a hand over her eyes and rubbed at her nose.

'Gods, I'm sorry.' She said. 'I'm a snotty mess.'

No- you're perfect, Draco wanted to say. But he didn't.

She smiled at him then, through her tears. Draco didn't know what to do except smile hesitantly back.

And then they were there again, for the second time, smiling at each other on the steps of the manor.

'Draco,' Hermione said. Her voice shaky. 'Please can I come in, I think we need to talk.'

I Can Die Happy

Hermione - November 1998

Hermione looked at him, Draco Malfoy.
The boy who hadn't been her enemy at all.

He had actually been her guardian angel.

She gave into her emotions, she didn't even try to fight them.
She stretched up and wrapped her arms around Malfoy's neck, pressing her face into the place where his hair flicked onto his collar and breathing in the scent that already, she only associated with him.

'Draco,' she said through her tears. She felt him tense as her lips brushed the soft skin of his neck.

'Thank you - for all of it. I didn't know, Thank you,'

He hesitated for only a moment and then she felt them, the hands she'd thought about several times in the past few days, strong looking, masculine hands, the Malfoy ring firmly in place on his index finger.

He slid them up around her and splayed them over her ribs, pulling her close.

She let him pull her tight against him and encircled his neck with her arms, even as she told herself that the feeling coursing through her was dangerous. She was feeling more than just gratitude for Draco Malfoy.

Draco Malfoy, the man who had murdered people, to protect her.

The thought hit her hard, and she reluctantly pulled away from him, feeling him drop his arms to his sides. He stepped back, concern etched into his features, his eyes searching hers. He was so focused on her.

She kept expecting sarcasm, spite and arrogance, not the quiet intensity of his eyes always on her face, that made her cheeks flare and something pool dangerously low in her belly.

Under Malfoy's gaze, Hermione suddenly became aware that she probably looked horrendous. She was not a delicate crier.

'Gods, I'm sorry.' She said, 'I'm a snotty mess.'

She swiped at her tears and her runny nose but she couldn't stop, couldn't get her tears under control.

He watched her continue to cry with a perplexed, helpless expression now. He looked like he had absolutely no idea what to do or what to say.

She realised that he was probably embarrassed by her tears, Draco didn't seem like the crying type.

She smiled at him through her sobs, trying to show him that she was okay, and she got a small smile back but he still looked utterly mortified and he still hadn't said a word since she had hugged him.

Hermione needed to talk to him. After watching the memories she was positively overflowing with questions.

'Draco' she said, embarrassed by the wobble in her voice. 'Please can I come in? I think we need to talk.'

Her words seemed to break the spell, and he blinked, his grey eyes clearing slightly as he stepped back.

'Of course. Yes, come in.'

He motioned for her to go first so she stepped back into the cool, dark interior of the manor. Draco closed the door behind her, stopping to take a deep breath and rub a hand hard over his face.

Hermione walked down the hallway, her chest still hitching as her sobs abated. She was amazed and intimidated again at the sheer size of the manor, the high ceilings and the overt opulence.

The paintings hanging just in this hallway were worth more than her entire house, she realised.

There were portraits and pictures covering the walls, statues and ornaments everywhere she looked, but the manor wasn't welcoming, it wasn't homely.

It was dark, ominous. There was a sad, empty feeling to it no matter how many antiques it was stuffed with.

Hermione couldn't imagine how anyone ever felt at home here.

Their footsteps echoed down the long passageway as they walked.

Malfoy didn't speak but he kept his eyes on her, he looked reproachful, thoughtful.

He was so different from the arrogant teenager she had known, she thought again.

That version of Malfoy would have been rolling out the sarcastic comments by now.

Had he always been like this underneath? Hermione wondered, or had the traumatic events of the last few years knocked it out of him?

Eventually he opened the door of the same parlour room she had visited last time. There was a low fire burning in the grate. At least this room was warm, she thought as they entered.

Draco motioned to the sofa for her to sit, and this time he joined her, positioning himself awkwardly on the seat next to her, as if he was afraid to touch her.

He still hadn't spoken.

His eyes slid to her, and he waited, appearing to be holding his breath.

‘Malfoy,’ she began, feeling emotion well up in her throat again.

‘What I saw, in the Pensieve, with the Aurors, I can’t-’ she paused. ‘I can’t get my head around the fact that you- you’ve done so much for me over the last year. You’ve put yourself in so much danger. I really don’t understand.’

He didn’t respond. His eyes had left hers and he was now staring determinedly down at his own hands on his knees.

She waited a moment, then continued on.

‘I had no idea you were doing that, going through so much, it’s- I’m struggling to process it. It’s a lot to get my head around.’

He nodded slightly.

‘I’m just so glad you let me see the memories, so I can thank you, I would never have known.’

His eyes remained firmly on his hands, she saw his jaw clench, but he still didn’t speak. Why didn’t he speak? It was making her nervous. She just kept talking, because he wasn’t.

‘Draco?’

A jolt.

He finally, *finally* met her eyes.

She waited. Willing him to just talk to her.

‘You weren’t safe.’ A softly spoken sentence, ‘I wasn’t going to let them take you.’

‘You went up against Voldemort, and the Death Eaters. You hid me from them,’ Hermione said. ‘But I thought you hated me. All this time.’

He frowned, his face screwed up slightly as he chewed his lip. There was another long pause before he replied.

Hermione felt herself getting impatient, she wanted answers from him, she needed to understand what she had seen.

‘I never hated you, Granger.’

It was so hard to believe him, even now.

‘Then why? Why did you treat me so badly? Why did you act like you did?’

He huffed out a long sigh. The hand came back up to his face, a second one joined it. When he eventually spoke, the words came from behind both hands, a muffled voice.

‘Believe me, it was better for you that way,’

Hermione forgot what Draco Malfoy was capable of, she forgot herself completely. Her emotions got the better of her.

She reached forwards and pulled his hands away from his eyes. She felt the coolness of his fingers in hers as she hooked her own around his.

‘Malfoy! Enough. Look at me. Stop giving me half answers. You didn’t have to protect me, that wasn’t your job. I watched you, you put yourself in mortal danger, more than once.

I saw you kill Bellatrix, LeStrange and Greyback- Crouch, you stopped him- ’ She felt herself shudder, the tears threatening again.

Malfoy’s eyes dropped to their fingers. She realised that she still hadn’t let go, their fingers were still entwined from when she had pulled his hand away from his eyes. Their faces were inches from each other’s, their knees just touching on the couch. Hermione didn’t back away. She needed to know.

‘Why? Why did you do it? We never spoke, we weren’t friends. You actively went out of your way to make sure I knew you despised me, that I’m a Mudblood,’ she saw him visibly cringe.

‘Why did you care what happened to me?’

He suddenly stood. He moved away from her, backing himself into the corner.

‘Fuck. Where’s that Acromantula when you need it?’

The words were quiet, under his breath.

Hermione looked at him in frustration.

He had killed Voldemort, killed Death Eaters with his bare hands.

He was apparently the deadliest wizard in the world, and here she was, begging him to talk to her, like they were children, arguing about trivial things. Not the fact that this man had risked his life to save hers, more than once, and would have happily gone on with his life, and let her go on with hers, without her ever even knowing, if she hadn’t come to shadow the Aurors.

She stood up. She was being reckless, she knew, but she was Hermione Granger. She always had to *know* everything, and Draco Malfoy was a mystery she had to understand.

She walked towards him. He looked almost scared of her as she approached. She felt suddenly like laughing at the ridiculousness of Malfoy being scared of anyone. He didn’t look like he wanted to laugh. He looked like he wanted the ground to swallow him up.

‘Don’t make me do this.’ He said quietly, ‘I don’t want to do this.’

‘Tell me.’ She fixed her eyes on him, pinning him with her gaze. What was she doing?

‘Why Malfoy?’

He threw his hands up, ‘You know why! Granger!’ He burst out, his voice suddenly loud, echoing in the large room. ‘Stop playing dumb. If there’s one thing you’re not, it’s dumb!’

Hermione stopped her approach, frozen in place.

Something in Draco seemed to break then. A dam had burst. The pent up emotion he had clearly been pushing down, rose up to the surface.

‘I can’t do this! This is too much for me, Granger. I’m not like you. I haven’t led the life you have. You don’t, you don’t understand-’.

She realised that his breath had started coming in little huffs, his chest was rising and falling rapidly, his face grew pale. She had pushed him too far.

‘I’m sorry,’ she said, ‘I didn’t mean-’

‘I wanted to keep you safe, because, you’re important to me Granger!’ He almost shouted.

‘You’re not just important to me, you’re the most important thing to me.

And I know how pathetic that is, you don’t even like me.

But, I like you. I’ve always liked you. Even when I acted like I didn’t.

Your intelligence, your kindness, your determination, your loyalty.

You are everything I think a human should be, you’re everything I’ll never be, and I couldn’t let anything happen to you.

Everyone always makes such a fuss of Potter, like he’s the most important fucking person in every room.

But it wasn’t him, it was you.

You are the one who made the Golden Trio so amazing. It was your hard work, your determination.

I didn’t want you to know because, fuck, because I’m a Malfoy, a bully like my father, and now I’m a fucking murderer.’

He was almost frantic, his hair stuck up in blonde spikes where he ran a hand through it anxiously.

‘And you, are you, Granger.

I didn’t want to tarnish you with anything about me, or my family.’

He motioned around the room, an anguished expression on his face, it’s dark here, I’m dark. I didn’t want the Malfoy poison tainting you.’

Hermione was dumbstruck. For the first time in her life.

Draco Malfoy, the boy who called her Mudblood, who had never looked at her with anything other than disdain was telling her- what was he telling her?’

‘I’m important? To you?’

She couldn’t process it, even after seeing his memories, she couldn’t picture it.

‘Always. Since the first time I saw you.’

His eyes burned into hers.

Hermione felt strange.

She felt unlike herself. She wasn’t rational, she wasn’t looking at this calmly, she wasn’t thinking about anything other than Draco Malfoy’s eyes, staring into hers, the intoxicating scent of him that for some reason drew her close and made her mouth water.

Hermione thought she knew what her Ammortentia would smell like from now on.

She looked at his sharp jaw, his hair, so bright against the bleakness of the manor walls, his broad shoulders, the strength in his body, the power in his large hands.

It was making Hermione feel something she had never felt in her life. She felt her own lips part, felt her breath come quickly now.

His nostrils flared slightly, his jaw clenched. The heat in his eyes was making her feel like she was melting.

Draco didn’t look scared any more.

He looked enticingly dangerous, like a lion, stalking its prey before it pounced.

But he didn’t pounce. He waited, breathing hard, waiting for her.

What was she doing?

Stood alone in Malfoy manor with her childhood bully, a clearly dangerous man?

Why did she feel like she didn’t want to be anywhere else?

Hermione blinked.

‘Malfoy?’

‘Granger,’ a low sound.

‘Do you actually have an Acromantula here? Because I feel like that is something you’d do.’

He looked at her then, and all the tension bled out of his features.

He looked confused again for a moment, and then started laughing.

It was a deep sound, rumbling from his chest.

It almost looked as though it surprised him when it came out of his mouth. It changed his features, made him even more handsome.

Malfoy had dimples, she realised.

She’d never noticed. She didn’t know if she’d ever seen him really laugh. She’d only ever seen him make a cruel, mocking sound, through a curled lip, that didn’t reach his eyes.

This laugh was like the smile from the other day, but one hundred times better. Hermione couldn’t help laughing too.

They stood and laughed for a few minutes.

‘No, I don’t have an Acromantula’ he said, ‘I did, but it heard Auror- in- training Granger was coming so it’s hiding.’

‘Oh really?’ She said, ‘I’m scary? Scarier than you?’

He looked at her then, a glint in his eye.

‘Much.’

The tension between them had been a taut wire, that she had needed to loosen. She didn’t know what might have happened if she hadn’t.

She was Hermione Granger, she reminded herself.

She wasn’t like the girls at Hogwarts, she wasn’t like the girls who kissed boys against walls, who got down on their knees and unzipped their flies, she wasn’t...

Hermione felt herself get hot.

‘Granger?’

‘Yes?’ She felt like she’d been caught out. She shook her head slightly, trying to clear her thoughts.

‘Are you hungry? I can’t remember when I last ate and I’m starving. Would you have some dinner?’

‘Dinner?’

‘Yes, you know - food? With me?’

Hermione wondered if this was some sort of bizarre dream.

Now Draco Malfoy was inviting her to dinner at the manor.

Hermione felt herself nodding before she’d even considered how ridiculous it was. She’d come for a confrontation, for a confession of some sort.

But instead, she was getting dinner.

He seemed to finally relax a little.

Whatever had passed between them pushed to the side for now. She decided to wait to ask him any more questions. He was clearly hugely uncomfortable with it.

Malfoy called out and suddenly a house elf appeared with a pop.

Hermione felt her face darken as she watched him ask the elf to bring them dinner. She despised the use of house elves.

The elf, apparently called ‘Moddles’ nodded enthusiastically as Draco put in a request for food, asking Hermione what she wanted.

‘Actually I’m fine,’ she said. ‘I don’t agree with elf slavery,’ She shot a glance at Malfoy.

The elf looked at Malfoy, her eyes wide.

He looked back at her and pulled a face, then the two of them started laughing. They were laughing at *her* Hermione realised.

The elf looked back at Hermione, at her indignant face and laughed even more.

‘What?’ She said, feeling a blush creep up her cheeks.

‘What?’

Malfoy stopped laughing and turned to her. Moddles will make you whatever you want, Granger.

She really doesn’t mind. She’s not here because I’m making her be here.

She’s actually a free elf. I released her the second my parents signed over the manor to me.’

Hermione’s already raised eyebrows rose even further. The manor was his?

Moddles looked at Hermione and nodded proudly.

‘I is staying to look after Master Malfoy,’ she said. ‘I love Master Malfoy.’ She moved closer to him defensively, a little frown on her face.

‘But don’t you want to go and live your own life?’ Hermione asked her. ‘Do the things you like to do?’

Moddles glared at Hermione then, and moved even closer to Draco. She clutched his trouser leg in her tiny fist.

‘I like working here, I don’t want to go. I’s been looking after Master Draco since he was a baby.’ She said, turning her huge blue eyes to Malfoy and looking at him adoringly.

Hermione looked at him, and he raised his eyebrows, a slight smirk on his face.

There he was, she thought.

But the smirk wasn’t mean. It was good natured. He reached down, and gently squeezed the little elf’s shoulder.

‘You did a good job of it too Moddles.’ He said.

Hermione was shocked then to see the elf’s eyes fill up with tears.

‘Moddles, oh no, please don’t.’ Malfoy’s tone was warning. He took his hand from her shoulder and crouched down. He spoke to her in a low voice.

‘Remember,’ he said. ‘I’m ok. I’m fine. It’s all over now isn’t it.’

Fat tears fell onto the ground.

Moddles nodded, looking up at Draco, her blue eyes swimming with tears and adoration.

Then she turned and flashed another glare at Hermione before disappearing with a pop.

Hermione stared after her in shock.

Another thing she had learned about Draco Malfoy, he was kind to the house elves.

‘Sorry about her,’ Malfoy said.

‘She’s a little bit, uh- defensive of me. She did a lot for me growing up.’

‘No,’ Hermione said. ‘It’s fine. You’re so lucky to have been so loved.’

‘Hmmm,’ he didn’t say anything else.

He motioned for her to follow him, and they left the parlour, heading again down the long hallway to a dining room.

They passed so many doors.

Many were open, but some were shut up, closed off.

She watched him as he walked, graceful, catlike. He always seemed to be ready, always tensed.

By the time they arrived at the dining room the huge mahogany table was already groaning with food. Hermione’s eyes widened with amazement as she took in the platters of roasted vegetables, sliced meat, buttery looking potatoes, sauces, bread, olives and cheeses and fruit.

How were they going to possibly even make a dent in that amount of food?

‘Ah,’ Malfoy said. ‘I think Moddles might have taken your words as a bit of a slight. She might be overcompensating here a little,’

‘A little?’ Hermione breathed. ‘There’s enough food here for twenty people.’

Malfoy looked embarrassed.

Hermione looked at him as he pulled out one of the silk padded mahogany chairs and motioned for her to sit, pushing it in for her and flicking a white napkin onto her lap with a flourish.

He sat opposite her and they appraised the food. It all looked delicious.

Hermione put a small bit of everything onto her delicate bone china plate, watching as Draco piled his own high.

They sat in silence for a while, eating, taking sips of the rich red wine in their goblets.

Hermione didn’t think she’d ever tasted food so perfectly cooked and seasoned, every mouthful was heaven.

She watched Malfoy eat.

He even managed to do that gracefully.

He cut his food into small pieces, chewed slowly, mouth closed, napkin to hand.

It was all very formal and polite.

His eyes flickered to her often, she noticed.

He watched her closely, his eyes on her mouth as she bit into a perfectly ripe strawberry.

Despite how lovely the food was, Hermione couldn't manage to eat much.

It had been a long day, her shock at what she had seen in the memories, the looks the Aurors had given her as she denied all knowledge of Malfoy's actions, the secrecy agreement, turning up here. It all felt like it had happened to someone else, it felt surreal to be sat here now, opposite him as though they were just two friends having dinner.

She imagined Harry and Ron's horror if they knew what she was doing.

She looked up at him. He was chewing some bread thoughtfully, his eyes on her as always. He swallowed it down as he held her gaze.

'This is weird isn't it,' he said.

'Surreal,'

He sighed and pushed his plate away.

'What is it exactly you need to know Granger? What do you want me to tell you?'

Finally.

'I've actually got a list.' She said.

'A list?'

'Of questions.'

He pressed his mouth into a thin line.

'Of course you do.'

She reached into her jacket pocket, and brought out her notebook and quill, which she had charmed to be pocket sized, then she lifted her sleeve and brought out her wand from its holster on her forearm.

His eyes widened, then seemed to darken slightly.

'You keep your wand in a holster?' He asked. She saw his tongue dart out to wet his lips.

'Easy access. Especially when coming to visit a Death Eater.'

'And a murderer.' He supplied helpfully.

'And a murderer.'

He smiled at her, it was a slightly wicked smile. She felt that jolt in her belly again.

'Okay, just ask me.' He said with a sigh.

She used her wand to make the notebook normal sized again, then flipped it open. She looked through her pages of notes.

Malfoy was craning his neck to try and read them across the table. She picked up the journal and held it closer to her. She did not want him reading her notes on him. She flipped to the pages of questions, then eyeballed him, fixing him with her eyes, determined for answers this time.

He was back to looking nervous. He had stopped eating, pushing his plate away, his meal half eaten.

Hermione cleared her throat.

‘Okay. Question one. What exactly did the Death Eaters want with me, in particular?’

He looked her in the eye. ‘Your mind. They wanted to use you as a weapon.’

She swallowed. ‘Was that all?’

They both knew what she was asking.

He dropped his gaze. ‘No.’

Hermione released a long breath. She saw him close his eyes briefly and grimace.

She released a shaky breath.

‘Okay. Question two.’

‘Go.’ He was tense now. His fingers gripping the table, his shoulders stiff.

‘Crouch,’

Draco paled visibly,

‘Do you think he-’

‘No, definitely not. I got there too quickly.’

Hermione felt all the air leave her at once.

That had been the fear, festering in the back of her mind, since she’d seen the memory and watched Malfoy kill him so brutally, that maybe Crouch had done something to her. She felt her relief flow through her, a physical sensation, washing through her body and choking her with emotion.

‘Thank you, thank you so much Draco.’

He just nodded slightly. Barely acknowledging her words.

Hermione’s voice was thick with tears. It took her a minute to get herself under control.

‘How did you get me to the Great Hall? I’ve thought about it and I can’t remember getting there at all, just waking up there. The memory ended with you carrying me away from Crouch.’

He blanched.

‘I can’t answer that.’

‘What? Why?’

‘I just can’t. Please don’t ask me any more about it Granger.

Play fair.

I’ll answer other things, but I can’t answer that.’

She could see he wasn’t going to budge. ‘Okay, fine.’ She needed to think over what his reluctance could mean. She filed that question away for later.

‘A different question then- Do you think I’m still in danger?’

He shook his head, a decisive movement, one sharp shake, no doubt on his face at all.

‘They wouldn’t dare.’

Hermione looked at him. He was so confident in his own strength, in the power he now had.

It made Hermione’s stomach clench.

How must it feel to be that powerful? She looked at his hands again, the ones she had seen him literally kill people with, by just moving them the way he wanted to, and she bit her lip slightly.

He was watching her, looking at her with dark eyes, making her stomach twist further. The hot flush went through her again.

Hermione swallowed.

‘Okay, last question. Malfoy.’ She cleared her throat, ‘How long were they trying to get to me? Only since sixth year?’

‘No.’

‘How long?’

‘Granger, what does it matter?’

‘How long, Draco?’

He sighed.

‘The start of third year.’

Hermione felt her heart stop.

‘You’ve been protecting me, since- you’ve been doing this for nearly six years?’

Six years, she’d been in danger and she hadn’t known. She’d been oblivious, whilst Malfoy, Malfoy of all people, had been fighting to keep her out of the hands of Voldemort and his followers.

He didn’t reply.

She felt tears begin to fall again, felt them fill her eyes and trickle down her cheeks, she couldn’t stop them.

Her gratitude to him was immeasurable.

She felt so sad that he had done this alone. That she’d hated him so much. That they had all hated him, when he’d been fighting so hard.

Six years.

‘Granger,’

She looked up, his eyes were stormy, he looked like he was in pain. He sat opposite her, his food long forgotten, his hand moved towards her across the table, reaching for her, before twitching back.

‘Please, don’t cry Granger.’ His voice was soft, ‘I really don’t like it when you cry.’

That made her cry even more.

Who was this man?

Who had he always been?

Because it certainly wasn’t who she had thought. She cried at the realisation that his actions, some of them for her, had lead to him being here, in this manor, alone, with nobody, not even his parents.

‘Granger,’ his face was pinched.

‘Please don’t feel guilty. I did all of it because I wanted to. My life, before I met you. It wasn’t what you think it was. I would have tried to kill Voldemort regardless. I never- I didn’t want to be a Death Eater, I didn’t get any choice.’

She looked up at him, and her gut twisted at the sight of the pain in his face. He wasn’t telling her everything. She could tell.

‘Draco, I feel-’ she sobbed. ‘I don’t feel worthy of what you’ve done for me. I’m ashamed that you’ve done so much, and I never knew. I’m not worth all that trouble.’

He rose from the table, scraping his chair back, she stood up too.

‘Hermione,’ his voice broke on her name,

‘You couldn’t be more fucking wrong. Loving you- it gave me something to live for, when

times were really shit. It gave me a focus. Please, don't be sad. I don't want to be the reason you cry. Ever.'

They both froze as he realised what he had said, the words ringing in Hermione's ears.

He stepped towards her around the table. She watched him come, she didn't move. Her breath came quick, her fingers tingled by her sides. Her stomach swooped with that same feeling, the feeling she only got when looking at Malfoy, the one she had never had with anyone before.

Another step.

His eyes were focused fully on hers, his face set, his own hands fisted by his sides. She could see his chest rising and falling under the buttons of his crisp white shirt.

Hermione felt like she was on fire.

The heat that had made her melt earlier had now set alight inside her, the small embers growing, kindling as Draco stepped nearer again.

She let her own eyes take in his features. His razor sharp jawline, the slight scruff of blonde stubble beginning to grow back. She saw the dark ring of silver left in his eyes, his pupils blown, reflecting in the dim light of the dining room, his lips, so full and soft, parted as his breath hitched. He finally closed the gap between them.

'Granger,' she felt his breath ghost across her neck, felt the curls that had come loose from her braid tickle across her face.

His scent was all around her, enveloping her, making her lose all rational thought, narrowing her vision to a point, she could only focus on his eyes, his mouth.

'Fuck it.' He said.

And then suddenly, he was all over her.

His hands came up, cupping her face, fingers splayed, thumbs brushing against her cheeks and swiping away the tears there.

His lips found hers and she opened her mouth to him, feeling like she was drowning in him.

Her hands found his waist now, the hard ridge of muscle of his obliques. She ran them up and over his shoulders, pulling him closer to her.

She felt his tongue, deliciously soft as it slid into her mouth, sending a jolt directly to her core, making her thighs clench.

Hermione was molten, there was lava in her veins.

Draco's forearms flexed as his hands moved around to the base of her skull, sliding up into her braid. Their bodies pressed hard, melded to each other.

Hermione could feel every inch of him and it still wasn't enough.

She had been kissed before, but not like this, never like this. He was practically holding her up as her knees gave way.

Draco's breath came in ragged gasps into her mouth and she felt him shuddering as she slid her fingers up to his jaw, to pull his face closer to hers.

Hermione was utterly lost in the kiss, she knew she would never experience a kiss like it, and she knew she would never, ever forget it.

She was so lost in him, that she was shocked when Draco suddenly pulled away from her. He was shaking as he stepped back.

'I need to- I need to stop.' He groaned.

'Fuck.' He brought a hand up to fist in his hair, his breath came fast, his chest jerking as he sucked in harsh breaths.

She suddenly felt a blush travel up her entire body as she saw the projected front of his trousers, straining hard, the zipper pulled tight.

Oh gods.

Hermione clenched her legs together, hard.

'Sorry,' he said, 'If we carry on I'll-'

Hermione flushed at how much she desperately wanted him to finish his sentence. He would what?

She wanted him to tell her what kissing her had nearly made him do.

She saw him shift uncomfortably and realised she was staring at him.

'Sorry' they both said at the same time.

Malfoy laughed.

'You don't have to be sorry,' she said. 'I knew what I was doing.'

'Well I'm grateful,' he replied, running a hand through his hair, his breathing beginning to even out slightly.

She looked at him confused. 'Grateful?'

'As far as thank you's go, that was the best one I've ever had.'

Hermione stared at him open mouthed. He thought she'd done that, to thank him? As what, payment?

A new heat took over her now, she was furious.

How dare he think she'd-

Her anger dissipated as she saw him smiling at her. That wicked glint back in his eye.

'Malfoy!'

She moved back towards him.

Draco- November - 1998

Draco had tried to be a gentleman, he'd done what he thought was right and let her go when he felt himself start to lose control.

But when Hermione had stepped back and he'd seen her cheeks flushed under her freckles, her lips pink and swollen from kissing him and her hair all messy from his fingers, it took everything in him not to grab hold of her and throw her, caveman style over his shoulder and and take her to his bedroom.

He stood, in the dining room of the manor, feeling himself hot and hard in his trousers and he tried not to let the maniacal laughter burst out of him.

Hermione Granger had made him like this, the woman herself, not his boyhood fantasy, all dressed up in Slytherin green, not his more recent image of her, her eyes wild and hair even wilder, legs astride a broom- actual real Hermione Granger.

He'd nearly come all over himself as he'd pressed up against her, feeling her tongue in his mouth, hearing her little breaths as she pulled him closer to her.

Draco had wanted this for So. Fucking. Long.

He realised then that she was looking at him, well not at him, at his crotch. Her eyes were focused on the twitching, straining part of him that ached for her, ached to be touched by her.

She saw that he'd seen, and her face immediately flushed bright red.
Oh, gods. She was too pure for that.

'Sorry,' he said, just as she mumbled out her own apology.

The laughter bubbled up then. He felt almost hysterical. Things like this didn't happen to him. This was too good to be true. This was every want and dream Draco had had since he was eleven years old coming true.

'You don't have to be sorry,' she said. 'I knew what I was doing.'

He felt a kind of sickness creep in then. Was it a pity kiss? Had she done it because she felt sorry for him that his life was basically a shit show?

He tasted the bitterness in his mouth replacing the sweetness of her lips.

'Well I'm grateful,'

Her face changed abruptly, the glassy look gone from her huge brown eyes instantly. They were suddenly sharp, wary.

‘Grateful?’ Her voice was icy.

‘As far as thank you’s go, that was the best one I’ve ever had.’ He said, realising even as he said the words, that they were true, it was a pity kiss. She’d never kiss him voluntarily, Potter had told him that once before.

He wasn’t expecting what happened then.

The anger that flitted over her features, and worse than that, the hurt.

He’d hurt her with his words.

Granger looked like he’d slapped her, he didn’t want that, he didn’t want that at all.

So he backtracked, he turned on the Malfoy charm, throwing her a smile, a half cocked twist of his lips.

It always worked on Pansy when she was mad at him.

Granger’s eyes changed from that awful angry hurt to relief.

Thank fuck.

‘Malfoy!’ She shouted, a small smile on her face, and he loved the sound of his name on her lips.

She came towards him again, and Merlin, she was kissing him.

She’d initiated it, she was pressed back up against him, her sweet scent invading all his senses, her hands roaming over his body, running over his chest and trailing down his stomach.

Draco thought, he could die happy.

If he dropped dead now he would float down to the underworld, to meet all the other Malfoys and Blacks and he’d accept his fate with a stupid big grin on his face.

His girl was kissing him.

Draco and Hermione kissed in the dining room for a long time.

Their kisses were frantic at first and Draco thought he was going to explode with the feel of her hands on him.

But he didn’t want to push her to do anything she wasn’t ready for. He didn’t want her to have any regrets.

It took everything he had to wind his fingers through hers and keep everything above the waist. He couldn’t afford to mess this up, to scare her or to let her have any regrets.

So they just kissed.

They kissed until their lips were swollen and pink.

Draco dipped his head to Hermione's neck and sucked, hard.
He knew she'd have to glamour them away later but he couldn't help it. He wanted to mark her, like an animal with its mate.
He wanted to see the imprint of his lips on her skin-

Draco Malfoy was here.

So he sucked, and he felt himself grow even harder in his trousers at the sight of the cherry red love bites on her neck, at the sound she made as his lips fastened onto her skin, the soft sighs as she pulled his head closer to her and let him do it.

'What's happening to me Draco?' She asked, even as she brought up her leg and hooked it around his hip as he kissed her up against the wall of the dining room.

'Why can't I stop? I've never felt like this before.'

He couldn't answer her, his mouth was curved into a smile against her neck, his body wrapped around hers.

His throat closed up and his words got stuck.

This was really happening.

Hours later, Draco had no idea how many, they lay together on the uncomfortable leather couch next to the dining room fireplace, they had moved there at some point earlier, when they had kissed for too long to stay standing.

Draco lay on his side, his arm curled underneath him as she folded in next to him, one of her legs in between both of his, the other thrown over his hip.

Draco watched her, as the light from the fire played over her face.

Her eyes had drifted closed and her eyelashes spread out over her cheeks. He ran a curl gently through his fingers and brushed her hair softly off her face.

He counted her freckles and traced the outline of her lips with his eyes.

She was so beautiful it made his heart hurt.

Draco still couldn't believe this was happening. He had finally gotten the girl. It only took nearly dying once or twice.

It was worth it. He thought. He'd die a thousand times if it meant he got to do this with her. He felt his lips spread into a wide grin. He was so happy.

Draco didn't think he had ever felt this happy.

He also felt tired, he realised, for the first time since he'd killed Voldemort.

He struggled to sleep, usually choosing to go out and fly around the grounds on his broom until he saw the yellow dawn light begin to creep in.

But, laying with her, he felt his own eyes begin to close, a peace he hadn't felt in so long stealing over him.

He lay his head gently on Hermione's chest, and he let himself fall asleep, his fingers intertwined with hers, listening to her heartbeat.

Hermione- November 1998

Hermione awoke a few hours later. She had no idea what time it was. She was stiff, her neck bent at an uncomfortable angle on the arm of the sofa. The fire had burned down in the grate, just a few embers left.

But she wasn't cold, because Draco Malfoy's body almost entirely covered hers. His head lay on her chest, he was heavy with sleep. She looked down at his tousled blonde hair, his features were so beautiful in repose. She unwound her fingers from his and brought them up to stroke the soft blonde strands of his hair, the smooth skin of his face, the small scar on his one cheek.

She was in trouble, Hermione realised.

She had fallen, hard and fast for probably the most complicated man she could have found.

But for now, she didn't care. She had lived the last seven years for someone else, fighting and worrying and always trying her best to help. This time, she wanted to do something that she wanted to do, and she wanted to be here.

With him.

She let her eyes drift closed again, her fingers coming to rest on Draco's shoulders, her face in his hair as she fell asleep.

The Dragon

Chapter Notes

So it looks like I've fallen into a pattern of posting Wednesdays and Sundays.
So I'm going to try and stick to that now as best I can, unless life gets in the way, to try and give myself deadlines to aim for.

Thank you for reading! I appreciate you all ♥ Enjoy another mostly pain free chapter!

Draco- November 1998

Draco woke up, stiff in all sorts of places, and the first emotion to hit him was panic.

His eyes flew open, his heart pounding with the fear that Granger would be gone, or that she hadn't really been there at all.

That he had dreamed her.

But the first thing he saw when he opened his eyes was hair- wild, curly hair everywhere, obscuring his vision.

He smiled, feeling relief flood through him, and he raised his head slightly to assess the situation.

Somehow, during the night they had shifted so that he was laying on his back on the leather couch, his neck bent awkwardly on the arm, his long legs hanging off the other end. He still had his dragonskin shoes on.

Hermione was fast asleep on top of him. Her arms draped loosely over his shoulders, her hair fanned out over his chest as she turned her face to the side. She was breathing lightly, her face pink from their body heat.

She must have taken her braid out in the night he realised, letting his eyes drift appreciatively over the tumble of her long, shiny curls spread out over his white shirt. He fucking loved her hair, he always had.

Draco felt his body react instantly as he suddenly became acutely aware of the feel of Hermione on top of him, the soft swell of her breasts, her hip bones pressing into his thighs. He shifted uncomfortably underneath her, trying to make things less obvious without waking her up, but almost the second he shifted his hips, she jolted awake.

Draco watched the same realisations that he had had flit across her face before those whisky coloured eyes slid up to meet his.

He waited, holding his breath.

She smiled at him- a hesitant, sleepy smile, but her expression was not the smile of someone with regrets.

He thanked Salazar that he had forced himself to have self- restraint last night.

He wanted things to go at her pace. Draco knew that Granger was a different person to him in lots of ways.

Their wildly varied life experiences meant that their morals were not the same.

‘Good Morning,’ she whispered, looking beautifully shy under his gaze.

Draco thought that it was a good morning, it was the best morning.

He had never thought he could feel this happy whilst still being within the manor walls.

He hated the place so much. How could he not when it held such terrible memories?

When he entered certain rooms he felt like he could still see his blood staining the wood grain, still feel the sensation of being dragged backwards by his ankle, his nails ripping from his fingers.

It had been so long, but Draco still dreamed regularly of specific incidences, his shoulder, his first time being Crucioed, Barty Crouch’s visit, and the glass of the whisky tumblers slicing into his knees.

He haunted his own house - A little boy, creeping through the halls, looking for comfort but only finding monsters with eyes like his, and a triumphant smile.

And that was all before Voldemort took over and he had to endure the Death Eater occupation of the only home he had.

But now, he finally had a happy memory here.

He wondered if that memory could take root and bloom outwards.

Or if it would always just be that, one white orchid planted in a barren, black place, dying through lack of water and air.

Draco desperately wanted more happy memories.

He had never been able to make a Patronus.

He genuinely couldn’t even make the beam of light flash at the end of his wand, no matter how powerful he was, how strong his magic was.

He had no memories that were happy enough.

His only happy memories involved Granger and even those were always tainted with misery or pain.

The spin-the-bottle game was the one he always tried, but it was spoiled by the memory of Potter’s face as he had walked in on Draco kissing Hermione, and then his snarl as he had sent the Sectumsempra towards him in the bathroom days later.

Draco always associated that kiss with the sharp agony of the slices that had opened all over his body, the searing pain as his blood had seemed to burst out of his skin, coating the bathroom floor red in seconds.

He tried memories of his friends, but he just thought that he was always so wracked with worry and fear that even those memories were tainted.

This was one true, happy memory. Maybe this could be the one.

He tightened his arms around her as she brought her lips down to his, letting her legs fall to straddle him, her stomach pressing slightly onto the hard ridge of him in his trousers. Draco hissed in a breath, feeling all his blood travel south as her tongue slipped gently into his mouth.

He brought his hands up into her hair, running his fingers through her curls, letting them slide through his fingers and fall back down like a curtain over their faces, hiding them from the world.

He felt Hermione's fingers trace along his jaw to the base of his neck, before continuing down over his shoulders. Draco shivered against her as their tongues slid into each other's mouths, he sucked her tongue gently and heard her breath quicken in response.

Hermione wriggled slightly and he felt her move so that she was positioned right on top of where he was now throbbing, hard and aching for her.

Draco let out a low groan as he felt her grind gently but deliberately against his erection.

'Fuck, Granger, what are you doing to me?' He panted.

She kissed him lightly now, teasing, feather light kisses, against his open mouth, taking control from her position on top of him.

Draco lay underneath her, totally at her mercy as she moved ever so slowly over him, her knees pressing into the sofa either side of Draco's hips. He twitched and shuddered, completely focused on the sensation of her body on top of his.

He dropped his hands from her hair and slid them down her ribcage to her waist intending to pull her down harder onto him.

He inhaled sharply as he realised that she must have taken her trousers off at some point during the night too.

His fingers met the soft, bare skin of her thighs and he opened his eyes to see Hermione, in just a pair of lacy white knickers and her shirt, unbuttoned to her waist, straddling him with her hands pressed against his chest as she pushed herself to sit up.

Her hair cascaded down in loose curls, her eyes were huge and glassy, her lips parted, his love bites trailed down her neck, disappearing below her shirt.

This.

This was his patronus moment, Draco thought. All his dreams were coming true.

He let his fingers slip over the lace of her underwear, feeling the softness of the satin under his rough fingertips, calloused from duelling and flying.

He spread his fingers out as he gripped her waist firmly and pushed his hips up. Hermione moaned softly against his mouth and Draco couldn't help himself, he rocked his hips again, just to hear her make that sound.

She met his thrust with one of her own and then she was moving on top of him. Draco looked down to see the thick shaft of his cock straining the front of his trousers, trapped against his stomach by the soft satin of Hermione's underwear, as she slid herself slowly up and down the length of him.

The friction between their bodies as she moved narrowed his focus to just the feel of her, warm and wet, through his trousers.

Draco panted hard as he gripped onto her hips, helping her move faster against him she arched her back, and moved her hands behind her to grip his thighs, pushing her hips forward and grinding down harder onto him, squeezing his shaft hard as she slid up and down.

He could hear her now, her breath trembling in and out as she moaned, small 'oh's' of pleasure.

Draco reached up and deftly undid the last few buttons of her shirt, groaning at the view he now had of her full, heavy breasts bouncing slightly in her white lace bra as she rocked on top of him.

It was too much, and it wasn't enough.

His cock throbbed in his trousers, desperate to be let free, to slide into her, to push gently into her slick, soft center. He knew she would be tight, sweet. But she needed to initiate it, he couldn't push her too far.

Hermione's pace increased, she moved quicker now and he could feel her thighs clenching around him. He could feel himself starting to build, the feel and sight of her making his cock harder, aching and twitching as she moved, he could feel, even through his trousers, how wet she was, feel her beginning to tighten, to pulse.

Her breathing increased and she kept going faster, grinding harder against him. The friction felt so good, the pace just right, he didn't know how long he'd be able to hold on.

Draco watched Hermione's chest hitching as she whined his name and felt his own blood thunder in his ears, his cock thick and solid under her. He pulled her down tight to him, his hips stuttering as she arched her back further, her hair brushing his thighs.

Draco felt himself begin to lose control as she gripped him tightly between her legs and cried out, riding him hard. He watched as she came undone, her eyes squeezed shut, her fingers

gripping the front of his shirt tightly.

Fuck.

He held on as long as he could before finally giving in and thrusting against her, feeling his dick pulse over and over as the hot liquid spilled out, his come coating his stomach and thighs within the confines of his trousers, soaking through the material and onto Hermione's underwear as she ground out the last waves of her own orgasm onto him.

Draco suddenly became aware of how hard his fingers were pressing into her hips and made himself loosen his grip as Hermione slowly stopped moving and collapsed on top of him, boneless and panting, her breath puffing lightly into his ear.

Draco's own chest heaved and he smiled against her hair, still in disbelief at what was happening to him.

He smoothed her sweaty hair back from her head and flipped it over her shoulder, smoothing it gently with his fingers as they both lay and recovered, their breaths slowing in time with each other.

Draco felt himself beginning to drop back off to sleep when he became vaguely aware of the sharp pull he got when someone had Apparated within the manor wards. He sat up, instantly on his guard though there were only a few people with access.

'Malfoy?'

His name being shouted.

'Oi, dick head. I'm out. Where are you?'

Theo.

'Oh shit.'

Hermione's eyes grew wide and she jumped off of him, looking madly around for her trousers and trying, unsuccessfully, to smooth her hair.

Even in his mild panic, Draco took a second to appreciate how fucking incredible she looked.

Her cheeks were flushed under her freckles, her lips pink and swollen. Her hair seemed to have grown in size and curled down past her elbows like a wild halo.

Her shirt was open, the soft swell of her breasts in her white bra making him stir again in his trousers. She had a taut line of muscle travelling down the middle of her flat stomach and her thighs looked strong and solid.

If it wasn't for fucking Nott, Draco would have grabbed hold of her and gone again.

He stood up, feeling every muscle in his body protest after a night on the sofa, but he didn't mind one bit. It was the best pain he'd ever felt.

'MALFOY?'

Theo's voice was louder now, he was coming up the hall to the dining room. Draco dived towards the door and opened it slightly, just as Theo arrived outside. He poked his head out.

‘Alright fucker?’

Theo stood outside the door, a quizzical expression on his face. Draco felt a pang in his chest as he took in how pale Theo still looked. He was clearly still in some pain.

Draco knew he would take a while to recover from the Crucio, especially one from Voldemort.

Theo wasn't experienced in how to take one like he was. Draco knew how to breathe through it, to try and relax against the waves of agony, to not fight the convulsions. It didn't make it any less horrific, but it was easier to recover from.

Draco had had more practice than Theo.

‘You're looking better,’ he lied, keeping it casual whilst holding the door tightly, blocking Theo's view inside, ‘How are you feeling?’

Theo frowned, ‘I'm okay. How are you doing more's the point? You look utterly fucked.’

Draco could not help a slight grin spreading over his face. He tried to make his mouth stop smiling but he just kept getting flashes of Granger sitting on top of him and he couldn't.

‘Yea, I uh, fell asleep in here last night.’

‘You did?’

‘Yep,’ Draco shifted foot to foot. ‘Why don't you go and wait in the parlour and I'll be there in a second.’

‘Wait, why the fuck are you being so weird?’ Theo asked. His face a picture of confusion. He craned his neck trying to see into the room.

Draco held the door fast. He became aware that he had a large wet patch on his crotch at the same time that Theo did. His eyes widened and he opened his mouth to speak just as a large crash came suddenly from inside the dining room behind him.

Draco forgot about holding the door and looked back, seeing Hermione sprawled on the floor, half in and half out of her trousers. He dived towards her helping her up as she frantically yanked her trousers up and buttoned them up.

Her face was an alarming shade of red, and she pulled out of his grip, desperately rearranging herself as she looked towards the door where Theo now stood, mouth agape, a look of utter, gleeful amazement on his face.

‘Are you ok?’ He asked her in a low voice.

‘I'm fine, I just slipped.’ She said, but she wasn't looking at him, she was looking at Theo.

Draco dropped his guiding hand from her lower back and stood next to her, quickly casting a wandless Tergeo on himself.

They both looked sheepishly at Theo as he stalked into the room. He had significantly more colour in his face now, his blue eyes alight.

‘Hermione Granger!’ He said, and he couldn’t have been more excited. ‘It seems you trainee Aurors start early. Come to interview our friend Malfoy again, have we?’ He wagged his eyebrows as he eyeballed the love bites on her neck. ‘It looks like he had plenty to say.’

Draco didn’t think it was possible for her to get any redder, but he watched her as indeed, she did.

He alternated between wanting to laugh and feeling mild concern at the shade of scarlet burning in her cheeks.

Theo smiled a great big shit-eating grin as he looked between the two of them.

‘I-I- I didnt- I came to, uh-’ she was stuttering, grasping for an explanation when suddenly Theo stepped towards her and gathered her in a huge hug, wrapping his long arms around her and squeezing her tightly.

Hermione stood, arms by her sides and let herself be hugged, looking at Draco with wide eyes and a baffled expression as Theo kept hold of her for an uncomfortably long time.

As he watched them, Draco tried not to let the thought that flashed into his head take root.

Mine.

He had a wild urge to push Theo violently away from her, to snatch her back and pull her close to him. He pictured himself baring his teeth at Theo like a feral animal.

It burned in him.

His dragon whipped its tail and swiped at him internally with its sharp claws, he felt its fire in his chest.

But, he sat on it, squashed it down. As far down as he possibly could.

He could only imagine how far she’d run if he acted like that after one night of kissing and a bit of a morning fumble.

He made himself watch, forcing his hands to stay relaxed, until Theo thankfully released her and stepped away.

Draco let out a slow breath.

Theo had tears shining in his eyes that he quickly blinked back.

‘Well, I can tell you, you’ve made someone a very happy boy today Granger.’ He said gruffly.

Hermione smiled shyly over at him and now it was Draco’s turn to feel his cheeks flare.

‘Alright dickhead that’s enough,’ he said, inspecting a suddenly very interesting pattern, in the wood grain of the floor.

He eventually looked up to see them both looking at him expectantly.

‘Umm, okay. Breakfast?’ He asked, for want of something else to say.

Theo clapped his hands together, and began making straight for one of the dining chairs. Hermione stayed where she was, looking uncertain.

‘I’m so sorry, really I should go,’ she said. ‘I’m meeting Ginny for lunch.’ She indicated to herself, ‘and I definitely need a shower.’

A strangled choking sound came from somewhere in the direction of Theo. They both ignored it.

Draco felt an earthquake of disappointment hit him. It made his whole body hurt. He didn’t want her to go.

‘Sure, yes okay, of course.’ He said, keeping his voice light.

She stood, not moving. He waited for her, holding his breath. Hermione looked back at him, then over to the table.

‘But I’m sure if I eat quickly,’ she said, ‘I should be able to fit it in.’

An avalanche this time. Gratitude and relief rolling over him, flattening him, pushing all the air out of his lungs.

He smiled, feeling his cheeks stretch. Fuck. He just wanted to spend more time with her, anything, any time he could get.

Hermione smiled back and Draco felt his heart grow wings. Who knew it was possible to be this happy?

He called out for Moddles and she appeared with a pop.

She squeaked with excitement to see Theo and immediately bustled over to him, fussing over him and asking after his health.

Theo smiled back at her and insisted he was fine, no fuss needed.

Eventually she turned back to Draco and they discussed breakfast. He could see Hermione still wasn’t comfortable with making requests of Moddles so he decided for all of them, asking for a continental style breakfast, fruit, croissants and cheeses.

Moddles nodded enthusiastically and disappeared. He noticed that she’d mostly ignored Granger.

She still hadn’t forgiven her for yesterday’s insinuation.

Seconds later, several cafetiers of coffee appeared and Draco gratefully accepted the cup Theo poured him.

He watched with interest as Granger added a large pour of cream to hers along with..was that *three* sugars? She noticed both him and Theo sipping their plain black coffees and watching

her, and she grew pink again.

‘What?’ She asked.

Both Draco and Theo immediately dropped their eyes.

They all sat then, awkwardly sipping their coffees, the silence stretching out. Granger spoke first. ‘So Theo, you’re one of Draco’s oldest friends, I gather?’

‘Absolutely not.’ Theo replied. ‘He pays me to be here, like an oversized house elf. I cannot stand him,’

She smiled at him over the rim of her coffee cup, ‘He’s awful isn’t he?’

‘The worst.’ Theo agreed.

Hermione looked over towards him, a small smile on her face, Draco smiled back at her, raising his eyebrows.

He got lost in staring at her again, his coffee and Theo both completely forgotten, until suddenly there was a pop and the table was filled with food. Granger seemed to startle at the noise of the crockery rattling, she tore her eyes away from his and he missed looking at her already.

They all distracted themselves then with eating. Theo made polite conversation, asking Granger about her Auror course, and they chatted about some people they knew in common which were few and far between, seeing as they had been on opposite sides of the war. It wasn’t until Draco heard Theo mention Pansy that he suddenly thought of her with a jolt.

‘Where is Pans?’ He asked.

‘She’s out shopping for the new house.’ Theo replied, rolling his eyes.

‘Have you found one?’ He thought that actually he might not want Theo and Pansy living with him after all.

‘Not yet, but she’s shopping for things to go in it once we get it.’

Draco thought that sounded about right.

He was exceedingly glad that Pansy hadn’t been with Theo this morning.

This was definitely not the way he wanted her to find out, and Granger needed to know a bit more about Pansy and how to handle her, before they came face to face.

He suddenly realised that he was getting ahead of himself again.

This might be it for her.

She might want to leave today and never speak of this again. She might already be sitting opposite him, realising how crazy last night was. She might remember who he was, what he’d done.

This might be the last time he saw her.

Draco pushed his breakfast away, his appetite completely gone as he felt a violent wave of nausea wash over him.

He found he couldn't speak throughout the rest of the breakfast. He just watched Hermione, taking in all the small details of her.

The way her nose crinkled slightly when she laughed, how small and delicate her fingers were as she picked apart a croissant, the way her hair curled more underneath than on the top, little spirals forming close to her neck that he wanted to feel, to pull out gently with his fingers and watch spring back.

He looked at his love bites staining the delicate skin below her ear and he bit his lower lip, feeling an overwhelming urge to clear the table and plant his lips there again, pinning her underneath him as he licked and sucked his way down her body.

Theo could find his own way home.

Draco was shocked out of his thoughts by a sudden burst of laughter. Granger and Theo, their heads together talking and laughing about the time she had slapped him like they'd been friends forever.

He watched them, feeling like he was in a dream. Was he? Had he hallucinated all this? Maybe he'd never killed Voldemort at all. Maybe he was still unconscious on the floor and this was all in his mind.

Because how could he be sat eating a fucking pain-au-chocolat with the girl he had fantasised about for six years and his best friend, laughing and talking like it was the most normal thing in the world?

Things like this didn't happen to him. He was Draco Malfoy, purveyor of all things dark and shit.

This wasn't right.

Draco started to feel his chest tighten.

Oh no.

Not here. Not now.

The bands lashed themselves around his ribcage and immediately began wrapping tighter, he felt his lungs suddenly refuse to expand.

The familiar tingling began in his fingertips, travelling up his arms and down his body into his legs.

His heartbeat began to stutter.

Draco tried desperately to stop what was happening, he didn't want to do this in front of her.

Please, no.

But he couldn't stop.

He felt his breath begin to shorten, heard his pathetic little gasps for air. His chest began to heave and his eyes grew wide as he struggled for breath.

Oxygen - He needed it. Why couldn't he get it?

Draco put a hand to his chest. His heart, was it still beating?

Black spots began appearing, swimming in front of his vision, he felt the world begin to fade and he struggled to stay upright in his chair. He slammed a clammy hand to the table, gripping hard onto the wood.

Draco wasn't aware of Hermione by his side until he suddenly heard her voice, close to his ear.

'Draco? Draco, are you ok?'

He tried to answer, but his voice wouldn't work. He couldn't breathe.

He managed to focus enough to see her, her big brown eyes filled with concern, swimming into his line of vision.

He felt, somewhere, on some level, her hands on him, grasping at his shoulders, and suddenly, the bands loosened slightly.

He gulped in a breath, and tried harder to look at her. She was saying something, he didn't know what, but the warmth of her eyes, the kindness in them, it loosened another band.

He sucked in air gratefully, focusing on her eyes, on watching her lips move, on the feel of her touching him, her warm fingertips melting away the icy fingers of panic that had gripped him by the throat.

Gradually, thankfully, the sensation of suffocating faded away.

Draco's hearing slowly came back and he became aware that both Hermione and Theo were leaning over him.

Hermione looked terrified, her face a picture of worry.

Theo grimaced. He had seen him do this many times, but he would know that Draco would never have wanted Hermione to see him like this.

Draco wanted to Occlude, he desperately wanted to hide himself away, but he couldn't, he couldn't hide from her.

'He's alright.' Theo was saying, 'aren't you Malfoy? He just needed a minute, that's all. I think you tired him out Granger. He'll be fine in a second.' Theo clapped a hand on his shoulder and squeezed.

Fuck.

Draco wanted to disappear. Could he do that? Just Disapparate, so he didn't have to see the look on her face.

Hermione was still looking into his eyes, concern coming off her in waves.

He cleared his throat and tried to focus his eyes.

'I'm fine.' He hated the break in his voice.

'I'm good.' He stood up on shaky legs, cringing at the sound his chair made as it scraped back.

'I uh, I've got some paperwork I need to get to soon so..'

'Oh,' Hermione jumped up. 'Yes, I'll go. I need to go too.' She was flustered. She looked around her for her jacket, snatching it from the floor along with her wand and holster, and her notebooks.

Draco couldn't speak.

They left Theo sitting in the dining room, Hermione bidding him goodbye as Draco led her silently down the corridor.

He'd fucked it. Why the hell would she ever want to go near him again. He'd shown her how much of a fucking mess he was. He was a murderer, a liar, and a freak who couldn't even eat breakfast without flipping out.

He would never be normal.

He could never give her any of the things she deserved.

Draco suddenly needed to get her out of the manor. He needed to get on his broom and fly at a dangerous speed. He needed to break something, to destroy something. He felt his despair slowly turning into a white-hot anger at his own failures, at all the ways he would never be good enough for her.

It was boiling in him. A million times hotter than earlier. The black heat of his magic was smoke, curling out of his mouth and nose when he breathed.

He was scared he might lose control and inadvertently hurt her.

She needed to go.

He stiffly opened the manor door, and waited, holding his breath as she walked out of the door. She turned to him, as if she was going to speak, but Draco was scared to look at her, scared to see what he wanted so fucking badly, but could still never have.

He kept his eyes hard, kept them on the wall, on a fixed point above her head.

'Okay then,' he heard her say softly, and he pretended he couldn't hear the wobble in her voice.

‘Bye, Draco.’

‘Bye, Granger.’

He managed to keep control of himself until he felt her put her hands gently on his shoulders and reach up, to kiss him softly on his cheek. He closed his eyes and swallowed at the sweetness of her lips, the scent of her in his nostrils, and then he wrenched himself away from her and into the door of the manor.

Draco just managed to slam the door shut and cast a Muffliato before he lost control and tore the manor hallway to shreds.

Hermione - November 1998

Hermione looked at the heavy wooden door of the manor in shock.

What had just happened? One minute they were sitting, eating a delicious breakfast, and the next, Draco had had a huge panic attack and practically thrown her out.

It was after they had spoken about Pansy, she realised. Maybe he had thought about who Hermione was, about how it could never work between them.

She didn’t have the breeding, the money- she was a poor substitute for a pureblood witch. She had three sugars in her coffee and she embarrassed herself in front of the house elves.

That was what it was, Hermione thought.

He’d obviously always had this fantasy about her, this infatuation, but now he’d gotten to spend some time with her, he’d realised she was nothing special.

She swiped at the angry tears she hadn’t noticed were dripping down her face and smoothed down her hair before Apparating home with a sharp crack.

She missed Theodore Nott hobbling out of the manor, calling her name.

When Hermione got home she immediately headed to the bathroom to run a hot bath. She looked into the mirror and blinked at what she saw.

Her hair was absolutely huge, puffed out around her head in wild curls where she’d slept on the couch and not brushed it or kept it covered. Her lips were still beestung and pink, a memory of their hours of kissing. And trailing down her neck, disappearing below the collar of her shirt were bright red and purple marks, in an exact outline of Draco Malfoy’s perfect lips.

She looked at them and felt a wave of desire wrack her body, an instant dampness between her legs as she thought again of the feel of him, of his mouth, hot and wet on her skin, of his tongue and his teeth as he had marked her as his own.

She had wanted him to mark her.

A man as powerful as that claiming her as his, had turned Hermione on more than she had ever been turned on in her life.

She had never wanted someone more.

It had taken all she had not to take Draco's intimidatingly large cock out of his trousers and guide him into her, where he would have found her drenched and ready for him.

She had repeated to herself that she was a good girl, that she didn't sleep with people she technically didn't know, especially not on the first night.

She had had to wrap her arms around his neck, to twist them into his hair, anything to keep them from the buttons of his trousers.

And this morning. Hermione closed her eyes against the memory of how he had felt underneath her.

The thick line of Draco between her legs had made Hermione wild with want. She had fucked him on top of his clothes as a way of coping with how much she had wanted to do it properly, Because she didn't have sex on the first night. She wasn't that type of girl.

But now it looked as though she had missed her chance. The coldness of his eyes as he had seen her to the door made her flush with embarrassment. He had been so stiff, so different to how he had been just an hour before. What had she done wrong?

She looked at herself in the mirror and now she felt angry. She was so stupid to think that Draco Malfoy was anything other than what he had always been. A cold hearted arsehole. Who did what they had done, practically told someone that they loved them and then just stopped speaking to them?

She thought about the incredible things he had done for her, his bravery, his selflessness. What had happened at the breakfast table to change everything?

She had thought he was having a panic attack, but Theo seemed so casual about it. Had she misread?

Hermione angrily glamourised away the love bites and got into the bath.

She had run it as hot as she could stand, and she soaked in it, letting her skin turn red as she tried to get rid of all the images of Draco Malfoy burned onto her brain. Why? Why did she have to find him so unbelievably attractive? Why did she want him so very much?

She let the bath drain and walked into her bedroom. She collapsed onto the bed, burying her face into her pillow, gathering it up in her fists and screaming, as loudly as she possibly could into it, until her voice was hoarse and her throat hurt.

Eventually, as she gradually got herself under control, she managed to think rationally.

It had been an amazing night, and she had loved every second of it. But realistically, what had she expected to happen? That she was just going to come home and tell her friends that she was now seeing Draco Malfoy?

Harry's mortal enemy, a marked Death Eater who was evidently responsible for Dumbledore's death, even though she knew now, that he had never wanted any of those things.

She knew that Harry and Ron wouldn't be able to see past the way he had been in school, they hadn't seen him the way she had in his memories- desperate and vulnerable.

Gods, he couldn't even leave the house without being Traced, and he was under the scrutiny of the Daily Prophet and the whole of wizarding Britain. Because he had *killed* Voldemort. Never mind the half a dozen Death Eaters he had casually disposed of along the way.

Had she just thought they'd go out on some dates? Turn up at the Leaky Cauldron together and order drinks at the bar?

It was for the best. She decided. He was right. Whatever it was between them, it could never go further than one amazing night.

Hermione got dressed and headed out for lunch with Ginny, still amazed at how good it felt to be free, to not have the spectre of Voldemort looming over them. She knew the Aurors were still wary of any risk to her, but she was confident in Draco's response that no one would go near her now.

She sat opposite Ginny and listened to her friend talk.

Ginny spoke about Blaise and their burdening relationship, spoke about Quidditch and the trials she had coming up, and they also spoke about Harry and Ron. Had she noticed anything unusual with them? Ginny wanted to know.

Hermione nodded and agreed in all the right places but her mind just wasn't with Ginny. Her mind was filled with flashes of blonde hair, silver eyes and signet rings glinting on long fingers.

Hermione was glad when Ginny told her she had to leave to go to Quidditch practice.

'Are you ok Mione?' Ginny asked as she left, her blue eyes searching Hermione's face.

'You've been quiet today.'

'I'm fine,' Hermione lied, feeling bad that she hadn't given Ginny her time properly.

'I'm just tired, that's all.'

She supposed that was technically true.

Hermione went home after lunch and sat at her desk. She took out her notebooks on Draco's case.

She read what she had written about him so far, about the interviews, his answers, his demeanour.

Then she read about the memories again, feeling her heart thud painfully in her chest at the things he had done for her.

She couldn't help it, she needed to get her feelings out. She poured her heart out to the pages as she wrote about everything that had happened between her and Draco, about how he made her feel, about the way he had seemed to be so vulnerable despite the huge amount of power he held in his fingertips.

She wrote until she had exhausted herself, and then she fell into bed. Hermione knew she was going to dream of him, she welcomed it, even as she knew it was wrong, and she'd only end up hurting herself.

She awoke a few hours later with a start.

She had heard something.

Her heart pounded as she reached for her wand on her bedside table.

She sat up as she heard the noise again.

A soft sound, pebbles at her window.

She waited.

It came again a few minutes later, the sound of the small stones skittering against the glass.

She got out of bed and went to the window, looking down onto the street to find it empty.

She stared down into the gloom, she was sure she'd heard-

And then suddenly, her heart stopped, because bleeding into view came a shock of bright blonde hair, silver-grey eyes and those delicious lips, followed by an expensive looking black cloak, lined with green velvet.

Draco Malfoy was on the street outside, throwing pebbles at her window.

Hermione didn't even stop to wonder how he knew where she lived, or make any attempt to swallow her excitement.

She ran to the mirror, checking she didn't look too bad, and quickly cast a spell to make sure she smelled nice.

Then, she practically flew down the stairs. She took a second before opening the front door, one deep breath, before pulling the handle and letting in the cold night air.

Draco was in the house with his mouth on hers before she had even seen him move.

He kissed her like he would die without her, his hands fisted in her hair, his lips slick and hot against hers as his tongue slipped into her own desperate mouth.

She took hold of the collar of his cloak near the hood and pulled him tighter to her.

His breath was already ragged as he walked her backwards, away from the door towards the wall. He didn't break their kiss as he released her momentarily to raise one hand, opened palmed behind his back, and she heard the door slam shut, shuddering on its hinges.

Hermione gave in to every desire she had as she pulled Draco hard to her, up against the wall of her hallway.

His hands were all over her, sliding up under her pyjama top to cup her breasts in his palms, still cold from the outside air, before lowering his mouth to her neck and kissing and sucking his way down. She moaned at the feeling of his tongue flicking over her peaked nipples as she pushed her hips hard towards his straining erection.

Draco ground against her, his hip bones rubbing against hers.

She didn't even think as she lowered her hand to his buckle and undid his belt, pulling his trousers open.

She heard him hiss in a breath as she took hold of the waistband of his boxers and lifted them over his cock, her fingers brushing the soft skin of his head as she did, smearing the wetness already there. She wrapped her hands around his thick shaft and pumped him once, the sound of him swearing into her ear making her even wetter, even more desperate to feel him inside her.

She pulled him backwards towards the staircase and felt him tugging at her pyjama shorts as she did. She shimmied them down and stepped out of them, needing them gone.

She sat down on the stairs and pulled Draco down. He came with her, his hands braced either side on the staircase and he crawled up the steps so that he was on top of her.

Hermione couldn't wait another second. She heard Draco mutter the contraceptive spell as she opened her legs wide and took hold of him, guiding him to her entrance where she was wet and slick, unbelievably ready for him.

She breathed in that sweet caramel-apple smell she now knew was the smell of his magic seeping out of his pores, and she moaned as she felt the head of his cock, finally, *finally* press at her entrance.

She opened her eyes momentarily to stare straight into Draco's grey ones, alight with wonder as he looked at her, his pupils black and shiny, his lips parted.

He watched her as he began to push his hips forward, sliding into her so perfectly slowly. Hermione tried to hold his gaze but oh, he felt so good as she stretched around him, feeling the length of him fill her up.

'Oh fuck Granger. This feels incredible, fucking *Merlin*,' she heard him groan into her ear, but she couldn't reply, she was seeing stars.

She pulled him to her, clenching around him, hearing his shuddering breaths, waiting for him to move again but also not wanting him to, because she thought she might orgasm straight away.

He brought his lips down to kiss her as he pulled his hips back and withdrew. His tongue flicked over her lower lip as he caught it gently between his teeth and Hermione lost all coherent thought as he pumped firmly back into her, the slick length of his cock sinking in so deeply that the base of his stomach hit her clit, making her moan his name loudly.

She allowed her head to fall back as she let Draco Malfoy fuck her on her staircase, his hips grinding into hers as he slid in and out in the most perfectly agonising rhythm, his face a picture of beautiful, blissful pleasure.

It didn't take long until she shattered around him, the best orgasm she had ever had wracking her body, making her squeeze his cock tightly and rhythmically as he spilled inside of her. As she felt him come, felt him throbbing as she clenched down on him, she was only half sure of the word he whispered into her neck, over and over again in time with his jerking hips.

‘Mine, mine, mine.’

Moth to a Flame

Hermione- November 1998

Hermione and Draco only just made it off the staircase and into her bed before their mouths and hands found each other again.

Throughout that night, Hermione found that her appetite for Draco Malfoy knew no bounds.

She didn't care that she was tender and sore as she lay underneath him for the third time, lacing her fingers around his neck as he slid, hard and slick inside her, and, when she woke a few hours later she wasn't able to stop herself from kissing him awake and climbing back on top of him.

The night took on a dreamlike quality for Hermione, passion and a dull, pleasurable pain taking over all of her rational thought.

Finally, at around 7am, Draco was spent.

He fell asleep on top of her, and she felt him gradually get heavier and heavier. She looked down at him and he was dead to the world, his breathing slow and even, the fingers of one hand tangled possessively into her hair, the other resting, splayed over her hip. She watched as his face relaxed and his lips pouted. He looked so peaceful, she couldn't wake him.

Hermione stroked her fingers gently over Draco's back, careful to avoid the many scars and slashes that marred his soft skin. She bit her tongue to keep from crying at the sheer number of them.

She let her own eyes finally drift shut, breathing deeply to take in the scent of him that permeated her bedroom- his own brand of dark, enticing magic. She eventually dropped down into a deep, exhausted sleep.

They both finally woke at around 11am.

Hermione opened her eyes to find Draco already watching her. His grey eyes were cloudy with exhaustion, his hair stuck up at all angles, his lips looked pink and chapped and- was that a bite mark on his shoulder? Had she actually bitten him?

Hermione felt her face redden at the memory of her teeth sinking into the soft skin of his neck as she had rocked on top of him, his hands gripping her hard, her own fingers fisted in his hair.

He smiled at her, a slow, seductive smile, and Hermione felt it again, that new stirring, low in her belly, that she had never had before, but that Draco seemed to inspire with only a look.

She shifted and felt soreness between her legs, but pulled him to her anyway, unable to resist the sight of him, hard and ready for her again.

Draco was gentle as he moved between her hips and slowly guided himself inside her, this time without the urgency of the night before.

He took his time, bringing two of his fingers to his mouth and sucking them, running his tongue over them, before lowering his hand between their bodies and sliding his wet fingers over the sensitive bundle of nerves between Hermione's legs, making her moan as she clenched hard around him.

She felt herself begin to lose control almost immediately as his fingers sent small sparks of pleasure shooting through her entire body.

The feel of them, along with the sensation of Draco thrusting deep and slow inside her in a painfully perfect rhythm was too much.

She forgot to be embarrassed as her eyes rolled back in her head and she moaned his name, arching her back and gripping onto the bed sheets as she shook and twitched around him.

Draco watched her.

His eyes, half closed with pleasure, never left her face.

He looked as though he were committing the moment to memory, taking in every second.

Hermione squeezed hard as she felt him begin to come too, his strokes getting faster, his hips snapping harder against hers as his throbbing release came, pulsing in time with her own.

Draco leant over her, his forearms either side of her head, kissing her gently, his breath ragged and her hair sticking to his face as they both slowly recovered. After a few minutes, he rolled off her and lay flat on his back, staring up at the ceiling for a while.

He seemed to be deep in thought, and Hermione watched him, suddenly unsure about what he might say.

Previous to his very welcome appearance outside her window in the middle of the night, he had seemed like he couldn't wait to get away from her. He had practically thrown her out of the manor.

After nearly ten minutes of agonising silence, he spoke, so quietly that Hermione had to strain to hear him.

'I'm sorry about yesterday, Granger. That was shitty of me.'

She leaned up on her elbow so that she was looking down at him. Draco's face was pinched, like he was in pain.

'Draco,'

His eyes were wary as he looked up at her.

‘Do you want to talk to me about what happened at breakfast?’ She probed gently, cautiously, ‘Has it happened before?’

She could see the shutters come down immediately. The dulling of the silver, the light disappearing from his eyes with one blink.

‘Granger.’ His tone was a warning. ‘Nothing happened.’

She held his gaze but got nothing back. He had blocked her out completely. She waited, hoping that her silence would prompt him to talk, but his eyes were flat, he was resolute.

‘Draco, maybe I can help, if you'd just let me understand?’

He sighed, ‘Some things you don’t want to know, Granger’ He said. ‘Even you can't always have the answers to everything’

Hermione felt a twist in her chest as she looked at the hurt in his face. She felt like he had done something he was deeply uncomfortable with when he let her see his memories, he had taken a huge risk when he had given her access to a part of his hidden life.

But he was still holding back.

What could be so bad that he wouldn't tell her?

She realised that Draco had spent his whole life keeping secrets. He was a master of lies, of showing one thing, whilst covertly doing another. She could only hope that at some point, he trusted her enough to let her in.

Hermione suddenly felt overwhelmed by all of it.

By him.

She thought again about the magnitude of Draco’s actions, all the terrible and difficult things that made him who he was.

She felt her throat tighten and blinked rapidly, trying not to cry.

Draco reached a hand up to catch hold of her jaw. He kissed her softly, then moved to kiss over her face, his lips capturing her salty tears.

He pulled her close, hugging her tightly.

She cried into his chest, wishing that things had been different, that they had been different.

‘I don’t want this to end.’ She said, a few minutes later when she could catch her breath. ‘I don't want you to leave.’

He released her, pulling back so that he could look at her. He rubbed a hand over his face, a mannerism she was already beginning to recognise as stress.

His voice was quiet, as he met her eyes.

‘I can’t tell you how much I want this, Granger. It’s been pretty much all I’ve wanted since I was eleven.’

Hermione felt her stomach swoop.

Since he was eleven.

‘But,’ Draco sat up and pulled away from her slightly.

‘I’m not eleven anymore. I’m not naive enough to think that wanting something badly enough means that you get it.’

He suddenly gave a bitter laugh that made Hermione’s gut twist.

‘There are things I’ve wanted, so fucking much in my life, and I know now that no matter how hard you try, how hard you fight for it, sometimes those things will just never happen.’

Hermione knew, somehow, that he wasn’t only talking about her.

‘Granger,’

He said her name, and she didn’t like the sound of it. It sounded like doubt.

‘How do you think this would work?’

He stood and looked at her, holding his arms out.

‘I am the focus of the wizarding world right now. Front page fucking news. Everyone knows who I am and what I’ve done.’

He indicated his arm, where the mark she had avoided looking at was still there, as noticeable as ever, despite its fading colour.

‘Do you really think your friends are going to just accept me? After what happened at Hogwarts?

Dumbledore?

All the years of bad blood between me and Potter?

They won’t forgive you for this, Granger.’ He shrugged, ‘I can’t do that to you.’

Hermione felt the beginnings of fear.

‘Draco, they’re my friends. They care about me. They won’t turn their backs on me.’

He clenched his jaw, hard.

‘Anyone can turn their back on you Hermione.

I won’t be responsible for ruining your life, your reputation.

Do you really think they’ll let you be an Auror if they know you slept with the first person you interviewed? A person that is technically a mass murderer?’

She had been about to argue with him, but now her mouth snapped shut.

All she had wanted for years was to become an Auror, and he was right.

He wasn’t just anyone.

He was Draco Malfoy, and despite the fact of who he had killed, the point was, he had killed, and Hermione knew, he'd done it with no remorse, and no hesitation.

'So why did you come here then?' she said, and she felt more tears slip down her cheeks. 'Why did you let me do this- feel this- if you're just going to walk away and leave me?' She felt pathetic for what she said next, but it was the truth, 'It's not fair.'

Draco looked at her then with so much sadness and bitterness in his eyes, it hurt her to see.

'Because I'm a terrible person.'

He spoke through gritted teeth, 'I lost control, I let how badly I wanted you take over the fact that I know I'm fucking poison. I'll only end up hurting you. I shouldn't have come.'

Hermione felt a flash of anger then.

It was more than anger. It was a burning rage, that suddenly flamed through her body.

'No!'

Draco jerked in surprise, his eyes wide as she rose to stand, her fury firing her blood.

'You don't get to do this again Draco.'

'Granger-'

'Stop always thinking you get to make the rules on who we are! You've done that since we were eleven, put barriers up between us. But I know now Draco. I know who you are, under the facade you put up, and I want this. I want you!'

Hermione was breathing hard, shocked by the strength of the emotions she was feeling. How was she already so consumed by him?

It had been a matter of days since he had come back into her life, but she already knew she couldn't just carry on as if it had never happened.

He sat up, shifting onto the side of the bed, and dropped his head to his hands. Hermione didn't know what to do to convince him that she didn't care who he was or what he'd done any more, that she would take him any way she could get him.

She thought about the last few years of her life. She had spent them so focused on other people, on keeping them safe, on making them happy. She cared so much about her friends, and she knew they cared about her. But she couldn't remember the last time she had done something just for her.

The past year she had been working for Professor McGonagall in her spare time, making healing potions, Skele Gro, Blood Replenisher, Pepper- Up - simple, commonly used potions, making them in big batches, ensuring that they had plenty in reserve for the wounded after skirmishes and attacks.

She had also supported Harry through his grief over losing first Sirius and then Dumbledore. Harry had not coped well with either, and had been on his way down a very bad path before Hermione had realised quite how much he was hiding things.

Unbeknownst to her and Ron, Harry had spent much of sixth and seventh year highly dependent on dreamless sleep potion, procuring it from a dark witch he had found in Knockturn Alley.

He had gotten to the point where he couldn't sleep without it, and even with it, he was managing only an hour or two, going slowly insane with lack of sleep.

He had begun experimenting with other, more potent potions, also bought from the same dark witch, and Hermione had found him, almost unconscious one night, his eyes rolling back in his head, battered and bruised where he had fallen down on his way back to the common room.

She couldn't believe the risk he was putting himself in, when everyone was fighting to protect him, and had started to get angry before she saw how much he was struggling. Harry couldn't even tell her his own name, but he could cry for his lost uncle and mentor. Hermione had thought about just how much loss Harry had had to endure in his life, and that, along with the constant threat from Voldemort had been too much for him. He was collapsing inwards, losing touch with who he was.

Hermione hadn't told anyone, but she had worked with Harry, gradually weaning him off the potions, and sitting up with him for hours on end each night, keeping him talking, so that he didn't go and score more potions, or hurt himself trying. He wouldn't get any further help, so Hermione had made it her own personal mission to ensure he was looking after himself.

Ron had very little idea how bad things were. Harry only opened up to him once Hermione had seen him through the worst of it. He was doing well now, clean and happier. She loved to see it.

So, in all the things they had had going on, Hermione hadn't really dated, she'd had a few one-night stands after Ron, but it was hard to do during the unrest and she hadn't had time anyway. She had always been dedicated to doing the right thing, to being the logical one, the reliable one.

Draco Malfoy was not a logical choice, but he was the choice she really wanted to make.

She didn't know how she could just walk away from him, to know he existed and that he made her feel the way he did.

He had set a fire within her, the way nothing had before. She looked over at him and she felt a pull- an invisible string, one that had always been there, but that she had not known to follow until now.

He looked at her as though he could read her thoughts.

'I'm not worth it Granger.' He said. 'Don't give it all up for me.'

Hermione stood up and came around to face him. Draco raised his eyes and she saw how much he wanted her, how desperate he was to give in, to say yes.

There was such a fragile hope there. Hermione was amazed at how Draco could flip between being so powerful, so dominant, to showing such a fear of vulnerability, of letting himself have the things he wanted. What had happened to him? She wondered.

‘Let me decide what I want to give up, and what I want to keep.’ She said, and her voice was firm. ‘Whatever this is between us Draco. No- one else needs to know. It can just be ours. We can keep it for ourselves.’

She stepped forward to straddle him, wrapping her legs around his waist, her bare skin pressed against his, and she kissed him.

She ran her fingers through his hair and she slipped her tongue into his mouth.

He only resisted for a second, tried to speak through her kisses, but then his breathing came quicker and she felt as he hardened beneath her and pushed gently against where she was already slick and ready for him.

She lowered herself down onto him and he groaned into her mouth, his hands dropping to grip her tightly from behind and pull her closer.

She felt that same possessiveness in his grasp, in the way his fingers tightened around her hips, the way his eyes burned with the intensity of his desire and his kisses became firmer, bruising, stealing her breath and leaving her gasping as she felt the room seem to shudder around them.

As he pushed his hips up, filling her with the thick length of him completely, Hermione moaned against his neck and squeezed herself around him, feeling like the few hours they had gone in-between had been too long.

She just wanted to touch him, to feel the way she felt when he was moving inside her, to look up into his beautiful grey eyes and see the wonder on his face, the way he looked with his lips swollen and wet from her kisses, his hair sticking up in wild spikes where she had run her fingers through it.

As they lay afterwards, panting and exhausted, Draco turned away from her. She watched his back, his breath moving in and out, she traced the slashes of his scars, the outline of his muscles under his skin.

He was still facing away when she heard him speak.

‘Granger, is this real?’

He turned to her, and the fear in his eyes almost broke her.

‘Because I don’t think I’ll survive it if it’s not.’

‘Draco-‘

‘I need to know Granger. Before I let myself believe it. Before I give in to it. Tell me this is really what you want. Because, if you say that you’re mine, I won’t be able to let you go. I’ve waited too long for this.’

Hermione swallowed as she saw the tears shining in his eyes.

‘Please,’ his voice broke on the word.

‘It’s what I want.’ She replied, ‘and it’s very real.’

She watched the way his face changed. The fear and vulnerability seemed to vanish, replaced by a fierce, hungry look of possession.

He pulled her into his arms, wrapping them around her tightly, his heart pounding against hers.

Hermione closed her eyes as she felt his power ripple around them, his magic curling into spirals in the air, wrapping them both within it, enveloping them both.

She smiled and held him just as tightly, feeling the invisible string pull taut and tie them together.

Draco didn’t leave Hermione’s house that day.

He stayed and showered while she cooked them dinner. They sat down together to eat, Draco eyeing the food ravenously, his pureblood sensibilities preventing him from eating until she was seated and ready.

She plated up their meals, unable to resist a quip about how she’d done it all by herself, no elf required, gaining herself another Malfoy eye roll.

She sat then and watched in amazement at the amount of food Draco managed to inhale, he ate at least three times what she did.

He saw her looking and shrugged, ‘It turns out keeping you satisfied is hungry work Granger,’ he said, sending her a wink that sent an instant jolt to her core.

She couldn’t help smiling as she went to get some second helpings for him, feeling a small fizz of pleasure watching him eat the food she’d made with such enthusiasm.

So, they sat and ate together while Hermione tried to get Draco to open up a little more about his life.

He talked about Theo and Pansy easily and enthusiastically, his voice full of love. Hermione felt almost envious of them, getting to have spent so much time with him.

He asked after Blaise, and Hermione didn’t sense any bitterness there. He seemed to be genuinely happy that Blaise was happy.

He even spoke about Voldemort, telling Hermione about the smell of him, making her laugh in disgust at the comparisons he made. Draco really didn’t like bad smells, she learned.

He always smelled delicious, so that made sense.

Draco asked about her parents, and she told him about how they were settling in Australia.

She let him see her sadness over it, something she never felt like she could do with her own friends.

He seemed to be very interested in her parents and in her relationship with them. He asked her questions about what her childhood was like, what kinds of things they did together, where they went. He asked her question after question. She wondered if it was a muggle fascination, he seemed to never run out of questions.

When she eventually went and got her old family photos out, he pored over them, touching the pictures lightly, running his fingers over the people as he flicked through album after album.

He looked at photos of her father holding her for the first time, swaddled in a blanket, a look of adoring love on his face, her mother holding her hand as she led her into playgroup for her first day, Hermione as a toddler building a snowman, bundled up in her snow gear, her nose red from the cold, her father lifting her to push the carrot nose into the snowman's face. He never seemed to get bored, going back to certain pictures and looking at them again and again, until eventually Hermione closed the album gently and distracted him with kisses, redirecting him.

They talked for hours, getting to know each other in reverse, undoing all their preconceived ideas of each other.

As they sat together talking, Hermione realised that she was subconsciously shifting towards him all the time, that everything she did, her focus was on Draco, the same way his seemed to be on her.

He barely had to touch her, before she felt the heat begin in her lower belly. She breathed in the scent of him, holding it in her lungs and she thought that whatever magic it was that Draco possessed, it had wound its way around her heart and into her brain, because she craved him like a drug.

Hermione had had sex before. It had felt different, pleasant, but like going through the motions.

She had enjoyed it for the intimacy, but she hadn't ever stopped to wonder how good it should really feel for her.

Now she had experienced sex with Draco, she'd never be able to go back.

No one would ever live up to him.

Draco was reluctant to leave that night, so he didn't.

He stayed.

Hermione transfigured him some clothes out of some of hers, but he didn't really need them as they spent most of their time in her bed.

Over the following days and weeks, they fell into a pattern. They spent as much of their free time together as they could without Hermione attracting suspicion, and they slept together every single night.

Hermione realised very quickly that Draco avoided sleeping at the manor.

When she questioned him, he just shrugged and said that he liked it at Hermione's.

He liked her bed with the patchwork quilt, and the sound of people moving around in the street below, the voices, the white noise.

No matter what had happened that day, he would appear, just as she was getting ready for bed, freshly showered and smelling of toothpaste, then grab hold of her and pull her towards him, showing her all the ways that he had missed her that day.

Hermione felt heartsick as he left every morning, hating the fact that she had to spend the day pretending that he didn't exist, that he didn't occupy her every thought.

Her heart would jump if ever his name came up in conversation, no matter in what capacity. She just loved to hear the syllables and have an excuse to say them herself.

One morning, Draco woke early and told her that he needed to get back to the manor.

He had someone coming to take inventory of some of the art and antique pieces. He was planning to curate some to sell.

Draco wanted to donate the money to a charity. He was evasive when she asked which one, he just said he felt he wanted to do some good after all the bad his family had put out into the world.

It was the first time Draco had mentioned his parents, and Hermione hadn't wanted to ask about them, sensing a reluctance there which she assumed was family loyalty.

After all, he appeared to be close to them growing up, he was always mentioning his father.

Hermione kissed him and kissed him as he left, melting into his arms, not wanting to let him go.

'Will you come later? To the manor?' He asked.

Hermione shook her head. 'I'm so sorry, I can't. I've got to go out tonight. We are going to the Leaky Cauldron for Charlie's birthday.'

Draco's eyes immediately darkened, his face closed and he was stiff as he nodded. His mouth a grim line. He stepped back slightly.

'Of course, you need to see your friends.'

'I'd rather be with you.' She said, painfully aware that already, they were feeling the effects of not being able to be seen together in public or even acknowledge the others existence.

'I'd cancel but it's a bit of a big thing as it's the first party since- well since there's no more Voldemort.' She said, looking into his face and biting her lip anxiously.

Draco's eyes were cold and flinty, his jaw clenching, she could see the muscle ticking there. He gave a rueful smile and pulled away from her, turning to leave.

‘You’re fucking welcome Weasley.’ He muttered under his breath.

Hermione pulled him back to her and kissed him until he softened slightly, but he was still grumpy as he left for the manor. He Apparated away with a face like thunder and a rather loud crack.

Hermione instantly missed him.

She went and lay in her bed for a short while, worrying.

She buried her face in the bedding, breathing in the scent of him, of them, feeling her throat close slightly over the look on his face as he had left. She hated that he’d never be welcome amongst her friends, even though he was the reason for their freedom.

She forced herself to stand and go and shower him off her, she winced slightly as she washed between her legs. It was still taking her a little bit of time to adjust to the size of him. She relished the pain, knowing who and what had caused it.

After her shower she sat down, wrapped in a towel, her hair in a turban, and filled her journals in on all the new developments between her and Draco.

She needed to do it.

She couldn’t talk to anyone real about him and she was so overwhelmed with her feelings for him that she just needed to get them out.

Eventually it was time to get ready, Ginny was coming to get her at six.

Hermione ran her wand over her hair smoothing down the curls into spirals, then she flipped her head upside down, fluffing her curls into a halo around her head, framing her face.

She added some eyeliner and a slick of lipstick before changing into a muggle style dress that Ginny had told her was in fashion. It was a silky satin material, black with thin straps and, Hermione felt, rather short.

She looked into the mirror, noting the way her breasts swelled over the top of the neckline and how the dress clung to her narrow waist accentuating her muscular thighs. She wished Draco were here to see her in it.

The whole time she was getting ready, she tried to ignore the feeling in the pit of her stomach, that she didn’t want to go, that she wanted to cancel, to Apparate to the manor and spend her time with Draco instead.

She felt like he was burned behind her eyelids, she saw him every time she blinked, little flashes of his smile, his fingers, his Adams apple as he swallowed, all the things she had never noticed in a man before, that now seemed to be important to memorise every time she was with him.

Ginny arrived in a bustle of chatter, cold air and perfume. She looked beautiful in an emerald green version of Hermione’s black dress.

They both wobbled on their heels as they Apparated to the Leaky Cauldron, neither of them used to wearing them, there hadn't been much call for six inch heels the previous year.

It was a cold night and Hermione could see her breath, puffing out in front of her. She was glad she had worn her outer robes over her tiny dress.

The pub was warm and welcoming, their section transformed for Charlie's party with banners and balloons, there was a band playing, loudly blasting out songs that Hermione recognised from both Wizarding and Muggle musicians.

She and Ginny removed their coats as they entered the warm, damp air of the pub and were greeted by several jaws dropping, the wizarding boys eyes bugging out of their heads as they took in the Muggle style dresses.

Blaise motioned being shot in the heart from across the bar, dramatically falling to the floor.

Hermione pulled at her hem self-consciously, wishing she was more like Ginny, confident and sexy, as she danced her way across the pub to Blaise, who looked like all his Christmases had come at once.

Hermione greeted Charlie, giving him a small, wrapped birthday gift. A pair of Cufflinks from a magical jeweller she had discovered in Hogsmeade. The ones she had bought for Charlie consisted of a thick, handmade silver ring, with three linked leaf shapes, to signify protection as he went back to his job with the Dragons in Romania, now that the threat in London had been reduced.

Hermione heard Ron calling her name across the pub and went to stand with him at the bar, he hugged her warmly and offered to buy her a drink.

She accepted and wandered away from the bar a few minutes later sipping at a Firewhisky, her eyes darting around as she took in all the people she loved, celebrating together, free from fear. It was an incredible feeling, but Hermione couldn't help thinking of Draco, wondering what he was doing, alone at the manor.

The night progressed in typical Weasley fashion, loud, warm and happy.

Hermione sat on a bar stool and watched Ginny dance with Blaise, who looked like he was several Firewhiskies deep, his tie wrapped around his head as he played air guitar, sliding on his knees across the makeshift dance floor.

Harry and Ron were nearby, hunched together at a small table, sipping their drinks as they chatted, heads bent close to each other, their knees touching, their lips brushing the others ears as they strained to be heard over the music.

Ron offered Harry his drink to taste and the way he watched Harry's mouth as he sipped reminded Hermione so much of Draco and the way he watched her, a look of hungry desire.

Hermione felt a pulse low in her abdomen as she thought of Draco, of the way his eyes tracked her, the way he sometimes looked at her like he wanted to eat her.

She bit her lip and looked at her watch, wondering how early she could slip away. She was starting to feel quite tipsy herself.

She sat and let herself get lost in thoughts of him for a moment. Zoning out of any conversation.

She got so lost, that for a moment she almost thought that she caught the scent of him on the air, the smell of bonfires, a sweet apple undertone. She breathed deeply, trying to catch it again, but it was gone.

She rose and moved around the bar, chatting to various people, tugging slightly at her dress as it rode up her thighs and cursing Ginny. After about ten minutes, she became aware of a creeping sensation up along her spine, the feeling of being watched. She looked around the bar, feeling suddenly wary, on her guard.

Her eyes settled on two men, sitting on stools over in the corner, she didn't recognise them.

One was looking around the pub with interest, blue eyes sparkling with amusement as he watched the drunken wizards on the dance floor, Blaise now positively swaying.

But the other wasn't looking anywhere except at her.

His eyes were hard, staring intensely, following her as she continued walking, back to Harry and Ron. Hermione frowned, feeling slightly uncomfortable.

Ginny came then and grabbed her by the hand.

'Come on Mione!' She slurred. Stop being boring! Come and dance!' Hermione tried to protest, but Ginny was strong, bolstered by the shots she'd been doing with Blaise and she yanked Hermione towards the dance floor.

Hermione gave in and followed Ginny, laughing and joining in with Ginny's dance moves.

She was aware of the man still staring at her, every time she looked up, he was still laser focused on her.

She had half a mind to go and ask him what his problem was, but instead she chose to ignore him and danced to the music, letting the alcohol she had consumed flow in her veins, feeling the heavy bass in her feet.

She couldn't help sneaking a glance back over to the man. There was something about him, something slightly familiar, but she couldn't place him. She wondered if he had gone to Hogwarts, maybe a younger year.

When she looked back over, both men were gone.

She searched the now full dancefloor, looking to see if he was there. She could still feel the crawling sensation of being watched, of eyes on her.

She decided to head back to the bar area, towards her friends. She began pushing her way through the packed dance floor, squeezing past the heaving throng of sweating bodies. Hermione pressed forward and suddenly collided hard with someone, stood stock still on the dance floor.

She raised her eyes from the broad chest, the blue button down shirt, up to look into the face of the man who had been staring at her.

Her hands were still pressed up against his stomach where she'd put them out as she had banged into him.

The man looked down at her, down the unfamiliar nose, the strange lips curving up into a smile.

But the eyes she was looking into weren't unfamiliar.

They were a clear, almost unnatural silver.

Hermione took a deep breath and then she knew without doubt who had been staring at her. She smiled.

He was here.

'Draco?'

The Polyjuiced version of Draco smiled, and she could tell immediately, by the quirk of his lips before he even spoke.

'Want to dance Granger?'

She stared at him, her mouth open in shock as he leaned in closely to her ear. Her body responding in a strange way. She knew it was Draco, he sounded like Draco, smelled like Draco and he had Draco's eyes.

But the lips that brushed against her ear belonged to a stranger, the hand that came up to run, slowly and deliberately down the silk of her dress, along her waist, and down to the curve of her ass, they weren't Draco's, they were a stranger's hands, moving the way Draco's would.

'You look incredible,' he said, and his voice was so low it was practically a growl. Despite the pumping music, Hermione heard him clearly as he moved closer to her, his body crowding hers.

She leaned in as his fingers gripped her hip.

'This fucking dress...'

She brought her arms up around his neck.

'You're making me lose my shit.' He said, and his other hand came up now, running over her body, a thumb grazing her breast making her shiver.

Hermione stopped caring that his behaviour was questionable, that he had felt he needed to come here, to watch her.

She forgot that he didn't look like Draco. Because, he was Draco, and her body was responding the way it always did to him.

So when he pulled her close, she arched her back, pushing her breasts into his chest and her ass into his hand. She let the music guide her and she began to move against him in time to the music.

One of Draco's thighs found its way between hers pushing her dress up slightly, and she smiled as she felt him begin to move to the music too.

The charmed strobe lights moved over their faces as they danced. Their bodies moving with the beat, Hermione's pulse thundered in her ears as she felt the stranger growing hard against her hip, the fluid movement of his body as he danced. Obviously Draco had perfect rhythm.

She lifted her hair off her neck as he leaned in, trailing kisses below her ear and down. She moved against him, feeling the friction building between them.

Draco's hands roamed all over her body now, as his hips moved in time with hers. He pushed his face into her neck and she heard snippets of the things he was panting into her ear, even over the music.

'Feel so good Granger-'

'Need to take you home, now-'

'This fucking dress-'

She lifted her arms as she danced, not sure if she was going to lose herself right there onto Draco's thigh, and half certain he was well on his way too, his eyes were closed, he looked almost like he was in pain.

Hermione felt a crushing disappointment as the song they were dancing to ended, and a different one came on, breaking the spell.

Hermione suddenly remembered where she was and she opened her eyes.

Her friends were all sat, opposite where she was dancing, their mouths agape as they watched Hermione Granger dirty dancing with a stranger, rubbing herself on his thigh as he pulled her in with one hand on her lower back, and another gripping her hair as he ground himself into her.

Harry's face was white and Ron's mouth had fallen open.

Ginny looked positively amazed, her eyes shining with excitement as she mouthed to Hermione from across the pub 'What the fuck?'

She clapped her hands together with excitement, thinking that Hermione had finally found a man.

If only you knew which man I've found. Hermione thought, and gave a slightly drunken giggle.

Draco looked up now, his eyes full of desire, barely even aware of where he was until he too clocked her friends.

He stepped back from her, just as someone else approached them, the other stranger. He flashed Hermione a cheeky grin.

'Hello Theo,' Hermione said, her hands on her hips.

Fancy seeing you here Granger.' The stranger replied with a wink.

'Malfoy, we need to go.' He said, The Polyjuice will be wearing off soon.'

Draco looked reluctant as he stepped away from Hermione.

‘I’ll come back to the manor in an hour.’ Hermione whispered in his ear as he made to leave and headed towards the entrance.

She didn’t notice Cormac McLaggen approach Draco, thinking he was a stranger, didn’t hear what he slurred into Draco's ear, his own eyes roving greedily over Hermione .

The only thing she did see was Cormac’s eyes as they flew wide open, just as stranger Draco’s fist connected with his face, sending a spray of blood into the air, and all hell broke loose.

Sticking Charm

Hermione - November 1998

The collective attention of every wizarding boy in the Leaky Cauldron was immediately drawn to the scene on the dance floor.

To their eyes, Cormac, one of their own, was currently being attacked out of the blue by a complete stranger, whilst his friend grabbed hold of Hermione Granger, pulling her back from the fight.

And so, immediately, there was a brawl.

Charlie, Ron and Harry elbowed their way into the fray, where the twins and Oliver Wood had already set upon the attackers.

Theo pushed Hermione back, away from the fight and then dived in to help Draco, who currently had Cormac McLaggen by the front of his shirt, his face pressed bruisingly hard into Cormac's bleeding one, his eyes wide and terrifying as he uttered threats that made Cormac attempt to scramble away from him, a look of horror on his face.

Harry and company launched themselves at the stranger, kicking, swinging and pulling at him. Theo returned the favour, taking Oliver out with one sharp upper cut to his chin.

It became immediately apparent, as the wizards fought, that Draco and Theo were significantly more experienced in the art of physical combat than everyone else put together. The only one who even looked like he could throw a punch was Charlie.

Hermione looked on in a sort of fascinated horror.

Draco had George and Fred down on the floor with him in seconds, his knuckles swinging and feet kicking.

He was still focused on Cormac though, his eyes wild as he grabbed at him, he batted the other boys away in his determination to seemingly either kill Cormac or scare him to death.

Ron drew his wand which Theo smacked out of his hand, sending it skittering across the pub floor.

Harry attempted to kick out at Draco, who merely grabbed Harry by the ankle and yanked him down, so that Harry was also wrestling on the ground.

She was sure he gave Harry an extra hard punch to the gut, a grim look of satisfaction on his face as he did it.

Hermione watched as Harry swung back for him and Draco laughed, he actually laughed as he batted his fist away as though Harry were a fly, buzzing around his face.

Theo also seemed to be enjoying himself far too much for Hermione's liking. He grinned as he wrestled Charlie on the floor, blood dripping from his nose.

Theo and Draco fought back to back, with their fists, elbows, knees and feet. The speed at which Draco managed to overpower Harry, George, and Fred sent a shiver through Hermione, she wasn't sure what kind of shiver it was.

The crowd swelled back and forth, the ferocity of the fight causing some people to back away and others to step forward and cheer.

Several other men jumped in, apparently with no idea whose team they were on, but with an admirable enthusiasm to add to the chaos.

After several minutes it became clear that very few people even knew who they were actually fighting, the dance floor was just a jumble of fists, feet and blood.

Draco managed to still keep darting his eyes to Hermione, even as he dodged Charlie's kicking legs and jerked his elbow into Ron's face.

Someone Hermione didn't know managed to run up and land a solid punch to the side of Draco's head, throwing him off momentarily as he swore and looked around furiously for his assailant.

Cormac used the distraction to try and break for the crowd. Draco immediately launched himself at him again, dragging him back and pummeling him, even as George pulled at Cormac ineffectually, trying to yank him away.

Hermione thought the problem was that these boys were all used to fighting with wands, they had no idea how to fight the muggle way.

No-one except Draco and Theo, it seemed.

Hermione saw, from the corner of her eye, Blaise come storming into the mele from wherever he had been, probably pushing Ginny up into a corner somewhere.

He immediately began pulling people up off the floor, shouting and shoving them away.

Most of her friends seemed relieved and backed away gratefully, limping, licking their wounds.

Harry, his shirt ripped, blood on his neck, continued shouting as he tried to get back at the stranger who was Draco.

Blaise shoved him hard in the opposite direction and then grabbed hold of Draco by the front of his shirt and pushed him back, away from Cormac, and away from Harry.

Hermione was shocked to see that Draco let him do it. He stopped fighting.

She watched as Blaise held Draco against the wall, pointing his finger at him as he shouted angrily into his face.

Draco was nodding, speaking back into Blaise's ear, gesturing towards Hermione and the dance floor.

Blaise seemed to respond to whatever he was saying, the anger leaving him as the two men spoke. She watched as he brought his finger down, out of Draco's face and released his shirt.

They looked at each other for a long moment, before Blaise stepped back, clapping him on the shoulder and shaking his head, before walking away,

Draco stood with his back against the wall for a moment, and then seemed to come back to himself, looking towards her.

Hermione was horrified to see that a patch of hair in the front of his head was suddenly significantly lighter than the rest of it.

Draco seemed to realise it too as his eyes widened and he brought a hand up to touch it, then immediately dived out of the pub. Hermione looked around for Theo, but couldn't see him anywhere in the crowd.

She ran out of the pub after Draco.

Hermione immediately felt the cold night air hit her sweat-damp skin.

She could see her breath, curling out in white puffs in the dark as she walked, out and down Diagon Alley, her heels clicking on the cobbles.

She turned her head side to side, looking for Draco in the darkness, afraid to call his name in case anyone was around. She wrapped her arms around herself, shivering.

Hermione couldn't help the little scream that escaped her when she was suddenly grabbed by a shape which materialised out of the darkness, and yanked her into an alleyway between two shops.

Draco pinned her against the wall, his mouth on hers, his skin hot, despite the cold night air. Hermione allowed herself a moment, let herself melt beneath him, let him warm her with his lips, his tongue, let him cover her body with his.

Then, she gathered her strength and pushed him off her, rearranging her face into one that was angry, swallowing down the urge to pull his lips back to hers.

'Draco, you bloody idiot!'

He was himself again.

Hermione's heart lurched to see his face- it had been entirely too long.

He was a mess. A beautiful, perfect mess.

His hair was wild, sticking up in blonde spikes all over his head, his nose was bleeding, and his lip was slightly split. She could already see his eyes blackening where he had headbutted Cormac early on in the fight.

He smiled, and there was blood on his teeth.

It hurt Hermione to see him hurt, even if he seemed to be completely unbothered by it. His eyes were alight, the silver sparkling with adrenaline.

He moved in to kiss her again and Hermione summoned a Herculean effort and pushed him back.

'What the hell were you thinking?' She asked, her hands still against his chest.

'Coming here, punching Cormac, you're asking for trouble Draco. Your Polyjuice nearly ran out in front of everyone!'

‘I know, I know. But it would have been worth it for this dress,’ Draco muttered, sliding his hands back up her waist and running his thumbs over her nipples, peaked from the cold and his proximity.

She looked at him, smiling at her, all bloody and disheveled and she still couldn’t think of anything she had ever wanted more.

‘And anyway, McLaggen deserved it,’ he added. ‘Pervy prick.’

‘It was stupid, Draco.’ She persisted. ‘What were you even doing there anyway?’

The laughter immediately went out of Draco’s eyes at her words. His hands stopped their roving over her dress, and he frowned at her. His face suddenly closed.

‘What was I doing there?’

‘Yes, what was the reason you came? Don’t you trust me?’

Draco stepped back and Hermione immediately felt cold, she wanted to pull him back to her, but stopped herself.

As much as she wanted to just submit to him, to let him cover her in kisses, she needed to have some semblance of a backbone.

She knew that the old Hermione would have been incensed that Draco had disguised himself to follow her, to spy on her, and had then caused a brawl at her friend's birthday party, even if it was to defend her honour.

She needed to at least try to feel that way.

Draco looked hurt, his eyes dropped from hers and he shrugged.

‘To keep you safe.’

She felt her heart squeeze.

‘Draco, I am safe. I’m here with my friends, nothing bad was going to happen.’

He shook his head.

‘You can’t say that.’ He said. ‘You can’t ask me to suddenly start trusting other people to take care of you.’

‘Draco-‘

That hand came back up to his face, rubbing over his eyes- his telltale sign that he was stressed, agitated. Hermione stopped and let him speak.

‘Granger, all I have known, since I was eleven years old, is worry that something bad might happen to you. You need to understand that your wellbeing has consumed me for a very long time. And now, we’re doing... whatever it is that we are doing. I can’t tell you-,’

He swallowed and brought his hands up to cradle either side of her face, they were still warm.

She leaned into them as he brought his own face close, his lips a hair's breadth away. His eyes, so clear and full of emotion stared into hers, and Hermione felt her heartbeat quicken.

'Keeping you safe is my job. Mine. It's what I do, and I don't trust anyone else to do it. I'm scared to-.' He closed his eyes momentarily, his face pinched.

'Granger, if anything ever happened to you-if you weren't here, my reason for existing is gone. Do you understand? I fucking live for you. From the moment I saw you, you are my reason Hermione-' He couldn't finish his sentence. He swallowed rapidly several times, his eyes, cloudy with emotion, fixed on hers, his fingers splayed over her cheeks tighter now.

Hermione felt the pain in her chest that she seemed to have constantly, since going to the manor all those weeks ago.

Her feelings for Draco were so strong that they physically hurt.

Even when she was with him, she felt like she couldn't get enough of him- like she'd never get enough of him.

Hermione felt a sudden fear grip her heart, as she stared into Draco's eyes, that she wouldn't be able to keep him, that the world would force them apart.

It was already so hard, there was so much against them.

'So,' he said, softly, interrupting her spiraling thoughts.

'That's what I was doing here.'

She couldn't speak.

His thumbs rubbed over her cheekbones and they looked at each other, the invisible string tightening- Hermione felt it, and she would have tied the knot herself if she could.

Draco kissed her, and she stopped pretending to be angry at him.

She knew she should be offended. She was good with a wand, a powerful witch in her own right, she could defend herself.

But, Hermione sighed, who was she kidding?

She hadn't felt angry when she watched him punch Cormac- she'd felt protected.

She hadn't felt overwhelmed by him following her -she had felt loved.

Gods, she thought. The old Hermione would hate someone like her.

Draco was intense.

Hermione felt the ferocity of his feelings for her, like a dragon breathing fire.

But the fire didn't burn. It warmed her, it enveloped her and made her feel powerful.

No-one had ever been focused on her. She had always been off to one side, squirreling away in the shadow of others. Useful, but never the main attraction, for anyone.

But, Draco's fire shone a light on her, brought her out of the shadows into stark relief, and Hermione wanted to stand in it, to let the orange firelight dance over her and bask in the glow of his flames.

She wanted everything that Draco had to give. She wanted to let his fire consume her and she wanted to consume him too.

Draco's lips crashed against hers, and Hermione couldn't feel the cold night air at all, she was instantly burning up.

She slipped her tongue between his lips and into his warm mouth as he nipped gently at her bottom lip. She ran her tongue over his teeth, tasting his blood, feeling the split in his lip break open as he kissed her harder, his hands continuing their earlier explorations.

She felt like he couldn't kiss her hard enough, his body couldn't be close enough. Draco slid his hands up the silk of her dress, his fingers dragging the fabric up, raising it higher on her thighs, he slid his thumbs impossibly lightly over her breasts again, making her shudder.

His lips moved from her mouth down, behind her ear and to her chest, kissing over her dress and fixing his deliciously hot mouth on her nipples over the satin of her dress. Hermione felt the wet heat of his tongue as he dragged it over the material and pushed her breasts harder into his mouth, arching her back against the rough wall.

Draco used his thigh to kick her legs further apart, her dress riding up, and she felt the frigid night air hit the wet strip of her exposed underwear.

She felt his hand slip down her stomach and over the throbbing heat between her legs. His fingers danced lightly over her covered clit making her moan into his ear.

'Shhhhhh' he whispered, and she could hear the smile in his voice, 'someone might find us.' But he wasn't helping because now his fingers had slipped underneath the damp satin of her knickers and she felt her knees give way as her entire body clenched when he slid his cold fingers over her clit.

'Draco,' his name was practically a whine.

He laughed softly and brought his palm up to gently cover her mouth. She panted against it as his fingers dipped and out of her, slipping out every now and then slide over her clit.

He practically held her up as she went completely boneless, her eyes closed, utterly lost in him.

She felt herself building around his fingers, squeezing tight. Her hands on his waist gripping him tightly as she shuddered and shook.

Draco's breath in her ear came in short bursts, warm air on her neck.

She almost screamed when suddenly Theo's voice came out of the dark.

'Malfoy you horny fucker. I've been looking for you everywhere.'

Draco jumped and Hermione could have cried frustration as his fingers withdrew and he yanked her dress down.

Draco looked her over, checking she was decent before stepping back from her, his chest heaving.

He looked furiously at Theo who eyeballed the two of them, raising his eyebrows at the straining tent in Draco's trousers.

'Oh fuck off Nott,' Draco said. 'Do you know how many times I've had to hear you and Pansy-'

'Okay! Thanks Malfoy,' Theo interjected.

'Not in the presence of a lady,' he indicated to Hermione who snorted. He'd just caught her with Draco's fingers between her legs in a back alley, she wasn't feeling her most ladylike.

Draco turned back to her.

'I'm really sorry,' he said, 'We need to get back to the manor now, before Pansy gets there. If she turns up and sees us like this there will be more than a few questions.'

Hermione nodded, suddenly feeling cold. Draco noticed immediately and wandlessly cast a warming charm over her.

'I'll see you in an hour?' He asked.

'Okay.' She kissed him and he waited in the dark until she went in and checked on everyone, before saying goodbye then Apparating home.

Draco- November 1998

'You couldn't have waited? You absolute wanker.'

Draco had never felt much like cursing his best friend, but right now Theo looked exceptionally hexable.

Theo laughed, the bruise on his jaw standing out starkly against his skin in the moonlight, a mix of purples and blues, the blood coming from his nose now congealed and thick, two scarlet streams, gathered on his upper lip.

'Absolutely not.'

'She only needed another minute.' Draco grumbled.

'I'm sure she'll still be happy to see you in an hour.'

That wasn't the point, Draco thought, rearranging himself uncomfortably in his trousers as he thought of Hermione in her dress, her breasts soft as they peeked out of the top, the feel of the satin against his hand.

'Malfoy, FOCUS!' Theo's voice was an unwelcome intrusion to his thoughts.

Draco sighed and tore his thoughts away from Hermione.

It had been a difficult night. As much as he didn't want her to see it. He struggled so much to let her out of his sight. He knew she needed to live her life, that he couldn't follow her everywhere. But in a place with so many people, where anyone could hide? Draco hadn't been able to cope with it.

He had nearly blown the manor to bits with his anxiety after she'd left earlier.

Luckily Theo had been fully supportive of a little adventure, excited to get a glance into the Gryffindor social circle.

Draco could see that it had hurt Theo to watch Blaise, happy with his new chosen friend group, but Draco was pleased for him.

Blaise had chosen the light.

He was out, free and relaxed, not creeping about with Draco the way Theo had to.

Draco still wondered every day why he and Pansy stuck around. He couldn't imagine he'd ever been much fun. He was always either worrying about his father, or Voldemort, or Granger.

They would have been so much better cutting their ties from him years ago.

He couldn't get rid of them though, and they were the sticking charm that held him together, they had picked up the pieces when he had shattered time after time.

Draco loved them fiercely.

Recently, they had spoken again about his reluctance to be seen anywhere in public.

Theo and Pansy had tried to reassure him that the attention on him was dying down.

That the more he just got on with life, as a normal wizard, that the news articles about him would stop.

He had been cleared of all charges- what more could they keep saying about him? Pansy had reasoned.

But Draco couldn't admit how deep his fear now went.

He didn't want any attention on him. He was sick of being under scrutiny, first his father, then Voldemort. He just wanted to be left alone.

Draco wanted to fade away, to be forgotten about.

He wanted to snatch Hermione up and trap her in a tall tower with only him for company, so that they could spend every second together, hiding away from the real world.

But that couldn't happen, he couldn't do that to her.

So day after day Draco forced himself to say goodbye to her, to let her live her life, maintain her friendships, carry on her studies.

He held his dragon inside, kept his face neutral and fought the incredible urge to follow her around, baring his teeth and snapping at anyone who went near her, or looked at her, or, Merlin help them- touched her.

Cormac McLaggen was lucky to be alive. If it wasn't for the trace, and the rather large audience, Draco would have ripped his head clean from his shoulders.

He and Theo Apparated back to the manor, intending to clean up and use some Murtlap before Pansy got there.

They walked down the hallway together, laughing as they wondered how many teeth Weasley was now looking for on the pub floor, when they both suddenly stopped short.

Pansy stood at the entrance to the parlour, her arms folded, her face like absolute thunder.

Draco felt Theo's immediate panic and had to bite his tongue to stop himself laughing as he turned to look at him.

'What. The. Fuck?' Pansy demanded, her eyes raking over the two of them.

Draco looked down at himself, then up at Theo. The laughter threatened again.

His blue oxford was bloodstained, he was missing a button and the pocket had been ripped and was hanging off.

His knuckles were scuffed, his lip split, and he was pretty sure he'd broken his nose for the hundredth time headbutting that prick McLaggen.

He felt the familiar stuffiness there, tasted the tang of blood when he swallowed. It made him think of his childhood. Draco quickly blinked that thought away.

Theo didn't look much better. His jaw was steadily gaining new shades of purple and the blood from his nose had dripped down his chin and neck.

'Believe it or not, the other guys came off worse,' he said.

Theo flashed his eyes to Draco, a warning, but it was pointless.

They were caught.

Pansy wasn't going to accept anything but the truth.

'Oh I fucking believe it Draco,' Pansy snapped.

She stood and tried to look scary, but Draco knew her heart was pounding.

Her foot tapped, not with anger, but with anxiety. She chewed at her bottom lip, her teeth worrying at the skin.

She loved them both desperately, and she had spent so much time worrying about them, watching them disappear off on skirmishes while Voldemort kept her at the manor.

She had been inconsolable the night it had all gone wrong, and she hadn't recovered from it yet.

Theo looked at Draco, sweeping a hand out to him, 'The floor is yours Malfoy,' he said. 'You can explain it to her.'

'Explain what?' Pansy demanded. But the worry in her expression only increased.

'I'm going to go and clean up.' Theo said, throwing Draco a meaningful look.

Draco nodded at him, and Theo stepped forward and planted a gentle kiss on her forehead before leaving.

Then it was just the two of them.

Draco looked at Pansy, and suddenly, he was fourteen again, terrified to hurt her, but knowing that he was going to.

‘Draco, what?’ She said. ‘What’s the big secret? What the hell happened?’

‘Pans, everything is fine. You don’t need to worry at all, okay.’ He said. ‘Come and sit down.’

She frowned, but followed him to the sofa, her eyes not leaving his.

He sat opposite her and took a deep breath.

‘So, you know. When I was young, the problems I had with my father.’ Pansy nodded. They’d never spoken about it specifically, but he knew she knew.

‘Okay well, one of the worries I had, was that, he wanted to take one of the girls from Hogwarts. He wanted the Death Eaters to use her as a spy and to keep her as a prisoner.’

Pansy’s eyes widened.

‘He did? Who?’

Draco swallowed.

‘Granger.’

‘Hermione Granger?’ A look of confused derision crossed her face.

‘What the fuck did he want with her?’

Draco sighed, ‘Her mind initially, and then her body, once her mind was no longer any good.’ He felt his stomach revolt at the memory of it, at the horror of knowing what they would do to her.

Pansy looked at him for a few seconds, he watched her mind make the connections.

‘And why was that such a big worry for you Draco?’

Pansy’s expression had hardened somewhat.

‘Well, obviously, I didn’t want her to get hurt. But also, you need to know that I, um, I’ve always had, um-’

‘It was her.’

Pansy stood up, a look of horror on her face.

‘All this time. It’s been *her*.’

Draco stood too. ‘Pansy-‘

‘That’s why it was never going to be me, isn’t it?’ She said, and her face had lost its colour.

‘Fucking *Granger*? Really Draco?’

Draco couldn’t hold her eye. He knew he was a coward, but he couldn’t watch himself hurt her like this.

‘All that time, when you knew how much I loved you, that I would have *died* for you. You rejected me, for Granger? Fucking Hermione Granger of all people Draco!’

Pansy gave a bitter laugh.

‘Well you wasted your life didn’t you. Because she hates you. She always has.’

He reluctantly brought his eyes up to hers. ‘Well, that’s the thing Pans- she doesn’t. Not anymore.’

He watched the realisation cross her face.

‘That’s where you’ve been haven’t you? Something to do with Granger, and you’ve dragged Theo into it with you!’

She began stalking back and forth, her fingers pulling at the sleeve of her black jumper, her shiny hair swishing.

‘Just fucking tell me Draco. I can handle it. I’m with Theo now, I love him. Just tell me, explain to me what she’s got that I never had.’

‘It’s not that. It’s never been that. I do love you Pansy,’ Draco said and his heart hurt when he heard her sob.

‘No, you don’t Draco. Not in the way I wanted you to.’ She turned to face him. Her palms up. ‘Tell me, what is it about her?’

Draco reached out to her, but Pansy snatched her hands away. She stepped back from him, breathing hard, her face a picture of betrayal.

Draco hated this. He hated how much this would hurt Theo if he saw it, hated that it could tear them apart. Most of all he hated that he had always known she would react like this, and he feared that so did Theo.

It was why it had always been an unspoken rule between them never to mention Hermione in front of Pansy.

‘She’s- she-‘

‘She’s what?’

He looked at her, forced himself to hold her gaze, fucking coward that he was.

‘I love her Pansy. I always have, I always will. It was no shortcoming that you had, nothing you ever did wrong, nothing you ever lacked. It was just that I loved her, and I haven’t ever been able to move on from that love. It has consumed me since I was eleven years old, and now, it looks like, finally, she likes me back. So...’

He held her eyes.

‘She likes you back? How do you know?’

‘We’re together Pansy. Me and Granger. We’re a couple,’ he said, and wondered if that was true. Could you be a couple if no one knew and you couldn’t go anywhere together?

‘A couple? What do Potter and Weasley think about that?’ She spat. But he could see her sagging as the reality of what he was saying hit her.

‘They don’t know. Theo only found out tonight,’ he lied, not wanting to cause Theo any more strife. ‘I needed his help, with somewhere she was going, and it turned out I was right to go. There was a fight, we were polyjuiced so no one knew it was us.’

‘Stop,’ she held a hand up. ‘I’m sure Theo will tell me all about it in great detail later,’ Draco felt a small trickle of relief that she planned to be with Theo later.

Pansy stood opposite him then, and her green eyes were full of pain.

‘So, she loves you too?’

Draco looked at her, ‘I think so, and if she doesn’t, she doesn’t hate me at least, and I’ll take what I can get.

This is the endgame for me Pans, I need you to know, I need to tell you now. I love you so much, you’re one of my best friends-,’

Her eyes closed at his words. She squeezed them shut.

‘So I really need you to accept Hermione. Because... I can’t live without either of you.’

He looked at Pansy and he willed her to understand, to be okay, to stop looking so hurt by him. She didn’t deserve it and neither did Theo.’

‘Draco, you know.’ Pansy said. ‘You know how much I love you.’

He nodded.

‘I’ll do anything for you,’ she said. ‘I’ll even accept Hermione Granger, if that’s what you ask me to do. I’ve known, for a long time that you could never love me the way I want, and I love Theo, I do.’ She began crying then, tears trickling down her face.

‘But Draco, I hope she knows how fucking lucky she is,’ she said.

‘You think you’re so worthless, you only ever see the bad in you, but there’s so, so much

good.' Her tears streamed down her face now.

'You are amazing Draco, you are so brave, so kind underneath it all, despite everything you've been through. Granger is so lucky to have you.'

She sat down on the sofa, and she let him sit next to her. He pulled her into his arms, held her tightly and Pansy gave into it. She cried in his embrace, as he stroked her hair and hurt as he felt her jerking sobs against his chest.

Eventually she sniffed and sat up. She wiped her face, dabbing at her mascara stained eyes.

'I do love Theo, Draco,' she said, and Draco believed her. 'I love him so much.'

'I know you do Pans,' Draco said. 'I do too,'

'Well then,' she said, standing up and taking a deep breath. 'What are you waiting for? Get her here. It sounds like me and her have some catching up to do.'

And that was how, hours later Draco sat in the parlour of the manor, the fire lit, Hermione nestled between his arms as they watched Theo give a blow by blow account of the fight to Pansy who smiled and nodded in all the right places, her eyes darting over to Draco and Hermione only occasionally.

They laughed as Theo did an impression of McLaggen crying as Draco told him he was going to cut his dick off and make him eat it.

And later, Draco and Theo watched as Hermione and Pansy sat together on the couch, making tentative conversation.

Draco watched and thought about his patronus again.
He wondered what animal it would be.

Hermione - November - 1998

Hermione would never tell Draco what Pansy said to her that night on the couch. He didn't need to know that Pansy had told her that she would gut her like a fish if she ever hurt Draco. That he had been hurt too many times in his life.

Hermione looked at the emotion in Pansy's eyes and realised that Pansy loved him too.

She was in love with Draco, Hermione knew it now, without question.

She loved him so much.

They stayed at the manor that night, after drinking until the early hours with Pansy and Theo.

Later on, Hermione worried as she watched Draco toss and turn for hours. He appeared to be haunted by nightmares, twitching and crying out.

Eventually she felt him rise and slip silently from the bed next to her. She waited, and when he didn't come back she wandered through the manor until she caught sight of him through a window.

He soared through the night sky on his broom, shooting like a star through the manor gardens, his blonde hair bright in the moonlight.

She watched him and she loved him with everything she had.

She waited for him all night, laying stiffly between the pressed cotton sheets and breathed a sigh of relief when he finally slipped in next to her at 6am, kissing her and snuggling up to her, his arms coming around her, his body spooning into her back.

Hermione stroked the skin of his forearms and held him close to her.

When she left the manor that morning, she left a very bruised, tired looking Draco, in a smart black suit and his cloak, on his way to another meeting with the art curator.

She headed back to her house, full of thoughts of the night before, of Theo and Pansy and their devotion to Draco.

She was so distracted as she Apparated home that she didn't immediately notice the two Aurors waiting at her front door.

'Good morning Miss Granger.' Called Howe, startling her as she approached.

'Hello,' she said, pausing, unsure as to why they were there.

'We were wondering if we could come in,' said Johnson. 'We've actually got some questions for you regarding Draco Malfoy.'

Expecto Patronum

Chapter Notes

Thank you all for reading and commenting on my little labour of love! It means the world.

I've put a chapter count on- just a warning, this may change as I'm writing as I go along. I'm already behind on what I want to fit in each chapter 🙄 so the chapter count is likely to go up slightly.

Please don't doubt that a lovely HEA is coming.. but this is the last chapter before things really implode, so enjoy our boy experiencing some real happiness for the first time in his life ❤️

Hermione- December -1998

Hermione stared at the two Aurors for a moment, her shock at hearing Draco's name leaving her unable to respond.

Then, she came back to herself and stepped towards them, affecting an air of indifference.

'Draco Malfoy?' She frowned. 'Yes of course. Is there a problem?' The two men looked at each other grimly but said nothing.

She opened her front door and motioned them inside, leading them into her narrow hallway.

'Can I get you anything?' She asked, still trying to keep it casual, but she could feel a fine sheen of sweat break out on her upper lip.

She smelled like him, she realised. Like sweet bonfire smoke and caramel, his intoxicating scent was on her skin and in her hair. Could they smell it too?

'No, thank you, Miss Granger,' Howe said, his face set, his mouth a thin line. 'I'm afraid this isn't a social visit.'

Hermione felt her gut twist, her heart rate increased, and she felt the first beginnings of nausea.

Was it the fight? Did they know that it had been Draco at the Leaky Cauldron? Or had they been seen together?

Maybe her Auror career was over before it had even started.

She stepped into her lounge and turned to face the two Aurors. She tried to keep the worry off her face, tried to look interested, keeping her expression questioning, rather than fearful.

‘So, Miss Granger,’ Johnson began, ‘As you were aware from the memories we viewed several weeks ago, Draco Malfoy appears to have had some sort of fascination with you, dating back to your time at Hogwarts.’

Hermione nodded, remembering the jumble of emotions she had felt watching those memories, how shocked she had been.

Draco was a stranger when she had walked into Malfoy manor a few short weeks ago, and now it felt like he was her entire world.

She would normally laugh at girls like her, she thought, a girl who was happy to forgo everything else in their life to spend more time with a man, letting said man do absolutely everything for them.

But she hadn’t known what she was missing before she had experienced being worshipped by Draco Malfoy.

‘I don’t think it was a fascination.’ She said, hearing the slight wobble in her voice and hoping that they couldn’t.

‘I think it was more of a desire not to see me raped and murdered by Death Eaters actually.’

Howe let out a sharp cough and blinked rapidly several times.

‘Have you seen Draco Malfoy, since you signed the vow of secrecy Miss Granger?’

Hermione felt the blood drain from her face.

‘No. No of course not,’ she said, hearing the concealed panic in her own voice, her heartbeat in her ears.

The two men shot another meaningful glance at each other. This was it, Hermione thought. Her Auror career was going up in smoke. They knew- she could tell.

‘Okay. So we don’t want you to be alarmed Miss Granger, but we need to make you aware.’ Howe began.

‘You will remember that Draco Malfoy was tagged for his own security, following his execution of Voldemort, and the murder of several Death Eaters.’

Hermione’s stomach lurched at their words. She could not make the connection between the person they described and her Draco, her sweet, loving boy.

‘Y-yes,’ she stuttered.

‘Well, we periodically check the traces, even when they have not been triggered.’ Howe said.

He was a stout, ruddy cheeked man, with a kind face, and a quick mind.

Hermione liked him, but she didn’t like the way he was looking at her now, the way his blue eyes searched her face, as if he could tell she was lying just by looking at her.

‘Draco Malfoy has been picked up on the Trace, very close to here, on seventeen different occasions since it was activated.’ Johnson said, striding closer to Hermione, looking concerned. ‘It appears that he may possibly be stalking you, and we have considerable fears for your safety.’

Hermione stared at the Aurors open mouthed. She felt like she was going to be sick. She searched for something to say, her panic leaving her mute. Her brain frantically scrabbled for an acceptable answer.

‘I can see you’re very upset, Miss Granger,’ Johnson said. ‘Please don’t be concerned. We will be paying Mr Malfoy a visit immediately after this, and the Trace will be monitored continuously. We will also place a series of wards around your home, and on your person.’

‘On my person?’

‘Yes, we can make it so that if Draco Malfoy comes within ten feet of you, that we are immediately informed- there can be Aurors with you within seconds.’

No.

Hermione’s blood froze in her veins.

‘Certainly not.’

The two Aurors looked sharply up at her.

‘Pardon me?’ Howe looked at her as though she had sprouted a second head.

‘You don’t want to take any risks.’ He said, looking at her curiously. ‘Draco Malfoy may be a free man on a technicality, but make no mistake, he is extremely dangerous. He was bred to be emotionless, a killing machine. Draco Malfoy lives by a different set of morals to the rest of us Miss Granger.’

Hermione’s heart hurt for Draco at the way the world viewed him.

She thought of his face, the way he looked at her when he was gripped by a panic attack, his eyes wide and glassy, the desperation in his voice when he had begged her to let him protect her.

She pictured him as he lay in bed, his body shuddering as he was wracked by the nightmares he suffered after the trauma of the past few years.

He was covered in scars emotionally as well as physically.

She bit her tongue to stop herself from crying at the injustice of Draco’s life.

‘I do not need wards placed on me, thank you very much, it’s an unnecessary violation of my privacy, when I am not the criminal here.’ Hermione said, and she hoped she sounded authoritative. ‘By all means place them on the house, but please forgive me for asking, but if Draco Malfoy wanted to hurt me, surely he would have done it by now?’ she raised an eyebrow at the two men.

‘I live alone. He could have easily gotten in here.’

As we have all seen, Mr Malfoy can produce some of the most powerful wandless magic seen for decades. I don't believe that my front door would pose much of a deterrent?'

Howe and Johnson looked at each other, then back at her. 'Be that as it may, Miss Granger, our job is to keep you safe. We will be placing the wards on the house. You may choose not to have them on your person, but you will need to sign to say that you have refused Auror help. If anything were to happen in the future, this could affect your case.'

Hermione wanted to cry with relief, but she didn't. She huffed and looked offended. 'I'll have you know, I'm perfectly capable of looking after myself, thank you.'

Both men looked doubtful as she showed them to the door.

Howe turned, as they were leaving, Johnson already outside, casting the wards around her house.

'I know you think you can look after yourself Miss Granger,' he said, 'But you need to understand that Draco Malfoy is more fucked up than you know. The things that kid's father put him through? The things he did to him?' he blew out a long breath. 'It's enough to drive anyone insane. If he ever comes near you, you run, do you hear me. You get as far away from him as possible. Don't try to fight him- because you will lose.' He fixed her with his blue eyes and she struggled to keep from screaming.

Hermione held it together until the two Aurors had left, then she sank to her knees on the floor of her hallway.

She bent in half as she let the sobs wrack her body, her tears dripping onto the wooden floor.

She cried for Draco, for all the secrets he kept.
For all the ways he had suffered and kept on suffering.

She cried with how much she loved him.

Loving Draco was the most painful, overwhelming experience of her life.
Hermione couldn't remember how she had existed before him, and didn't want to imagine life after him. He was all she wanted.

Hermione didn't know how long she was on her hallway floor. She knelt there and cried until she was wrung out.

She wondered what the Aurors were saying to Draco. She hoped and prayed that he had stayed calm, that he hadn't done or said anything that could affect him, or do anything to jeopardise his freedom.

While she waited, she wrote in her journals, filling them in on their life, what had happened with the Aurors, what they had said about Draco. She wrote about how much she loved him, about the string that tied them together, the way she felt she couldn't exist without him.

She heard a soft knock at her door about an hour later and ran to open it, hoping to god it wasn't Draco, that the Auror's had told him about the wards.

She expected to see Theo, or Pansy standing there, but it was neither, it was Ron Weasley.

‘Ron?’ she said, surprised. ‘Everything ok?’

‘Hey Mione,’ he said, ‘Can I come in?’

Hermione could see that Ron was upset, which was very much out of character for him.

Ron tended to live on one wavelength - he was not the most in tune with his emotions, nor anyone else’s.

She remembered him sitting, happily stuffing his face in the great hall the first day of sixth year whilst she had been frantic about the fact that they couldn’t find Harry anywhere.

She swallowed as she realised that he had been laying, Petrified, on the floor of the Hogwarts Express, courtesy of Draco.

Ron’s lack of emotional empathy had been a big reason why their relationship had been a non starter.

He couldn’t give her even remotely what she wanted, not one to talk about feelings, or the future, Ron was very much a ‘We’ll deal with it when we come to it,’ guy, and Hermione always needed answers immediately.

Neither of them had had very strong feelings for each other, and the relationship had faded away before it even took shape.

It was probably why they had stayed such good friends, Hermione thought. There were no emotions causing complications.

Hermione thought of Draco, of his declarations of love, his possessiveness, the searing passion of his kisses, and she knew he would never have been her friend.

She and Draco were only destined for one thing.

She ushered Ron in and took his coat, going to the kitchen and fetching them both a glass of Firewhisky over ice, she certainly needed it and she felt like Ron looked like he did too.

‘What’s going on?’ she asked him as soon as they were settled on her squashy blue sofa. She crossed her legs and squished up next to him, waiting.

Ron squinted at her, his face pink with embarrassment.

He took a deep breath before he spoke.

‘Mione, have you ever had feelings for someone that you know you shouldn’t have?’ he asked, his blue eyes hesitant.

He struggled to hold her gaze as she looked back at him, dropping his eyes to his lap and fiddling with a loose thread at his sleeve.

Hermione felt a sort of hysterical laughter almost bubble up out of her mouth.

Oh Ron, if only you knew, she felt like saying.

But Ron wasn't talking about her, he had no idea about Draco. She thought she knew who he was talking about.

He waited, and she could see he was battling himself.

'Ron, who says you shouldn't have feelings for that person?' She asked him gently.

Ron sighed, a huge heaving breath, and smacked his hand down on the arm of the sofa.

'The world!' He burst out.

'I feel like if I admitted the way I feel about them, that the world would say it was wrong! We're friends, nothing more. We should both get married, have kids and carry on our bloodlines, make more witches and wizards and do everything that's expected of us.'

He carried on, getting more agitated, 'You know how it is Hermione- being part of the golden trio. Everyone expects so much of us. Even now Voldemort is gone. It's all 'Oh what are they going to do next, who will they marry? What jobs will they do?'

She nodded and rubbed his arm gently.

She'd ignored those articles.

She took great satisfaction in knowing that she had big plans for her future, Head Auror, maybe even the Ministry one day.

But Ron had never been academic.

One thing his family was good at though were weddings and babies, she understood the pressure he felt.

'The only one who's probably got it worse than us is that poor bastard Malfoy,' Ron said.

'Have you heard? He's apparently pretty much a recluse at this point- not fancying the limelight apparently. Ron snorted uncharitably.

I find that hard to believe, remembering what he was like at school.'

'People change Ron,' Hermione said quietly, her heart squeezing again. 'It sounds like he's been through a lot.'

Ron nodded, looking slightly abashed. 'Yeah it does. I don't know how much of it's true though, whether he was forced or not. I mean, look at Lucius, he pretended for years.'

'Yes,' Hermione murmured, 'I'm sure Malfoy has had to pretend for a long time.'

They lapsed into silence then, both of their minds on their respective secret loves.

'Ron,' Hermione said eventually. 'If you care for this person, you should tell them. You won't know how they feel until you do. Keeping secrets isn't good. Believe me, you can miss out on so much by keeping secrets.'

Ron looked up, finally meeting her eyes, a hopeful expression on his face.

'And as for the rest of the world- *fuck* them!' She said vehemently.

Ron's eyes widened at the sound of her swearing. She almost laughed at that too, he thought she was so good, so pure. She thought about Draco's hand, sliding between her legs as she leaned against a wall in Diagon Alley. She'd changed and Ron had no idea.

'If people love you, they should accept you as you are, and accept your choices.' She said, 'They should love you anyway. And the people that don't- they aren't worth worrying about.'

She watched as Ron sighed and squeezed his eyes shut. He buried his face in his hands.

He really did love Harry, she thought.

He had been by his side through so much, always been there for him. She believed, and desperately hoped that it was reciprocated, she didn't want to see Ron get his heart broken.

'Thank you so much Mione,' he said eventually. 'I knew you'd understand.'

She gave him a sad smile.

'I really do,' she said.

She swallowed past the lump in her throat.

'Now go and tell him.'

Ron's eyes widened in shock as she said it.

He looked at her, but seeing no judgment there, he softened, and his expression was filled with a fragile hope.

He pulled her into a tight hug, wrapping his long arms around her.

Hermione hugged him back, feeling like she too needed comfort after all the emotion of the day.

Ron had a good heart, underneath all the layers of stubborn cluelessness, she thought, he really did care in his own way.

'You're too good to me,' he whispered, and she smiled as she saw him to the door and watched him walk away with a new purpose. She hoped he was on his way to see Harry.

Hermione felt like she was crawling in her skin as she waited for a sign that it was safe to go back to the manor. Eventually, she couldn't wait another second. She needed to see Draco.

She Apparated in, just outside of the manor gates. She had clearance to appear inside the house itself but she didn't want to risk it. She walked towards the wrought iron gates hesitantly, thinking, as she had many times before, how ominous the manor really was. She looked through the bars, searching for any sign of life, any sign of the Aurors, Draco, Theo or Pansy. When she saw none, she took out her wand and performed the twisting movement necessary to Disillusion herself and pushed open the gate.

It swung inwards with a loud creak, the sound sudden and jarring in the silence of the manor, punctuated only by the odd bird chirping, and the wind as it blew through the trees on the periphery of the property.

She walked through the extensive gardens- still perfectly maintained, she noticed, heading cautiously towards the large, intricate staircase that led to the entrance porch. Suddenly, the front door of the manor slammed open with a force that practically ripped it from its hinges.

She watched as Draco stormed out of the door, his broom in his hand. He looked different to how he usually looked when she was with him. His face was dark with fury, his eyes stormy. His features were harsher, pointier, his jaw clenched tight.

She could feel the rage coming off him in waves, the air around him rippling and sparking.

She watched as he ran down the staircase and stalked across the gravel before swinging his leg over his broom and gripping it tightly in his fists.

The muscles in his thighs flexed as he pushed off the ground and suddenly, he was in the air, sending a black cloud of crows skywards they startled from the eaves of the house as he shot past.

She watched in amazement at the speed with which he flew- he was a blur in the sky, his blonde hair blowing around his head as he looped and dived, swooping and careening, before dipping low to the ground, so close that she thought he was bound to hit the floor. He didn't, of course, he just shot straight back up, aiming skywards before swerving and looping back around.

He flew against the wards which protected the manor, making them shudder as he reached out a hand and ran his fingers along them.

He seemed to be pushing harder, faster, taking risks, his knuckles white as they gripped the broom tightly.

Hermione looked at his face- he wasn't flying for fun, he was trying, and failing to control his emotions.

After a time, he landed, he threw the broom to the side and stood, his chest heaving, his hair windswept, cheeks pink, the colour stark against the paleness of his face. He headed back in towards the manor, and she followed behind him, not wanting to let her see him this agitated.

Hermione grit her teeth as she felt the reverberations of the door slamming behind him. She waited for ten minutes pacing, invisible outside the house. Once she was confident the Aurors weren't inside, and that Draco wasn't coming back out, she Apparated into the manor.

Draco was nowhere to be seen as she approached the dining room. She could hear low voices and as she reached the doorway, she saw Pansy and Theo sat, heads bent together on the sofa where she had lain with Draco that first night.

They both looked shaken up, their faces pale.

‘Hermione!’ Theo jumped up, ‘Does he know you’re here?’ he moved towards her, his eyes darting back at Pansy who also stood up, a look of utter relief on her face.

‘I’ll go and try,’ she said, and Theo nodded, as he grasped her elbows and began steering her to the sofa, just as she heard an almighty crash.

Hermione felt the entire manor shudder, there was a creaking, groaning sound, followed by more crashes and an awful noise, not a scream, more of a roar-like an animal in pain. Where was Draco?

She broke away from Theo’s grasp and headed down the imposing hallway towards the room where the sound was coming from. Theo chased behind her, ‘Stop, Hermione’- he said, ‘let Pansy go, he won’t want you to see him like this.’

But it was too late, she had pushed open the door of the parlour and her heart stopped at what she saw. She paused next to Pansy, who also stood frozen, her eyes wide, mouth set.

Draco stood in the middle of the ruined room. His eyes rolled back in his head, his hands held out to the side.

Everywhere she looked, there was destruction as Draco obliterated everything he could see.

He twisted his fingers and glass exploded, raised his arm and furniture was blown to bits, picture frames and portraits crashed to the ground, wood splintering and glass shattering.

He stood in the middle, not seeming to notice as the shards ricocheted back at him, slicing at his skin and clothes, chunks of debris bouncing off his body as he stood rigid, every muscle in his body tensed as he wrecked everything around him.

‘Draco,’

He stopped.

He dropped his hands, and his eyes flicked back down, the irises visible again as he looked towards her. There were little cuts all over his face and hands, where the glass had sliced him. He didn’t seem to notice.

‘Granger?’

‘Draco? What’s happening?’ she asked, feeling herself tremble.

‘You’re here,’ he said, and his face was white with shock, stark against the scarlet trickles of blood running down his cheeks.

‘What are you doing here?’

‘What do you mean what am I doing here?’ she asked. ‘Why wouldn’t I be here?’

She felt Pansy slip away, but she couldn’t look anywhere except at Draco, standing in the middle of the destroyed room, staring at her like she was a ghost.

‘The Aurors,’ he said, still fixing her with his clear silver gaze, his eyes huge in his face. ‘They said they’d been to see you. They said that you were scared of me and that you told them to put wards on your house, to keep me away.’

His voice was quiet, resigned, ‘I thought you’d finally realised how fucked up I am.’

Hermione felt her stomach drop. He really thought it would be that easy? That she’d give up on him that quickly. He really had no idea did he.

She walked towards him, her feet crunching over broken glass, pushing pieces of splintered furniture out of her way with her feet until she reached where he stood in the middle of the room, his arms by his sides.

‘Draco,’ she said as she stood in front of him. ‘Do you really think that I don’t already know how dangerous you are?’ he blinked.

‘I know what you’ve done, and I know that you didn’t think twice about doing it. But I’m not scared of you and it’s going to take a hell of a lot more than that to keep me away.’

He looked at her, but didn’t speak.

‘I love you, Draco,’ she said, and it was almost a whisper. ‘I love you more than I thought it was possible to love anyone, or anything. I’m tied to you now Draco. I’m never leaving you.’

The wary, angry expression on Draco’s face disappeared. He looked at her in amazement, his mouth hanging open. He was frozen, for such a long time that Hermione wasn’t sure if he’d misheard her.

‘Say it again,’ he said.

‘What?’

‘Just say it again Granger, please.’

She reached up for him, catching his sharp jaw, running her fingers over the droplets of blood, wiping them away. She brought her face close to his, so that she could see every fleck of silver in his eyes, count the long lashes that framed them- her absolute favourite part of him.

‘I love you.’

She held his gaze as she pressed her lips to his. Draco’s hands came up, fingers tangled in her hair, and they kissed as though they each needed the other to survive, stealing each other’s breath and replacing it with their own. Draco’s lips broke away periodically, to brush against hers as he silently uttered the same words over and over again against her mouth,

‘I love you, I love you, I love you.’

Hermione felt wetness on her cheeks and realised that there were tears on Draco's face. She kept kissing him, letting her own tears fall as she thought of the Auror's words, and how Draco clearly believed himself to be so unworthy of love.

What had his parents done to him?

Hermione was determined she would show Draco what love was.

She would do whatever it took to give him as much happiness as possible from this point on, to make up for everything he had missed out on up to now.

She held him and kissed him, and she barely noticed the ruins of the room rising up around them, moving slowly back to where they began, shattered pieces joining together, making things that were whole again.

And so, after the Aurors visit, they couldn't go to Hermione's house anymore. Hermione spent more and more time at the manor, still hating the oppressive gloominess of it, but more than willing to be there if she got to be with Draco.

To begin with, everything was fine.

Her relationship with Pansy improved as Pansy gradually saw how happy Draco was when he was with Hermione, and she saw how much Hermione loved him back.

The four of them spent Christmas together.

Hermione had spent Christmas eve with Moddles whilst Draco had been out for the day. He'd braved the Hogs Head for a meeting with the Art Curator.

Hermione wondered whether he'd manage to do it without Polyjuice this time.

He was working hard on building up to being in public more often- as himself, making the odd trip to places where dark wizards were more welcome, Knockturn Alley and the Hogs Head feeling more comfortable for him than anywhere he was likely to get attention.

He put the hood of his cloak up, and stayed under the radar as best he could, but he said that he still felt people staring at him everywhere he went, which meant that he was Disillusioned more often than he was not.

Whilst he was gone, Hermione, Moddles and Pansy decorated the parlour and dining room with the gaudiest decorations Hermione could conjure- tinsel, ceiling decorations, rainbow fairy lights and brightly coloured baubles.

She transfigured a huge tree, and Pansy helped her to decorate it, weighing it down with hundreds of ornaments and lights, Pansy frowning and moving almost every decoration Hermione placed, straightening them and spacing them evenly.

Hermione kept the star to one side for Draco to put onto the top when he got home.

He had apparated in, around six o'clock, bringing the cold of outside with him as he walked into the parlour, calling her name.

Hermione watched as he stopped dead, standing in the doorway, his hand resting on the jamb as he took in the sight of the manor, full of colour for the first time in his life.

Draco had been speechless for a long time. He walked slowly into the parlour, his clear grey eyes lit up, reflecting the rainbow lights that flashed on the tree.

He swept his eyes around the room, pausing on every detail, then stepped forward, bringing his fingers up to touch one of the baubles, a look of absolute astonishment on his face.

'Do you like it?' Hermione asked when she couldn't stand his silence any longer.

He turned to look at her, his eyes shining, 'It looks like your house,' he said, his voice quiet and reverent, 'In the photos from when you were a child, with your parents.'

She smiled as she looked around. It did, she realised with a small jolt. She had inadvertently transfigured decorations that reminded her of being young, of happy times with her family.

'Granger, I fucking love it.' he announced, and in seconds he had crossed the room to pick her up, swinging her into his arms like she was weightless.

He carried her to the sofa and pressed her down, his body on top of hers, kissing her, his hands instantly finding their way under the jumper she was wearing, warm palms on her breasts, squeezing gently.

She kissed him back with equal enthusiasm, shimmying out of her jeans as he undid his belt buckle and pushed his trousers lower.

She felt her pulse, low in her abdomen as he knelt between her legs and took hold of himself loosely in his palm, already steel hard, his eyes on hers.

He looked down then, and she saw Draco's lips purse together as a thin line of saliva dripped from his tongue, down onto his cock.

He wrapped his fist around his thick length, his signet ring glinting on his finger as he pumped once, spreading the wetness from base to tip and rubbing it around his already slick head as he lined himself up.

The first press of him, opening her up as he pushed forwards, made Hermione cry out with pleasure, her fingers raking down his back, her whole body responding to him instantly.

He withdrew, then angled his hips up firmly, filling her completely as he bottomed out. She closed her eyes against the perfect feeling of stretching around him, her own wetness mingling with his, allowing him to slide smoothly inside.

Hermione locked her ankles around Draco's waist, keeping him deep inside her, feeling herself flutter around his cock as he pulsed and twitched, hearing Draco swear softly into her ear.

He ground himself slowly into her, his hips hard against hers. Hermione moaned as Draco panted quietly, feeling herself begin to climb quickly.

He was pushed so far into her that he barely needed to move to send shockwaves against her clit. She closed her eyes, fully focused on the sparking of sensation in her core, on the scent of him in her nose, the softness of his lips as they brushed, feather light against hers.

'Hermione,' he said, after a moment, his voice hoarse, 'I need to move.' She nodded and swallowed, knowing she was seconds away already.

Draco began moving, a slow, painfully controlled rhythm, making sure that he angled himself so that her clit felt every slide of his body against hers.

Just when she thought he couldn't make her feel any better, Draco brought one hand down from where it had been under her jumper, to lay his palm flat against her lower belly, pushing down, gently but firmly on the place where the head of his cock pressed inside her.

'Oh!' Hermione arched her back as she clenched hard around him, every muscle in her body contracting as she felt the head of his cock slide against her from the inside and rub against the pressure of Draco's palm from the outside. He angled his hips upward and moved, continuing with his earlier rhythm.

Hermione felt like she was going to scream. It was almost too much as she felt her orgasm build from inside her as well as in her clit as his body moved against both, perfectly slowly, just the right amount of pressure to leave her whining, her breath heaving in and out of her chest as she built higher and higher.

'You look so fucking perfect like this Hermione,' he panted, continuing to torture her, moving faster, grinding harder, 'Dr- Draco-' she stuttered, unable to catch her breath, 'P-please'. He pressed down slightly firmer on her belly as he increased his pace, giving her exactly what she needed, the incredible sensation sending her higher and higher, until she finally tipped over the edge, panting and moaning his name as she shuddered and shook underneath him, her eyes squeezed shut as he watched her, a satisfied smile on his face.

He waited until she had stopped twitching, and her hands came down from where they had been digging into his shoulder, her nails leaving crescent marks in his skin, and then he withdrew, his cock still hard and glistening.

Hermione didn't hesitate. She did what she'd been wanting to do since she had seen him, holding his robes up, his back pressed against the wall in a dark Hogwarts corridor several years before.

She wrapped her own hand around him, her fingers barely meeting either side as he throbbed, swollen and hot, close to the edge himself, and she took him deep into her mouth.

Hermione could taste the saltiness of Draco's arousal, mingled with her own release as she swirled her tongue around, her cheeks hollowing as she sucked, taking him as deeply as she could, her eyes watering even as she closed them with desire at the feel of finally having him in her mouth.

‘Ohh fuck, Granger.’ Draco groaned and his head tipped back, his eyes falling closed. He brought up a hand to fist in her hair, wrapping her curls around the back of his hand and squeezing gently, exactly as Hermione had seen him do before.

It was slightly awkward from the angle she was at on the couch, Draco was so tall that she couldn’t quite reach his waist from a sitting position.

‘Kn-kneel,’ Draco said, through clenched teeth, and she understood immediately. She released him with a pop and brought her legs underneath her to kneel on the low couch, bringing her knees either side of her.

She felt a fresh pulse of arousal between her legs as she opened her eyes to look up at him, his face tense with pleasure.

Draco looked down at the view he had of her, legs splayed as she wrapped her lips back around him, and he brought a fist up to his mouth, biting on his knuckles and squeezing his eyes shut.

‘Oh shit, Granger, oh sweet fucking Merlin.’ He groaned and his hips rocked forward into her mouth, making her gag as she tried to relax her throat muscles and take him deeper.

After a few seconds she got it, and she closed her lips around him, wrapping her fist around the part of his shaft she couldn’t fit into her mouth.

Hermione felt herself clenching around nothing as she sucked harder, sliding her fist up and down him, rolling her tongue around his head. She found her own hand coming back to her clit and she began rubbing two fingers gently in a circle as she bobbed her head up and down on him, mimicking his painfully slow rhythm from before.

Draco panted and groaned, his stomach rising and falling rapidly in time with his ragged breaths as his fist tightened in her hair, she felt him rocking his hips ever so gently, sliding himself in and out of her mouth as his muscles contracted.

‘Fuck, you’re so good at this, I-’ he suddenly bent forward, his eyes squeezing shut and she felt him begin to come, the warm liquid spilling out into her mouth in spurts, coating her tongue and throat as she sucked him down, feeling her own orgasm follow as Draco came hard into her mouth and her fingers circled her swollen clit.

Draco looked like he had run a marathon as he stood and buttoned his trousers back up ten minutes later. He helped Hermione balance as she stepped back into her jeans and pulled her hair up off her neck into a huge messy bun on top of her head.

She smiled as she watched him later, grinning as he reached up to place the star on the top of the tree, the V of muscles in his stomach visible as he stretched, a look of utter joy on his face when it was in position, sparkling with the charm she had placed on it.

By the time Theo and Pansy arrived, they were laying on the couch again, Draco was watching the Christmas lights, Hermione almost asleep on his chest.

‘Granger, what in the witch’s tit is this?’ Theo asked as he walked in, a look of abject horror on his face as he took in the bright colours and the tinsel dangling from every corner of the room.

‘Don’t bother, I’ve already told her its awful,’ Pansy drawled from by his side. ‘She likes it.’

‘I like it too,’ Draco replied, giving her an encouraging look, his expression earnest.

Hermione smiled, she didn’t care about anything except making Draco happy, and in that moment, she knew he was happy. He was relaxed, smiling and joking with his friends, his arm slung over her shoulder.

That night Moddles and the other elves joined them for a meal at the long dining table. They all ate and drank until they were fit to bursting. Hermione got the hiccups as she mixed the rich food with copious amounts of wine.

Moddles made her laugh, telling sweet stories about Draco as a little boy, levitating the house elves and hiding from them for hours, worrying them all sick.

She noticed Draco’s knee bouncing under the table and how he chewed his lip, until he changed the subject to school, and Theo’s embarrassing first year crush on Moaning Myrtle. Pansy looked positively offended. ‘You fancied a dead girl?’ she asked, her face contorted with scorn, ‘When there were so many living girls yet to reject you.’

Theo laughed, ‘You were my favourite living girl, always,’ he said, and they kissed each other, their fingers laced together as Hermione noticed both of their eyes dart to Draco for the shortest of seconds, he kept his own firmly on the table.

They spent the rest of the night drinking more wine and talking, Hermione thoroughly enjoying Theo and Pansy’s company, and smiling when she got a small hug on her leg from Moddles before she went to bed. She looked at Draco and raised her eyebrows as he gave her a covert thumbs up over the top of Moddles’ head.

Hermione held Draco tightly through his nightmares that night. She had hoped that the happiness of the evening would have banished whatever it was that haunted him, whichever monster it was that chased him, leaving him jerking, sweating and hyperventilating every night.

But, it wasn’t to be. She lay next to him, feeling worry twist her gut as he lay, his hands between his knees, facing away from her, shivering and twitching in the dark, until eventually he sat up, kissed her gently and left the bed, as he had every night since they had started staying at the manor.

Hermione stared up at the faded Falmouth Falcons poster above her head and began the long wait, wondering what he was doing tonight.

Draco’s eyes were always blank- Occluded, as he rose from the bed every night and wandered the hallways like a ghost.

Some nights he would get his broom and spend the hours flying, Hermione would watch him

for a time, then go back to bed to wait for him to slip in next to her, cold and shivering in the early hours of the morning, folding his body along hers, his arms wrapping around her waist.

Those were his good nights.

On other nights, Hermione had gone looking for him, eventually finding him, standing in the doorways of rooms that were normally closed up. Most times he would just be standing there in the doorway, staring into the room, his eyes blank, rubbing at a wrist, or his shoulder.

Hermione was aware that Draco often got pain in his shoulder, he explained that he had fallen off his broom as a kid and injured it, which was why he had been so dramatic about it when Buckbeak had kicked him.

Hermione could see he still favoured that shoulder, he had occasionally hissed in pain when it had twisted a certain way, or when he had been lying on it.

On Christmas eve, she went looking for him, and he was nowhere to be seen. She searched the manor high and low, eventually concluding that he wasn't there. She worried herself sick for hours, pacing the hallways until, around 5am, she heard the crack of Apparition somewhere down the hall.

She tiptoed down towards where she had heard the noise. Draco was in what looked to be an office. She hadn't been in there before.

He was wearing his cloak, black with a thick green velvet lining, and dressed typically in a black shirt, silver cufflinks and black trousers.

He was shuffling paperwork, reading something and marking it off with a quill. He looked up towards the door and saw her, quickly shoving the paperwork into a drawer and going to her.

'What are you doing up?' He asked, wrapping her arms around her and kissing her. Hermione frowned. He didn't smell right. He didn't smell sweet. There was a coppery tang in the air around him- like blood.

She wished she had her wand, it was too dark to see him properly, she tried to see his face in the gloom.

Draco avoided her eyes, 'let's go to bed.' He said and headed down the hallway away from her.

Hermione paused, she looked at the doorway to check he was gone, then opened the drawer carefully.

She knew she was wrong, but she wanted to see the paperwork.

The first parchment was a receipt for a donation of a sum of money to a children's charity. Hermione almost choked when she saw the amount. She guessed Draco had sold his art then.

The second seemed to have a list of names on it, along with monetary values, next to some names were thousands of galleons. She startled when she saw her own name there, near the

bottom of the list, the price next to her name- 50,000 galleons. Hermione stared in shock at the amount of money, far greater than anyone else on the list.

The writing on the parchment wasn't Draco's though, she thought it must be Lucius's, this had been his study after all.

What the hell was this? Was it the reason Draco had been protecting her? What was the money for?

The second parchment was another list of names, this time the writing was Draco's sweeping cursive, the elegant loops immediately familiar to her.

The names on the list comprised of several known Death Eaters, some, like Rabastan Lestranger were already crossed out, a thick slash through the middle, his brother Rodolphus's name was on the list, Amicus and Alecto Carrow, as well as Antonin Dolohov.

The other names on the list, Hermione didn't recognise. Some had slashes through them already.

'Granger?'

Draco was coming back down the hallway. Hermione shoved the paper in the drawer, already feeling guilty for snooping.

She went to meet him, grateful that he was showered and smelling more like himself. They returned to Draco's bedroom and she held him until the morning, her arms locked around his waist to stop him leaving again.

Christmas morning was wonderful.

Theo and Pansy came and they sat in the parlour, exchanging gifts.

Draco looked heartbreakingly handsome in the soft pale blue jumper Pansy gave him. Theo produced a bottle of vintage Firewhisky which Draco exclaimed over, along with a charmed pair of socks.

Draco opened them and the look on his face made Hermione giggle. He held the two socks up, looking utterly perplexed as her own face smiled back at her from the right sock, and Draco's grinned from the left. The two socks said increasingly more sexually explicit things to each other the longer Draco kept them as a pair, making Hermione blush and Draco laugh out loud, something he rarely did.

'You can add those to your plain black sock collection,' Theo said, 'spice things up a little.'

Draco lifted his trouser leg, 'I like black socks,' he said.

Hermione knew he had at least thirty pairs of plain black socks in his bedroom drawer. He had no explanation as to why he had so many. He'd shrugged when she asked, looking, perplexed into the drawer with her, making her laugh.

Theo and Pansy presented Hermione with an oversized knitted green jumper, emblazoned with the Slytherin logo on the front and the name 'Malfoy,' across the back. They all laughed and cheered as she put it on. Hermione dreaded to imagine what Harry and Ron would think if they saw her.

Her friends were spending their first Christmas together as a couple, Harry having been very receptive to Ron's declaration.

She had told them she was visiting an aunt, and neither had questioned it, too wrapped up in each other, something which would have offended her once, but now was just a relief.

Hermione looked over at Draco, who was looking at her in the jumper with his name emblazoned across the back, he was smiling but his eyes were half lidded and dark, she watched his Adam's apple bob as he swallowed, biting down on his lower lip.

'Malfoy, stop looking at her like she's a fucking chocolate frog,' Theo said, snapping his fingers in front of Draco's eyes.

'No,' Draco replied.

She looked back at him, holding his gaze, feeling herself begin to melt under the fire that burned in his eyes, the window to the inferno she knew resided within him.

Eventually, Draco recovered enough to give Hermione his gifts to her.

The first was a signed original copy of 'Hogwarts- A History'.

'I used to see you reading it all the time,' he said, shrugging as she exclaimed with delight. 'Its one of my favourites also.'

The second was a necklace. Hermione took it out of the box and looked at it in wonder. It was in the shape of a trident, a silver circle around it. In the center was a huge green emerald.

Hermione gasped, it was beautiful, but the way it made her feel was visceral. She felt like it was made for her. She put it on immediately, feeling it, curiously warm against her chest.

'It belonged to my aunt Andromeda.' He said. 'It's been handed down through generations.' 'I thought it would suit you,'

'I love it,' Hermione breathed.

'Come and see the rest of your present,' he said, and led her through the manor, away from Theo and Pansy.

'You need to be wearing some Black-Malfoy jewellery in order to access this room. Draco said. 'The jewellery needs to accept you, to let you wear it. I had a feeling that this necklace would.' He lifted it slightly from her chest, clasping it in his hand.

Hermione looked at him, 'What if it didn't?' She asked, her eyes wide and questioning. Not wanting to imagine what hostile Black family magic felt like.

He looked back, his face neutral. 'I knew it would,'

They stood at the heavy wooden door and Hermione listened to Draco recite an incantation, 'Remember this,' he said. 'It will let you in.'

Hermione felt as though she'd entered heaven as the door swung open to reveal Malfoy manor's extensive library.

The room was huge, one of the only rooms she'd seen in the house that wasn't dark and oppressive.

Light streamed in from the huge skylight above, and despite the dust, the library felt warmer, less hostile than the rest of the manor.

It was lined, floor to ceiling with books, shelf after shelf of dusty tomes.

Hermione sucked in an awed breath as she looked around and ran a finger over the spines of the books, feeling tears spring in her eyes at the sheer amount of knowledge in the room.

'I spent a lot of time in here when I was young,' Draco said, coming up behind her and wrapping his arms around her. 'It was my favourite place in the manor, a sort of safe haven.' Hermione thought about his words as she let her eyes travel over the books.

'Are you ever going to tell me about it Draco?' She asked eventually, her voice quiet, careful not to look at him. 'Your childhood?'

She felt him tense behind her. He was silent for a beat, his fingers stroking hers.

She waited, wondering if he was occluding until she eventually heard him sigh.

'I will.' He said, 'Just not today. I'm so happy, I don't want the Malfoy poison ruining it.'

'Okay,' she said.

'Whenever you're ready,'

They spent a little more time in the library, Hermione reluctant to leave, but eventually Draco laced his fingers through hers and they returned to Pansy and Theo to continue with gifts.

Hermione's gift to Draco was a chunky silver ring, a Slytherin snake that curled up his finger in a way that made Hermione wonder what it would feel like, pressed against her skin.

The ring was charmed on the inside so that when Draco touched it an inscription appeared:

H.J.G + D.L.M Forever.

The inscription would disappear as soon as Draco stopped touching it, or it was removed from his finger.

He smiled down at the inscription, and Hermione felt like her heart would burst. He looked like a little boy, grinning with pride as he read it.

'Forever?' He asked, his eyes on hers.

'Forever.' Hermione said, and she was sure her own grin matched his.

Later on, after a delicious meal, where Theo's charmed crackers caused much hilarity and chaos, they settled back into the parlour, the rainbow lights flashing slowly, the gentle glow illuminating their faces.

Theo and Draco took it in turns to play the piano whilst the rest of them sang, off key and rather drunkenly, until eventually, they were all exhausted, spread out around the room. Hermione and Draco sprawled on the couch, Theo and Pansy on some conjured floor cushions, next to the fire.

Draco looked to be deep in thought, his brow furrowed as he stared into the flames. 'What are you thinking about?' Hermione asked him, absentmindedly stroking the hair back from his forehead, running the soft blonde strands through her fingers.

Draco looked at her, chewing his lip, a sure sign he was nervous.

'I'm thinking, I might be ready to try a Patronus,' he said, his voice low.

Hermione sat up.

'You are?'

Draco grinned, 'yeah, I feel like I've got the memories now, I'm, you know- actually happy.'

Hermione smiled back at him. She reached up to kiss him. 'Go for it.' She said.

So five minutes later, Hermione, Theo and Pansy all sat and watched as Draco stood, his wand in his hand.

He looked nervous, which made Hermione feel a little like she had something stuck in her throat.

He was so powerful, how did he always manage to be so heartbreakingly vulnerable too?

'Come on Malfoy,' Theo chided, 'Before 1999 rolls around if you can.' But Hermione could see Theo also looked nervous.

Draco thought about it for a long time, shifting from foot to foot, before he eventually affected a sort of fighting stance and closed his eyes.

Hermione met Pansy's eyes across the room. They smiled hopefully at each other as they waited.

She first became aware of the glasses on the table as they rattled, faintly at first, then louder, before other items in the room began to shake, the noise getting louder until the very walls of the manor were shuddering.

The power around Draco began to build, like muggle electricity crackling, the smell of bonfire smoke sparking in the air.

Draco held his wand out and his hand shook as he squeezed his eyes shut and suddenly shouted, his voice reverberating off the walls,

'EXPECTO PATRONUM!'

There was a blinding flash of white light that shot from the end of his wand, almost blinding them all. Hermione closed her eyes against it, then opened them as she heard Draco begin to laugh quietly.

‘I’ve actually done it,’ he said, and his voice was full of an incredulous wonder.

She opened her eyes, expecting to see a huge dragon, beating its wings, but when her eyes finally adjusted, and she was able to see, she stared in astonishment at the animal Draco had conjured.

A small, white hedgehog ambled across the room, stopping at intervals, its little nose snuffling along the wood.

Across the room she heard Pansy’s stifled snort and Theo, being less discreet, burst out with laughter, ‘Malfoy! What the actual fuck is that?’

Hermione herself covered a small smile with her hand at the juxtaposition of the gentle little creature bumbling along, borne from such an intense power as Draco’s.

But when she looked over at Draco, he wasn’t laughing, and he didn’t look disappointed.

He was watching the hedgehog with eyes so wide, she could see the whites all the way around, his irises were such a clear silver, they reflected the tears that had gathered on his lower lashes as he stared, unblinking at the Patronus- a look of abject pride and wonder on his face.

‘I did it,’ he whispered, and his voice shook. ‘Hello little one.’

Draco- December 1998

Draco lay in bed that Christmas night, his arms around Hermione, and ran his fingers up his own inner forearm to pinch the skin there, just checking that he was real, that he wasn’t dreaming.

He had never, in his wildest dreams imagined this kind of happiness for himself.

Hermione loved him, his friends had stuck by him, he had even made his first Patronus.

Draco was dealing, carefully with any threat there may be, ensuring that Hermione was safe, he was slowly dismantling the manor, selling off assets, donating money to assuage the guilt of his family’s actions.

He was finally feeling braver about going out, sensing the furore around him beginning to die down.

As he buried his face in Hermione’s hair Draco smiled to himself. For the first time in his life, he felt like he was someone other than the small boy he had been, terrified, in pain, trying not to cry.

He was loved by the best human being in the world. She wanted to be with him. After all these years, after fighting so hard, he had finally done it.

Draco felt peace.

He thought to himself, as he lay there, feeling himself actually drift off to sleep, that he finally had a future to look forward to. Draco knew things would be different for him now. His life was only just beginning.

The Mudblood

Hermione - March 1999

‘FUCKING LONGBOTTOM?’

Draco’s voice was loud.

‘You can’t be serious, oh sweet fucking Merlin, please say this is a joke,’

Hermione watched as Draco paced back and forth his bedroom, one hand pinched at the bridge of his nose, the other fisted in his hair, mad blonde spikes sticking out through his fingers.

‘You’re seriously telling me, you’ve had sex with Neville FUCKING Longbottom?’

He stopped and looked at her, a pleading expression on his face. He brought his hands down and steeped them together in a praying motion in front of his chest.

‘Granger, I’m begging you to tell me this is a joke.’

Hermione tried to keep a straight face. In all the months they had been together, she’d never seen Draco so red, the colour high on his cheeks.

‘Draco, we’ve all got history,’ she said primly, ‘Are you trying to tell me you were a virgin when we first slept together?’

His hands dropped and he had the good grace to look suitably admonished, but he didn’t give in.

‘That’s different. I didn’t care about any of them, I was just waiting for you,’

‘Draco!’ She scolded, that’s not fair to ‘them’ whoever they may be, and I’m sure there were quite a few of them. The fact is, you have slept with other people, and so have I. It was a one night stand, a long time ago. It meant nothing.’

‘But it’s fucking Longbottom! Of all people.’

‘Would you rather it was Harry? Or what about Blaise? Or Theo?’ Hermione said, almost enjoying herself now as his face got progressively redder.

‘I’ll fucking kill him,’ Draco said, huffing out a long breath. ‘If I ever see Longbottom, I can’t be held responsible for my actions,’

He rubbed a hand hard over his face before striding towards her and crawling up the bed so that he was in between her legs.

‘Neville Longbottom’s days are numbered,’ he growled, and Hermione laughed, almost certain that he was joking.

‘You can send me my kill list when you’ve got the time to remember them all,’ she said, tipping her head back to give him easier access as he vigorously kissed his way down her neck, pulling her bra straps down as he went.

‘It’s a long list,’ he purred into her ear, and she smacked him hard on his arm, forgetting her anger only a second later as he kissed his way lower, then his arms wrapped around her thighs and he dipped his face between her legs, and as she lay back, she was certain he was trying to prove a point.

Later, Hermione watched Draco get dressed and felt the first sparks of concern.

He’d lost weight.

She could see the outline of every muscle in his stomach and obliques, there were hollows in his cheeks and dark circles under his eyes.

He still wasn’t sleeping, and it was becoming a problem.

A few weeks after Christmas Hermione had stayed up with Draco all night as he finally laid the horrifying truth of his past bare, and now she truly understood why he was so haunted by Malfoy manor.

Hermione had swallowed back the vomit that had risen in her throat as he had described the years of abuse he had endured at the hands of his father.

She had held him and trembled along with him as they lay in the dark and he whispered words which had shattered her heart into a million pieces.

He told her about the kicks, slaps and punches, the way he had been dragged by his wrists, his ankles, his hair. He told her the truth about his shoulder, making her sick with guilt.

Draco had cried streaming, silent tears as he told her about his mother and how he had called for her, but she had never come, she’d never healed him, never held him when he was hurt.

‘But you were her little boy,’ Hermione sobbed, feeling like she was falling apart as he described how he would pretend that she was there at night, wrapping his own arms around himself and talking to his pillow.

Draco seemed to defend Narcissa somewhat, explaining that she was not only terrified of his father, but also completely spellbound by her devotion to him.

Hermione felt her insides boil as she listened to him make excuses for her.

She wanted to scream and rage at the utter horror she felt at what he was telling her and for the fact that his mind still tried to protect itself by rationalising his mothers utter neglect.

She had to force herself to continue listening as he described being Crucioed regularly, the pain he had been in, his stutter, his limp.

But the worst thing of all was hearing the way he had learned to control himself, to hold back his tears, his pain. The way he held it all inside.

It explained so much about the power he had manifested, the darkness of it.

She understood the reasons for his panic attacks and the outbursts of anger he struggled with so much.

Draco had no tools to manage his emotions she realised. He had been left, alone and unloved for so long.

The more she heard, the more Hermione was amazed that Draco had found any capacity for love within him, and it made the ferocity of his devotion to her mean even more.

If it was possible, Hermione thought that she loved Draco on an even deeper level after his confession now she could at least try to understand him.

For a time, it had seemed like unburdening himself had helped.

He had been eerily calm, his emotions surprisingly level.

But as time went on, and sleep never came, he was jumpy, prone to random bursts of energy where he would take off on his broom, flying terrifyingly high, taking excessive risks and being almost unreachable as he Occluded so far into himself that Hermione could barely get him to hear her as she stood below and called him.

Other times he almost went into a trance, sitting stock still, his back straight, hands on his knees, as she'd seen him first at the DMLE, his eyes staring, unfocused.

He wasn't eating anywhere near enough, preferring to drink coffee or Firewhisky.

The only comfort he seemed to get came entirely from Hermione.

He would hold on to her like she was a lifeline, kissing her with a passion that sometimes scared her, her own love for him burning so hot that she felt like she was being incinerated from the inside out.

Whenever they were apart, which was more often now she had started her Auror training, she got a sickly feeling in her gut, she would breathe through it, holding tight onto her necklace through her clothes, counting down the minutes until she could be close to him again.

Theo and Pansy tried to reassure her, they told her that now he had her, he was happier than he'd ever been. And she could see that he was sometimes happy, but he was also tortured, and she couldn't do anything about the monsters that haunted him.

Draco had had the Trace taken off him for a few weeks now, but the wards remained around Hermione's house. She couldn't think of a good enough reason to give the Aurors to get them removed.

Draco was going out in public more often, only getting hassled occasionally- the looks he gave people were more than enough to send them scuttling in the opposite direction.

He continued to occasionally disappear at night.

Hermione didn't want to ask where he had gone.

She would wake to a cold, empty bed and wander the manor looking for him. When she was sure he wasn't there, she would return to bed and wait for him, feeling relieved when she heard the crack of him Apparating in down the hall hours later.

Draco would always go down to the study before showering, and then come back to bed to hold her and kiss her and make her forget he had ever left. But he always smelled the same after his disappearances, the same coppery tang clinging to his skin, even after he showered.

One Saturday afternoon, as she returned back to the manor after having lunch at the Burrow, she found Pansy and Theo visiting, they had their own house now so weren't at the manor as often.

Draco was showering, having not long arrived back from a meeting in Hogsmeade.

'We've got a plan,' Pansy said, 'To give Draco a break.'

'Oh?' Hermione was immediately wary.

'Let's go on a Muggle holiday,' Theo said, his eyes alight. 'Let's go and spend a few days in the Muggle world, away from all this shit, away from everyone. At least there we won't have to worry about Polyjuicing all the time.'

Hermione raised her eyebrows. She actually thought it might be a good idea. If they picked an obscure enough place, they could walk together free of the worry of being seen. They could visit some restaurants, go for some walks, and maybe Draco could find some peace.

When they put it to Draco a few hours later he immediately agreed.

'We'll need Muggle clothes,' he said, looking more energetic than Hermione had seen him in a while, 'Pansy, this is your domain.'

And so, two weeks later the four of them stood in the manor entry hall ready to go.

Hermione felt her legs go weak as she looked at Draco's long legs clad in a pair of dark blue jeans, and a pair of black Converse, a black collared t-shirt closely fitting his top half. His hair was gelled up, and he had a pair of black Ray Bans resting on his sharp, straight nose.

Theo looked equally as handsome in his own jeans, a blue version of Draco's shoes and a pale blue Oxford making his eyes look extra bright.

Pansy was a vision in a skin tight red minidress, a chunky pair of boots on her feet and a black leather jacket. Her own shades were oversized and dark.

Hermione immediately felt self conscious. She was wearing a short black flowery sundress, and knee high socks with a pair of black Doctor Martens. She didn't look anywhere near as sexy as Pansy.

Draco lifted his sunglasses to look her up and down, then smiled like the cat that got the cream and she suddenly felt a lot better.

They travelled to a small hotel in Marbella, a Spanish town just big enough to get lost in, with lots of shops and restaurants, but far enough away that no other wizards would be visiting.

They checked into their hotel, Pansy wrinkling her nose at the lack of opulence she was used to.

It became immediately apparent to Hermione that none of them had ever listened to a single thing in Muggle studies.

None of them had a clue how to work anything, and Draco was the worst of all of them all, affecting an inability to do even the simplest of things, imploring Hermione to help him with making a coffee or figuring out how to work the shower.

She grimaced at his spoiled behaviour, but couldn't help smiling at his bafflement at the TV remote and telephone.

Their first day went very well.

Hermione experienced, for the first time, what it was like going shopping with people to whom money was no object.

The Slytherins used the credit cards she had charmed to accept galleons with wanton abandon.

They walked down the narrow streets of Puerto Banús and Hermione realised how influenced they all were by the models and pictures in the shop windows. All three immediately wanted to spend their money, like children in a sweet shop.

Draco bought several more black items in Armani and Gucci, Hermione almost swooning when he came out of the changing room to model a crisp black shirt.

She glared at the shop assistant who audibly gasped when he appeared from behind the curtain, and she stepped forward to needlessly help him button the shirt and straighten the collar, making Draco raise his eyebrows and smile wolfishly down at her.

'Oh stop it,' she said. But she kissed him possessively anyway, flashing her eyes at the shop assistant on her way back.

He also bought himself some pointed black leather Louboutin shoes, and was very enamoured with the red sole. He tried them on, walking around the shop floor and flashing the bottoms of them to Hermione who just smiled and nodded encouragingly until he bought several of the same pair to take back with him.

Lastly, he chose a chunky silver Rolex watch which Hermione helped to fix onto his wrist, her fingers brushing against his Mark, now fading even further.

Draco desperately wanted to spend his money on Hermione too.

Pansy and Theo looked curiously at her as she refused, embarrassed to admit that there were things that she wanted.

Eventually, after much cajoling from Draco, she tried on some dresses, feeling herself blush at the look on his face as she came out of the changing room in a fitted blue one that dipped dangerously low in the back.

He looked as though he was about to pounce on her before the shop assistant reappeared with more dresses she thought would suit Hermione.

Whilst she was getting dressed again, Draco bought them all, refusing her horrified insistence that he return them.

‘That’s not the done thing in these kinds of places Granger,’ he drawled, a small smile on his face, ‘You can keep them, or I’m sure Pansy will take them off your hands.’

Hermione tried to look angry, but the sight of him grinning at her in his sunglasses turned her lower half to jelly, and she accepted the bag out of his hand, before grabbing hold of him and kissing him hard in the street, ignoring the stares from the Muggles around them.

They met back up with Theo and Pansy, who were also laden down with bags, and walked to sit in a bar overlooking the ocean and eat mussels and drink white wine until the sunset. It was utter heaven.

Hermione looked over at Draco, spread over the white cushions in the booth they were in, laying back slightly and basking in the warm Springtime sun. He looked out to the sea behind his sunglasses, a small smile on his face, and didn’t say much as the rest of them got progressively louder the more wine they imbibed.

It took Hermione around half an hour to realise that Draco had fallen asleep where he sat, his chest rising and falling slowly as he sank lower and lower into his seat, his lips pouting, fingers twitching periodically.

The three of them looked at him and no one had the heart to wake him, so they just left him to sleep.

Eventually, when it was time to walk back to the hotel, Hermione gently shook him awake, lifting his sunglasses off his slightly sunburned nose and kissing the tip of it, as he startled and looked at her, his grey eyes cloudy and bloodshot with sleep.

Theo helped her get Draco back to the hotel and he collapsed into the bed without getting changed. Without magic, Hermione struggled to take his clothes off the deadweight of his body.

Eventually, she managed to get him down to only his boxers. She stripped down to her knickers and snuggled next to him on the bed, feeling him stir slightly as she pushed herself up against him, but, he remained firmly asleep.

The next day, by 11am Hermione was concerned. Draco hadn’t moved at all throughout the night and had barely opened his eyes when she had shaken him at nine am, ten am and again now at eleven.

By eleven thirty, the three of them stood, arms crossed staring down at him as he lay, flat on his back, his arms thrown out, face a picture of peace, eyelashes splayed over his cheeks and his hair wild, as he continued to sleep soundly, despite them all attempting to wake him.

In the end Theo shrugged, ‘Maybe he’s just really, really tired,’ he said, chewing his lip as he raked his eyes over Draco’s prone form.

Eventually, Theo and Pansy went out for the day, down to the harbour and the beach. Hermione stayed in the room, writing in her journals, watching Draco closely.

It was almost 9pm before he finally stirred.

Hermione sat on the end of the bed and held onto his fingers, watching as his eyes fluttered open and he struggled to focus on her momentarily before sitting up and looking around.

‘Granger? How long have I been asleep?’

She smiled and moved next to him on the bed, he put an arm around her shoulders and pulled her in closely.

‘Not long, only about twenty four hours,’ she said softly, stroking his hair back from his face.

‘Oh shit,’ he said. ‘Fuck, I’ve ruined your trip.’

‘No, you could never’.

She looked at how red his eyes still were, ‘I think you really needed this, Draco.’

He yawned and stretched his long legs out, pulling her in for a kiss before hesitating.

‘I need a shower and to brush my teeth before I go near you. Hang on.’

He returned ten minutes later in just a towel, smelling and looking delicious and refreshed.

Hermione made him lie back on the bed as she did all the work. She straddled him and kissed her way down his body slowly, making her way gently over all his scars and marks, kissing, licking and sucking until he was rock hard under his towel, panting and fidgeting.

She pulled the towel open and positioned herself over him, lifting her sundress up and over her head and allowing him to undo the ribbons on either side of her underwear and pull them away so that she could slide, wet and ready down onto him, making them both sigh with pleasure.

Draco’s hands came up to spread over her hips and curve around, cupping her ass and pulling her down hard onto him, filling her to the hilt.

Hermione used his chest for balance as she rode him hard, coming up on her knees to lift up and slide back down, slowly to start, and then faster, chasing her own pleasure as well as his. Draco’s hands slapped down and fisted into the sheets either side of him, and she felt his thighs tensed and hard underneath her.

It wasn’t long until they both came, panting and sweating, her hair covering his face as she lay down on his chest, angling herself so that her clit pulsed with sensation every time she moved.

Afterwards, they showered together and then left to go out for their last meal with Theo and Pansy.

It was a beautiful balmy evening, the restaurant was beautiful and the food was delicious, but Hermione did not enjoy herself.

She had never had to confront the fact in the wizarding world that Draco was exceptionally and heartbreakingly good looking- he hid away most of the time.

But here, in Marbella, where he was unknown and walked freely among people, the attention he garnered made Hermione steadily grow more and more furious with every passing minute.

She had watched as he walked down the street, his excessive height and the white blonde of his hair making him immediately stand out. The catlike confidence in the way he moved, the

tattoo on his muscular forearm innocuous in this setting, his sunglasses perched on his nose, his straight white teeth flashing as he smiled and laughed.

She felt her insides slither as both women and men turned their heads to stare at him, girls giggled behind their hands and waitresses blushed.

Draco seemed totally oblivious but Hermione noticed Pansy's eyes on her as she eyeballed the pretty dark haired server who was currently laughing overly loudly at something Draco had said.

'You'd better get used to that,' Pansy said in a low voice in Hermione's ear. 'Everyone always wants a piece of Draco Malfoy.'

Hermione felt sick at the thought of it, of someone trying to take him from her, to entice him away.

She looked over at him, and it wasn't long before his eyes flickered to her.

His eyes always came back to her, didn't they?

What if one day they didn't, and someone better came along? Someone who was funnier, prettier, less prickly? He'd never be short of options.

Hermione stood up, scraping her chair back and pushed her way through the restaurant to the bathroom, breathing heavily as she looked into the mirror and splashed water on her face.

The image of the inscription on his ring flashed in her mind, H.J.G + D.L.M Forever.

Forever wouldn't be long enough, Hermione thought as she tried to steady her pounding heart. Draco was hers, and she couldn't bear the thought of anything ever coming in between them.

Draco - March - 2000

Draco was stressed.

He had just left another meeting where he had tried and failed to find a way to break the blood contract that tied him to Malfoy manor.

When Draco's parents had agreed to disappear to France and stay there, he had known it would never be simple- there were stipulations.

Draco had to remain at Malfoy manor, to maintain it and ensure that the manor, and the copious amounts of dark artifacts that resided there, were all kept safe.

He was not allowed to live elsewhere, not allowed to sell it or to do anything that further sullied the Malfoy name.

He was bound by blood magic, the spells completed many years ago when Draco was just a small child- his parents had no need to look far to get drops of his blood to complete the rituals without his knowledge.

Draco was shackled to the manor, and it was slowly killing him.

He felt better with Hermione at his side, but he was also worrying about her. Draco feared that the life they had together was actually no life at all.

They had now crept around for over a year.

The only time they got to do normal couple things was in the Muggle world or when they were Polyjuiced.

Hermione was doing her Auror training, trying to maintain a facade of a life that didn't involve him, coming back to this hateful place to rot with him all night before she went back to her life in the sun.

Draco now went out in public, but he made sure he was as unapproachable and generally awful as he had always been, bringing his trademark sneer out of retirement.

He hated the witches that tried flirting with him, giggling and touching his arm, trying to flutter their eyelashes at him.

He had been shocked to find that oftentimes his reputation only made him apparently more attractive, rather than someone to be appalled by. They had no idea who he really was, what he could do and had done.

He felt sick at the thought of one of them touching him, he only wanted Hermione. It had always been her and it would only ever be her.

But...

Draco knew, deep inside himself that he was holding her back. He was a poison, slowly strangling her, stopping her from being truly free and happy, from living a full life- the life that she deserved.

Draco knew that Hermione worried about him.

Her warm brown eyes were always on him on the days when he couldn't eat, or when he had one of his bursts of anger, or moments when he had to Occlude within himself, to hide from the vicious memories that attacked him out of nowhere, leaving him breathless and sweating.

She didn't deserve this.

He was doing what he had never wanted to do- he had clipped her wings, stopping her from soaring high, achieving all the things he knew she had always wanted to.

She was so happy to just be with him that she seemed to have forgotten about all the big dreams she had.

The sky was the limit for Hermione once, but Draco was dragging her down to the sewer with him instead.

Draco spent hours ruminating over it, looking at Hermione and feeling such guilt that his beautiful girl didn't even know she was in a cage.

She could fly free if she wanted to, the door was open, but she seemed content to stay inside, to live this small life they had, and he worried she would come to regret all the things she was missing out on from what could have been a bird's eye view.

He also hated himself for how much he wanted to slam the cage door shut and never let her go.

He never wanted her to leave.

Every day he couldn't breathe properly when she was gone, his chest contracted and he couldn't take in a full inhale until she was back by his side.

In a moment of panic, similar to the one he had had years ago with Theo, he had shown her how he Occluded.

He had taught her to hide her memories of him, demonstrated how to roll them up tightly on scrolls and push them far back into the recesses of her mind, where no one who was looking would ever find them.

He was a skilled Legillimens and they practiced together for hours, until he was confident her memories were safe.

As always she was perfect at it, a model student.

Draco also ensured that the journals she loved to write in were charmed so that they were the only people who could open them. He was paranoid, he knew, but it was the only way he could live with himself, to assuage himself of his lifelong fear that something was always about to go wrong.

He spent every day in a constant cycle of guilt and want, his love for her seeming to feed the dragon that lived inside him. It seemed to give it strength, make it rabid. His love only grew day after day, only becoming more all consuming as time went on.

Draco thought he might at least feel better if he could just sleep.

But it was so hard.

When they went to the Muggle world for their trips, he always just slept for the first day. Hermione would now check in with him at the hotel, kiss him gently and leave, so that he could sleep away his bone weary exhaustion for hours and hours on end. He was powerless against it, but always felt so much better, so much stronger afterwards.

These weren't Draco's only worries.

He was also slowly working his way through his father's list of associates, gently helping them to meet their deserved end.

It was easier now he could use magic again, but Draco had found he quite liked the Muggle way of killing.

He felt a sick satisfaction as he leant on the hilt of a knife, watching it sink through bone, muscle and sinew, feeling the warm spray of blood on his face, smiling as he knew another threat had been neutralised.

His dragon seemed to like it too, thrashing and clawing at him, sending bursts of flames into his gut. Draco knew it wanted him to kill, to maim, to release the fire and the dark curling smoke he felt inside him always, it burned white-hot, and it was getting harder to dampen it down.

Draco had a list of Death Eaters and business partners of his father. Witches and wizards involved in the trade of people trafficking, trading people so that their magic could be syphoned to make valuable stones, leaving that person steadily more confused, less in control of their own actions, losing their humanity until they became a shell of themselves, gradually fading away to nothing.

Hermione had been a target.

Making a stone had been the reason they wanted her all those years ago, and, Draco suspected, might still want her, even though the business appeared to have gone dead with the departure of his father.

Draco didn't trust the silence.

Hermione's stone was worth a significant amount of money due to her intelligence and magical ability.

Draco thought it was poetic fucking justice that the things he had always loved most about her were the things that threatened to take her from him.

He needed to obliterate anyone ever linked to the trafficking ring.

Kill them all.

And if his father ever came home- he'd kill him too. Draco knew he had choked that night after Voldemort. But he didn't have Hermione then. He didn't have as much to fight for, had never dreamed she would be his one day.

He wouldn't choke this time- he would kill anyone to protect her.

Draco was working hard to track down all the people on his list, trying to wait until Hermione was asleep before he slipped out.

But he sensed, often, that she knew he'd been gone.

She had never asked.

But, two nights ago, his worst fear had come true. He had waited until he heard her breathing become more even, watched her beautiful face relax into sleep as he'd run a curl through his fingers, his other hand loosely curled around her waist.

When he was certain she was fast asleep he kissed her gently, then slipped carefully from the bed and went to his dressing room to change.

He put on his black shirt and trousers, his favourite shoes with the red soles and his cloak.

He slipped his wand into one holster on his forearm, his knife into the one at his thigh. Then he walked down to the study to get his list.

He never Polyjuiced for these trips, he wanted the person he was killing to see his face as they died, to see him smile as he felt the satisfaction of another threat neutralised.

Just as he prepared to Apparate away, the silent spell already in his mind, he heard her, heard her small, shaking whisper of his name, 'Draco-' and he felt her hand clutch at his cloak.

But it was too late, he was already Apparating, and, to his horror, Hermione was with him.

He swore silently as she appeared beside him, in the cold dark street outside the Hogs Head in her short silk pyjamas, her hair a huge curling cloud around her head, face pale, eyes huge and terrified.

‘Granger! What the fuck?’ He whispered, quickly pushing her into the shadows, wrapping his cloak around her and casting a warming spell on her.

‘Draco,’ she sobbed. ‘I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to follow you, I just-’ she was overcome with tears, clutching on to him as he pulled his cloak tight.

‘I just wanted to know where you go, why you keep disappearing. I’m scared, Draco, I’m- I’m sorry.’

He stared at her in horror. She needed to go - now. He was meeting his associate in five minutes and she couldn’t be here, even disillusioned, it was dangerous.

‘Shh,’ he said, don’t be scared, I’m fine. But you shouldn’t be here, really. Please go home and wait for me.’

‘Is there someone else?’ She asked him, tears spilling from her eyes. ‘Another girl? Is that where you go?’

Of all the things he’d expected her to say, it wasn’t that.

‘For fucks sake no!’ He whispered loudly. ‘How can you even think that?’

She cringed back from his anger, shaking, her fingers releasing where they’d grasped at him, her tears reflecting in the street lights.

He forced himself to calm down, his heart beating hard as he drew her into him, wrapping her in his arms.

‘Hermione,’ he said, looking down at her, ‘believe me when I say, there is no one else, and there will never ever be anyone else. You are my absolute reason for living, you always have been and you always will be.’

He needed her to believe him.

She looked up, and his heart broke at the fear and sadness in her eyes. He brought his face down to kiss her, keeping his anxiety hidden as best he could, trying to calm her.

‘Love, you need to go now, okay?’

He kissed her again, ‘It’s not safe here at night. I’ve just got some business to deal with. It’s nothing to worry about. I’ll deal with it quickly, and come home to you straight away.’ He looked at her, silently begging her to just agree, to for once, not be his Hermione, not to question, to argue, to want to know more- please, he willed, just listen to me.

She did.

‘Draco, I trust you,’ she whispered. ‘Please, just be safe. Please, please. Don’t get hurt,’

He pulled her in tight, his relief flooding through him.

‘I won’t.’ He said. ‘I’ll be safe, I’ll always come back to you, I promise.’

Eventually, he watched as she Apparated away, his blood finally unfreezing in his veins.

Draco didn’t see the Squib, watching them from the shadows behind the pub, and his magic didn’t detect her, her own lack of magic rendering her insignificant to him.

He sucked in a deep breath, and rubbed a hand over his face, before pulling his hood up and heading into a dark corner of the pub to meet his informant. They were bringing him information on the location of Rodolphus Lestrange who was proving to be slippery. He had never told them why he needed the information, and they had never asked, knowing him well enough to know the reason and choosing to remain oblivious.

He sat down, keeping his face covered and waited for them to speak, their own face hidden within their hood.

Finally, his informant looked up, their eyes meeting his and softening with warmth.

‘Draco, my boy, are you well?’

‘Yes. Thank you Severus,’ he lied.

Hermione - June 2001

Hermione arrived back at the manor, pulling off her holster. She was exhausted. She was in her final year of Auror training and they were working her hard.

She, Blaize and Harry were churning out long days, learning defensive spells, hand to hand combat and also, interrogation techniques - Hermione was best at those.

She was thoroughly enjoying her training, but still struggled to be away from Draco for too long.

Their time together began at around six in the evening and she waited for it all day.

Hermione ensured she maintained her friendships, but he was always in the back of her mind, and she was always grateful to come home to him.

Hermione had had to set her own wards around her house, they triggered if ever anyone came to the door, so she could immediately Apparate back and pretend that she still lived there.

She’d lost count of the amount of times she’d had to jump off Draco, leaving him panting and sweating on the bed, always complaining of his blue balls when she returned.

She always made it up to him though.

She was beginning to think that maybe things had calmed down enough with Draco that they could think about one day coming out with their relationship.

Draco was dead against it.

He didn’t want her ostracised because of him, or to lose any friends over it.

Hermione desperately wanted to be free to love him. She would never give him up, she’d do this indefinitely if she needed to, but she wished he understood that she wasn’t ashamed of

him.

They argued over it, but it always ended in a stalemate and furious, tearful kisses as they bared each other their souls, frustrated and angry, but forever devoted to each other.

And so, they remained as they were, just taking what they could get, loving each other regardless.

That night, Hermione had been exhausted. She lay in Draco's arms and told him about her day, melting into him as he had stroked her hair, breathing deeply so could absorb the scent of his body, warm against hers.

She turned to her side and sighed with pleasure as he slipped inside her, one arm curled tight around her waist, gently rocking his hips as she clenched around him until they both reached a perfect climax together and she fell into a deep, dreamless sleep, tangled in his arms.

It was hours later that Hermione awoke suddenly, feeling Draco stiffen beside her.

His eyes were open and before Hermione could react he had jumped from the bed.

'No,'

His voice was a whisper.

His body was taut, every muscle tensed.

Even in the dim dawn light coming in through the window, Hermione could see the look of horror on his face.

He ran to his pile of clothes and snatched up his wand. Then he crept towards the door and stood frozen, listening.

Hermione sat up, confused. Was he having another nightmare?

Draco's eyes met hers across the room and Hermione felt fear spark in the pit of her stomach.

He looked terrified.

She had never seen him look scared. Angry? Yes, anxious also, but never had she seen him like this, his silver eyes wide, all the colour drained from his face.

He raised a finger to his lips, a sign for her to be quiet.

He peered out of the crack in the door and Hermione could see he was practically shaking with nerves.

She heard it then too, the sound of voices, coming from somewhere down the hall, maybe in the vicinity of the parlour. Draco immediately sprang back from the door. He cast a locking charm and a Muffliato. His face was bone white.

'Get dressed.' He said, and Hermione had never heard him sound that way. He was frantic. 'Do it- Now.'

'Draco?' Hermione said, feeling an icy fear begin flowing in her veins. 'What's happening?'

She got out of bed and grabbed her clothes, pulling her trousers up her hips and shoving her arms in through the holes of her shirt. She'd left her wand in the parlour, she realised with a jolt as she leaned down to lace to her boots, wishing she'd worn something different.

He was also getting dressed, hurriedly pulling on his trousers and then sliding into his shirt and buttoning it with fumbling fingers.

'My Father.' He said. 'He's here, in the manor.'

Hermione immediately felt a wave of sickness wash over her.

Lucius was here.

Hermione broke out in a cold sweat. She knew enough about Lucius to know that she needed to be scared, but Draco's reaction terrified her more than anything else. He was panicking.

'He can't find you here,' he said, 'Please, be quick Hermione, I need to get you out, no-'

But he hadn't even finished the sentence when the door suddenly burst open with the force of the Bombarda Lucius Malfoy had sent from the other side.

He stood, silhouetted in the doorframe. His eyes on Hermione. A terrifying look of satisfaction on his face.

Draco froze where he was. The two men stared at each other for a long moment. Draco looked like an animal caught in the sights of a predator, his eyes glassy with terror.

'It's true then.' The voice was a sly serpentine drawl.

'My only son and heir to the Malfoy fortune, is shackled up with a Mudblood.'

Hermione couldn't tear her eyes from him. She wanted to look over to Draco, but she couldn't move. She could just make him out, statue-still in her peripherals.

'Draco?' Lucius's voice was like ice. 'Isn't this the very Mudblood you were told to bring to me several years ago? It all makes perfect sense now doesn't it? Your confounding failure to secure her.'

Lucius stepped forward, a conversational tone in his voice, 'Do you know, I wondered for a long time, what it was that prevented you from getting the job done. To be frank, I thought it may have been your inferior magical abilities, maybe fear.' He leered sickeningly at Draco, trying to elicit a response.

'But no, it was clearly a different type of weakness instead, one of the many you possess my boy.'

He flicked his eyes to Hermione, and she felt her blood freeze in her veins, she stared back into his cold eyes, so much like Draco's, but filled with a vicious malice, so far from the love she saw when she looked at his son.

His lips stretched over his teeth in a terrifying facsimile of a smile.

Draco, who had been utterly motionless, blinked and suddenly seemed to come back to himself.

He was next to her in an instant, his wand held out, pointing at his father.

The tip of it shook slightly, and that broke Hermione's heart.

Draco wasn't scared of anyone or anything, he was powerful, intelligent and confident. But he was clearly terrified.

He had been caught off guard by the monster from his nightmares, and he wasn't ready.

Draco stood protectively in front of her, his large body blocking Hermione from Lucius's view, breaking his dreadful stare.

Lucius's eyes finally left Hermione, and now he fixed his eyes back upon his son.

'You would bring the Mudblood here, to the Malfoy family home?' he hissed, and Draco visibly recoiled.

'You would not only bring her here, but you would fuck her here, in my home, sully our blood with her filth, while I am exiled.

You have been hiding her from me, like you thought I wouldn't find out what you were doing?' Lucius stalked towards Draco, 'I still have eyes watching you, did you know that Draco? Didn't your magic pick it up? They've been whispering, telling me that you have been secretly fucking this disgusting creature for more than a year, practically moving her into my house. I didn't believe it, didn't believe that even you would sink so low. But here, I see it with my own eyes.'

Hermione watched Draco's fists clench. His face was contorted with anger, his jaw tense, the muscle there ticking.

'Don't you fucking dare.' The words were filled with venom.

Lucius laughed then, a cruel bark, right into Draco's face, causing him to step back.

'What will you do boy?' He taunted, a cruel light dancing in his eyes.

'You couldn't bring yourself to do it last time, but you'll do it now? Curse me like a coward, when you know the Trace means that I can't fight back?'

Draco laughed, a low sound, no humour there.

'You want to know what a coward is?' He spat, and he leaned towards his father.

'A coward is a full grown man attacking a six year old boy because he brought dirt into the house, kicking him unconscious while his mother watched and did nothing.

A coward is a man who breaks his seven year old son's arm by stamping on him after he caught him fucking around with the maid.'

Hermione could see the rage in Lucius's face, he was flustered as Draco took another small step towards him.

‘A fucking coward-’ Draco said, and now he was chest to chest with his father, looking down at him, crowding him.

‘Uses the Cruciatus curse on their own child, for fun. Leaving them lying in their own vomit and piss on the floor, and walking away, not one shit given.’

‘It was for your own good,’ Lucius blustered.

‘You needed to be stronger. Look at what it did for you. It made you powerful, it gave you the strength to kill Voldemort. I did that for you Draco. It was all for you.’

‘YOU FUCKING LIAR!’ Draco roared, and the walls of the manor lurched. Hermione cringed behind him, wanting to reach for him but terrified that if she touched him he might lash out, not realising what he was doing.

He was a coiled spring, his magic coming off him in waves. She could feel it from where she stood.

‘You fucking lying cunt. You did it because you could, because the second I was bigger than you, more powerful than you, you stopped. Didn’t fancy going up against me then did you?’

‘You DARE to disrespect me that way?,’ Lucius hissed.
‘When everything you have is because of me.’

‘No,’ Draco said, ‘It’s in spite of you. I’ve lived my life to spite you. Every happy moment I have is a big FUCK you, to you and your fucking training, your so called tough love.’

‘Oh yes,’ Lucius said. ‘I’m sure you’re with her to spite me, there’s no other reason you would touch that foul creature,’ Lucius motioned towards her, and before Hermione even saw him move Draco had jerked towards his father.

She didn’t see him throw the punch.

All she saw was Lucius Malfoy’s face shatter.

Draco’s fist connected with his father’s nose and blood immediately flew out to splatter across the floor.

Draco looked at his wand in his other hand and appeared to be considering it, then threw it back towards her. She scrabbled for it, holding it out in front of her.

Draco launched himself then. He lost all semblance of control. He climbed on top of his father who was now laying on his back on the manor floor, already only semi-conscious, and he punched him again and again.

Hermione heard the bones in Lucius Malfoy’s face crack, she heard the dull thuds as Draco’s fists connected over and over, with any part of Lucius he could reach.

Draco’s voice was hoarse as he screamed and swore at his father, who clearly was beyond hearing him. Draco had lost control.

Even as Lucius's blood splattered onto his face and into his hair, he didn't stop, he didn't seem to notice.

Hermione watched as Draco let every bitter emotion out, he got retribution for every slap, kick and curse he had received from his father as he beat him, letting Lucius be the one to feel pain for once.

Lucius had completely stopped moving, he lay limp on the ground.

After several more long minutes, Draco finally let his hands drop. He sat atop his father, and his shoulders sagged, his breath came in ragged gasps, his face dripping with his father's blood and the tears that coursed down his cheeks.

In the momentary quiet, as she looked in horror at Draco, Hermione suddenly heard a hushed sob from the hallway.

Draco looked up, his eyes focusing again as he too heard the sound. He rose to his feet, and went back to the ruined door frame, the wood splintered and broken.

He peered outside, and stopped. His body going completely still.

'Mother?' he breathed. 'What the fuck?'

He stepped towards the door. Hermione looked out and could see Narcissa Malfoy, huddled on the hallway floor, her hands over her ears, rocking and crying. She looked up, her face as white as parchment, tears tracking down her cheeks.

'Have you killed him, Draco?' She said, her eyes going to Lucius's prone body on the floor. 'Is he dead?'

Draco's battered fists hung limply by his sides, his own blood, as well as that of his father dripping steadily into the wood grain. All the anger had left him now. His breathing was ragged, his chest hitched. He walked back to look down at his father, standing for a moment, his eyes cast down at the bloodied pulp on the floor.

'I don't know.' He said.

Narcissa rushed into the room, and dropped to her knees next to Lucius, her sobs were louder now.

Draco looked away from them, and glanced up at Hermione, taking in the terror on her face, the way she swayed, trying not to faint. His eyes softened.

'Hermione, I'm so sorry,'

He stepped towards her, and Hermione reached for him with shaking fingers, she wanted to hold him for a moment.

His arms came around her waist and she encircled his neck, kissing him desperately, feeling him shudder against her as she grasped him to her, the blood and tears from his face

transferring to her own.

She didn't see Lucius Malfoy move until it was nearly too late.

He gasped and twitched, a heaving mass of blood and gore. Then his whole body suddenly lurched from the floor as he sat up and stumbled to his feet, knocking Narcissa to the ground as he propelled himself forward. He reached into his cloak pocket and withdrew a large knife, a muggle weapon.

Hermione registered the savage blade, the sharp point glinting as he clasped the hilt in his bloodied fist.

He had the knife to get around the Trace, Hermione realised at the very moment she also realised what he was going to do.

Lucius dived towards Draco, the knife raised in his hand. Hermione saw it in his eyes as he lunged, the utter madness that was there, the hatred.

He raised his arm and violently slashed downwards, the tip of his knife arcing down, straight towards the precious soft skin at the base of Draco's throat.

Hermione screamed, the bloodcurdling sound coming from deep inside her and she lifted her arm, just as Lucius Malfoy's knife pierced Draco's skin and one thin line of blood sprayed from his neck, out into the air.

Hermione didn't hesitate, she threw the curse.

'SECTUMSEMPRA!' She screamed, and the force of it threw Lucius back, away from Draco.

The knife flew up into the air and clattered to the floor.

Hermione hadn't known if Draco's wand would respond to her, but it felt perfect in her hand and she could feel the power in it, vibrating through her fingertips along with her white-hot rage.

She pointed it at Lucius, where he lay on the ground, the hateful bastard who had destroyed Draco's life, who had hurt him so many times.

She wanted him to suffer.

Lucius whimpered and held up his hands, Hermione didn't give him a chance, she stared into his eyes, and held his gaze as she cursed him again, 'SECTUMSEMPRA, 'SECTUMSEMPRA, 'SECTUMSEMPRA, 'SECTUMSEMPRA!'

Finally, He Could Rest

Chapter Summary

Please note. This chapter is a darker one, which features Draco's inner thought process in the build up to his death. Although, ultimately I decided not to go into this part of the story in too much detail, there is an extra trigger warning here.

We are nearing the end of the story now, thankfully our lovely pair are both highly intelligent and resourceful. We move ever closer to the happy ending they deserve! Thank you to everyone who has stayed with me this long, and to my new binge readers! I am super grateful!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Hermione - June 2001

“SECTUMSEMPRA, ‘SECTUMSEMPRA, ‘SECTUMSEMPRA!’

Lucius Malfoy's body jerked, more and more cuts opened up on his skin as Hermione threw the curse over and over. There was nowhere on him that wasn't bleeding.

It spurted out in jets from his severed arteries, covering Hermione and Draco, coating them and Narcissa who still sat on the floor where he had been seconds before. Narcissa screamed the names of her husband and son, her face a mask of horror.

Hermione ignored her, Narcissa's failure to protect Draco in the first place had been one of the things that had led them here. Hermione felt her own rage like a physical entity, bursting from her, the way the curse had flown from the wand.

Lucius lay now, as Draco had done years before, flat on his back, his arms outstretched, the wet sounds of his breathing the only noise in the room. He coughed, and blood sprayed from his mouth. He wheezed and his chest heaved.

He was dying.

Good. Hermione thought- she hoped he was in agony.

Narcissa bent over him, cradling his head. She began sobbing great wailing sobs, crying out his name. She had her wand out and cast spell after spell, trying to heal him, but the cuts kept reopening.

Draco was white, his hand clapped to the small puncture wound in his own neck. Hermione quickly pointed the wand at him and again, it responded like it was made for her, thankfully the wound immediately closed. She had acted quickly enough that in his weakened state Lucius hadn't had time to press the blade in.

Draco stood and looked between Hermione and his father as though he couldn't believe what he was seeing, as though his mind couldn't comprehend the events that were playing out. He moved robotically to crouch next to Lucius, his eyes wide and glassy as he looked down at him.

Hermione couldn't hear the rasping, almost silent words that were the last that Lucius Malfoy would ever say.

He looked at Draco, gave a bloodied, satisfied grin and then fixed his fading gaze back to her.

He died, staring into her eyes, his lips moving as he incanted a curse, one that Hermione had never heard but that made Narcissa cry out, her voice anguished.

'Lucius, no!'

She held onto his shoulders and shook him as the final embers of light went out of his eyes.

'Take it back Lucius,' she sobbed, 'Don't do it to them, please, take it back- he's our son!'

But Lucius had died.

Narcissa realised it too and she began screaming, a long, blood curdling sound of loss and terror. She clutched at Draco, making him lose his balance and sit hard onto the floor.

Hermione watched from where she was frozen, Draco's wand still gripped in her trembling fist.

She watched as Draco held his mother, put his arms around her and comforted her, even after all the times she had left him alone- he still comforted her.

Hermione saw tears fall from his eyes, running in rivulets through the blood on his face as he rocked her slowly, while Narcissa garbled about the curse incoherently between her sobs.

Draco didn't look as if he knew what the curse was either, his face was a mix of anguish and terrified confusion as he stared down at the man who had made his life hell for twenty-one years.

After several minutes, he seemed to suddenly remember that Hermione was there, and his eyes flashed.

'He used a curse,' he said, letting Narcissa slump to the floor and standing up suddenly.

'It will have activated the Trace.'

He fixed his eyes on Hermione, at the wand in her hand, and he went even paler.

‘Hermione,’

She couldn’t move, the reality of what had just happened washing over her.

She had killed someone, she had killed the father of the man she loved. There was no coming back from that.

She was a murderer now too.

Hermione felt herself beginning to go into shock. The tremors began in her fingers and spread through her body, her legs went weak and she felt herself begin to fall.

What had she done?

Draco was next to her in seconds, gripping her tightly by her arms. He stared into her eyes, his face millimeters from hers now, the silver of his eyes stark against the blood dripping down his face.

‘We need to run.’ He said.

‘They will be coming and they can’t find you here,’

Hermione began shaking her head.

‘I’ll hide you, he said, his eyes locked onto hers, wide and frantic.

‘I’ll say it was me. I’ll get you somewhere safe.’

‘Please,’ she begged. ‘Don’t leave me Draco.’

She watched as he Occluded, his eyes suddenly going blank. This was too much for him, he wasn’t coping. The sound of his mothers keening, the blood they slipped in on the floor, that same coppery tang in the air that so often hung around Draco after his nightly disappearances.

‘Move, Hermione,’ he said, and hearing her name sound so cold on his lips pained her so much.

‘Draco, the dungeon- where Voldemort- where he was-,’ Narcissa’s voice came, cracked and broken from where she still sat, her hands resting on Lucius’s ruined chest. ‘They won’t be able to get in,’

Draco looked to his mother, collapsed on the ground, her dress soaked in her husband's blood as he slowly exsanguinated on the floor of his manor, and he nodded, then looked back to Hermione and the devastation was written on his face.

‘Love, we need to go,’ he said gently, but his hand on her arm was firm, far firmer than she’d ever felt it before. Hermione felt suddenly unwell. The reality of the situation slamming into her. Her head pulsed with an agonising pain, making her cry out.

Draco began moving, out of the room and through the halls of Malfoy manor, his grip on her arm loosened and he wound his fingers through hers instead. She felt him tugging, pulling at her, but her body wasn't working.

‘Hermione, for fucks sake, MOVE!’ He shouted, and his anger was terrifying.

He looked back at her, but Hermione couldn't really see him, his face wavered in her vision. She tried to focus, but she couldn't.

Hermione felt herself stumble, Draco's face changed, his frustration immediately morphing into concern.

‘Granger?’ She heard his voice like it was coming at her underwater, there was a pain in her head, a splitting agony, she couldn't- she tried.

Hermione saw the floor coming towards her, and then suddenly she was swept up in his arms and he was running- running with her jostling in his arms through the manor halls, she turned inwards against his chest and breathed the comfort of his scent, looking weakly up at the underneath of his sharp jaw as he clutched her to him.

Hermione felt wetness on her face, she didn't know what it was, it was warm, running over her lips and chin. Draco looked down and his eyes widened.

‘No! Hermione! What's happening?’

She felt him jostle her slightly as he angled his ring finger towards something in the wall and then there was a sound, a loud creaking noise.

Hermione dully felt them begin to descend some steps, down into a room that was dark and dank, the pervading smell making Hermione's stomach revolt. She wasn't strong enough to move her head and the vomit streamed up and out of her mouth, down over her face and chest, even as Draco himself retched loudly at the smell of the dungeon.

He ran to the center of the room and knelt on the ground, gently laying her down.

‘Hermione, can you hear me?’ He pulled his arm from under her and cast a wandless Lumos, throwing shadows onto his face as he looked down at her, his expression a mask of fear.

‘Oh, gods, oh-‘ he said. ‘It's too much blood, you're-‘

He gathered her to his chest, and Hermione felt the darkness chasing her. She tried to pull away from it, to stay with Draco, to hold his terrified gaze and keep her eyes on the wide silver orbs of his, but she couldn't.

‘NONONONONONO, stay with me, please, please, don't go to sleep, I love you, I need you, please-,’ she could hear him sobbing, but it was getting quieter, the wetness continued gushing down over her lips, the pain in her head filled her mind, drowning out everything else.

She tried to mouth the words, to tell him how much she loved him too, to tell him that he was her entire universe and the best thing that had ever happened to her, but she couldn't.

'Please Hermione, stay awake, I'll die without you, I don't know what to do!'

She could hear the air panting from him, a loud sound- he couldn't breathe.

She wanted to comfort him, to reach for him, but Hermione felt herself fading, she was leaving, he was moving further away from her and she was falling.

His eyes, so pale and clear, stared into hers and he searched her face like he would find the answer there as he blinked tears from his lashes.

She felt his arms trembling around her as he held her and begged her to be okay.

'Granger, this can't be real.' he whispered.

'I won't survive this, I won't.'

Hermione felt the vibrations of his words within his chest as he gathered her close. She felt her eyes finally becoming too heavy and she allowed them to begin to shut, she couldn't fight any more.

Draco's beautiful face, shining with blood and tears was the last thing Hermione saw before the blackness finally enveloped her and she couldn't see him any more.

Draco - June- 2001

Someone was screaming.

Draco didn't know if it was him, he didn't know anything except that Hermione was on the ground, and there was blood pouring from her nose, a terrifying amount.

Her eyes were closed, she had stopped responding to him.

Draco shook her, he jostled her, he called her name and he begged her, he told her over and over again how much he needed her, but she wouldn't wake up.

Why wouldn't she wake up?

He sat next to her and rocked, unable to breathe, unable to look away from her face. He thought she might be dead, and if she was-

'Draco,' his name from behind him. He looked around, his hands still on Hermione.

'You need to get away from her now.'

His mother was descending the stairs, a horrible vision in black, the bottom of her dress, her hands, her face and chest all covered in blood, her hair lank and loose, sticking to the blood on her face as she came towards him.

‘I can’t leave her Mother, please, help me,’ he begged. All rational thought had completely abandoned him, he was frantic.

‘Draco, you must,’ she put a hand on his shoulders, her bony fingers pulling at him.

‘You must, if you want her to live you need to move away from her, immediately.’

Draco was confused, but he did what his mother said. He didn’t know why he listened, why he trusted her, but he did it. He stood up, and moved slightly away, his chest contracted, he struggled to take in great whooping breaths.

‘Get back,’ she said, holding her hand out, motioning for him to step back, and he watched as she kneeled down and leaned over Hermione.

‘BACK Draco, NOW!’ Narcissa put her hands on Hermione’s shoulder. She slipped off the ring with the black stone she always wore and pressed it to Hermione’s chest, holding it there.

Draco moved backwards, taking small steps, his eyes never leaving Hermione, watching as the blood pouring from her nose began to slow.

Was her chest moving? It was. He felt his knees buckle, his own heart restarted.

‘Get back, Draco. The further the better,’ his mother said as she kept moving her hands over Hermione,

‘What’s happening? Mum, please’, the word felt so alien on Draco’s lips, but he didn’t care, she was all he had at that moment.

‘It’s the curse.’ Narcissa said. She didn’t look at him. ‘Your father cursed you, before he died. The curse is an old one, mostly forgotten, he found it in one of our own family spell books years ago.’

Draco jolted as he suddenly heard a noise above, was that someone banging the door? The Aurors. They couldn’t apparate into the manor, but they’d get in- eventually.

‘Mother,’ he said, feeling a new fear now. ‘What does it do?’

Narcissa sobbed, she kept moving her hands over Hermione, cleaning the blood from her, the colour was slowly returning to Hermione’s face, but she didn’t open her eyes.

‘It’s your blood, Draco,’ Narcissa said.

‘You are killing her. The curse your father cast on you- in it’s your blood. From now on, any time you go near Hermione, you will immediately begin killing her, you are poison to her now.’

‘What?’ Draco couldn’t take her words in.

‘It can be undone though? There’s a counter curse?’

‘No,’ Narcissa said, and she looked up at him. Draco saw pain in her eyes, was it for him? Or for herself?

‘Draco, darling. Your father is the only person who can ever undo that curse, and Hermione killed him. It can never be countered now. This curse is forever,’

Draco felt himself swaying. He was going to fall.

He sat down on the step, even as he heard the banging above getting louder.

‘Son, you need to go,’ Narcissa said. ‘Lead them away from here. She will be ok as long as you stay away from her,’ Draco began shaking his head.

‘No, NO! This can’t be right,’ he said. ‘Please, it can’t be right. I can’t stay away from her.’ His mother didn’t understand, she didn’t know how much he loved Hermione, it wasn’t that simple.

‘I need her. I can’t live without her.’

Narcissa closed her eyes, she swallowed, ‘you’ll have to Draco, it’s either that or kill her.’ She paused, ‘I’m so sorry,’

Draco couldn’t understand, he couldn’t- this couldn’t be happening. Now, she was sorry now? That wasn’t good enough.

The world had ended.

His mother opened her eyes. ‘Go Draco. If you want her to live, go. The Aurors are upstairs, I will come too once I’ve ensured she is alright. I’ll keep her down here, then get her to safety later. Leave me your ring.’

There was suddenly a loud bang from upstairs, the Aurors were inside.

‘Now! Go Draco! Lead them away from her!’

Draco didn’t need to be told again. He threw his signet ring down, cast one last look at his girl, laying on the ground, then left, Apparating back to his bedroom, where his father lay dead on the floor.

When the Aurors stormed into the room mere seconds later, Draco was ready for them. He knelt next to his fathers body, his face hard, his tears gone.

The Aurors ran in, wands raised, slipping in the now tacky lake of blood that covered Draco’s bedroom floor.

He rolled his flat, grey eyes towards them, and he was deep, deep inside his head. There was no way he could process what was happening yet. He couldn’t let himself think of his very reason for existing, clinging onto life in the dungeon below him. He needed to do this first. He Occluded as far as he could inside himself.

Johnson and Howe took in the scene in front of them, a look of utter horror on their faces.

They both immediately trained their wands on Draco, right between his eyes.

‘Oh gods, what have you done Son?’ Johnson asked.

They knew, due to interviews, some of what he had endured at his fathers hands, Draco knew. They would never question that it was him that had done this.

Howe flicked his eyes away from Draco for a second, to look at the bloody pulp on the ground. Draco saw the shock in his eyes as he looked to Draco’s raw knuckles, then back up to his face.

Draco stood, and the two Aurors automatically stepped back as he drew himself to full height and stepped forwards.

‘Malfoy, you stay back’. Howe warned, and Draco watched the end of his wand spark. They were nervous, he realised, they were scared of him.

They should be, he thought. If he really wanted to, he could kill them now, where they stood, wands or not.

But he didn’t want to kill them, he needed to lead them away from the manor, and away from Hermione, as soon as possible, before the rest of the Aurors came.

Draco took another step towards them. His face felt tight as the blood began to dry there. He let a deliberately deranged smile stretch his cheeks, and trained his eyes on them as he advanced.

‘MALFOY STAY THERE!’ Johnson shouted.

Draco held his hands up, ‘I’m here, gentlemen,’ he said, ‘what are you waiting for?’

The two Aurors glanced at each other and Draco only had a moment to move before the spells came at him. He danced away, a reflex, before he remembered he was supposed to be getting caught.

The next time they aimed their spells at him, he lunged towards them, his teeth bared.

He watched as their spells arced towards him, and this time he let them hit him

Howe’s Body Bind lashed around him and he felt himself falling, no hands free to catch his fall.

He felt his nose break on the wooden floor as he slammed into it, an almost comforting sense of nostalgia coming over him, the familiar pain distracting him from the reality of his life. He was bleeding on the manor floor again.

He heard both men breathing heavily as they approached him, Howe was sweating.

Draco could break the binds if he wanted to. He had made sure he learned how to break the Body Bind curse wandlessly years ago, after his father's friends had cast it on him and tormented him.

But he didn't break out of it. Instead he smiled through the blood in his mouth and waited for them to lead.

'Draco Lucius Malfoy, you are hereby accused of the murder of Lucius Malfoy and will be remanded into the custody of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, until the time whereby you are judged fit to stand trial.' Howe said, and his voice was shaking slightly.

Draco didn't reply.

'Is that his wand?' He heard Johnson ask, as Howe bent down and retrieved Draco's wand from under his bed where it had rolled when Hermione had dropped it earlier.

He looked at the bed, unmade and rumpled from where, just hours ago, he had lain with the love of his life, his hand splayed over her belly, his face in her hair as he had buried himself inside her, knowing even then, that he needed to hold her tight, to savour every second.

He'd never be able to smell her hair again, Draco realised. Never. He couldn't go that close to her- he would kill her.

He felt himself begin to slip, his chest beginning to tighten, and quickly he Occluded again. He needed to stay sane until he knew she was safe.

He watched dully as the Aurors conducted the tests on his wand, confirming that it had indeed been the one to cast the repeated Sectumsempra that had killed his father.

'One of those would have been enough,' Johnson said, looking at him with a horrified reverence, shocked at his brutality. He thought of Hermione's face as she'd thrown the spell. She had done it for him. The first person to ever try to help him, and look where it had gotten her.

He was a poison, he'd always known it.

He waited while the Aurors charmed magical cuffs around his wrists and ankles, they placed them through the binds, not taking any chances, leaving him on the floor while they processed the scene.

'Is there someone else here?' Johnson asked, noting the smaller set of footprints smeared in the blood.

Draco opened his mouth to answer, panic jolting through him.

There was a noise further down the hall. The two Aurors jumped, their wands pointing at the door. 'I thought you said the scene was clear?' Howe said to Johnson.

Howe went out into the hallway, wand raised. There was a pause, then his voice came.

‘Mrs Malfoy, are you alright?’

Draco saw his mother enter the room, her face and hands dark with blood. ‘Thank goodness you’re here!’ She said, clutching at her chest. ‘I’ve been hiding from HIM!’ She pointed over at Draco.

‘He murdered my husband! He just lost it and killed his own father!’

The Aurors looked between Draco and his mother, then at each other.

He looked up at her from his point on the floor and she flicked her eyes to him, an imperceptible nod.

‘I’m so glad that you got here in time, and I’m okay!’ She said, ‘I’m safe now. I hope someone will come to get me later? Hide me from him, take me somewhere safe?’ He recognised the double meaning in her words.

‘That won’t be necessary, Mrs Malfoy,’ Howe said. ‘We will be taking your son into custody, you won’t have to worry about him.’

‘Good!’ Narcissa said. ‘Let him rot. I never want to see him again. I certainly don’t want him coming back to the manor.’

Draco understood.

He let his forehead rest on the wooden floor, giving in to the sudden exhaustion that had taken over him. He had so much to do, how was he going to do it without Hermione? He just wanted her arms around him, he didn’t want to do this.

It wasn’t long before the manor was crawling with Aurors. Clearly the murder of Lucius Malfoy by his only son was big news. He watched them ask his mother questions knowing that her Occlusion ability was second only to his, and they would never find what she didn’t want them to see.

He imagined it was how she had managed to live with herself all these years.

Eventually, it was time for them to take him.

They couldn’t Apparate within the manor so he was led out of the front door.

The body bind was released and they relied on the magical shackles at his wrists and ankles to keep him in line. They could use the shackles to shock him unconscious if he tried anything, he knew.

As Howe opened the door, Draco was shocked to see that there were small crowds of people outside the manor gates, drawn by the smell of blood and the promise of a show.

He had no idea how they knew what had happened, a tip off from the Aurors office was his best guess. They all gathered outside the wrought iron fences, the gate being held fast by an Auror, all shouting, all clamoring to look at him.

He saw Rita Skeeter, her face pressed to the bars, asking questions, shouting at him. His attention was on her so that he didn't see the photographer until the flashbulb popped. He was temporarily blinded, but not before he saw something up in the sky, a small flicker.

He looked up, and realised what it was.

Theo, flying away from the manor on a broom, the wards illuminating his disillusioned form for a split second as he breached them.

Draco saw Hermione's hair blowing in the wind as she sat slumped, supported on either side by Theo's arms as he propped her up between his legs and flew her away to safety.

No-one else had seen them. They were all looking in the opposite direction, too focused on him and the spectacle of his murderous actions.

Draco silently sent thanks to his best friend. Another reason to be forever indebted to him.

Draco was then led by Johnson down the steps of the manor. He ignored the shouted questions as they walked down the long gravel path towards the gates.

He went as deep as he could inside himself.

He let them guide him, his hands bound in front of him, and looked out at the crowd of people, at the fear and revulsion on their faces.

Yes, thought Draco. Hate me, fear me.

He went meekly enough, and by the evening he was securely locked away in a cell, having been told that he would be meeting his ministry representative the next day, and to prepare for a trial, though it was a formality. They knew he had done it.

Draco lay down on the hard cot in the corner of the dark room and turned on to his side. He squeezed his fingers shut around the ring he had wandlessly charmed to escape notice. He slipped his snake ring off his finger and looked at the inscription.

Forever.

What was forever? Draco thought. He would love her forever- that he knew. Each minute he was away from her felt like forever, he knew that too. His mother had said that the curse was forever. Could he stay away from her forever? No. He would rather be dead.

He wondered If Hermione was awake, if she knew about the curse. Did she know where he was? He held the ring tightly in his fist, like a talisman.

He hoped that she knew, hoped that wherever she was, that Hermione knew how much he loved her, how grateful he was to her for what she'd done- in his panic he'd never told her. The monster was dead. Hermione had killed him. She'd been strong when he couldn't, and now he needed to be strong enough to do his part.

Draco awoke the next morning and realised that he had actually slept for an hour or so that night.

He wasn't at the manor, and his father was dead. The curse binding him to his home had died with his father.

He sat up, his head in his hands and perched on the end of the bed, the memories of the day before hitting him like a bludger. He leant over and retched, dry heaving, his empty stomach clenching.

He sat and Occluded for the next few hours, sitting with his hands on his thighs, lost in happy memories of Hermione, until he was suddenly shocked from his reverie by a guard dragging his wand loudly over the bars of his cell.

'Malfoy, you're required in the interrogation room.' The guard said, looking at him warily. 'Hands out,' Draco held out his wrists as the guard entered, his wand pointed at him, and he was once again magically shackled. He rose and followed the guard silently down the hall.

They came to a room at the end of the corridor and Draco was led inside to a small table and chair. They were fixed to the floor.

He allowed them to slide the metal cuffs attached to the table around his wrists as an extra precaution as he sat in the chair, looking around the empty room and trying to stay present.

The guard left without another word and Draco sat and waited.

They left him there for a long time.

He felt his anxiety begin to grow, his knee bounced, his stomach roiled.

Eventually the door clicked open and Howe entered, looking exhausted.

'Draco, how are you doing?' Draco looked at him and didn't answer, why was he pretending he cared?

Howe sighed and looked at him resignedly. 'Your mother's here to see you. Do you want to speak to her? You can refuse.'

Draco nodded immediately. She would have information about Hermione.

'We will be outside, any funny business and those cuffs will take you out, understand?' Draco nodded again, his desperation almost taking over him. He felt the dragon stir, some anger spark in his gut.

Another agonisingly slow ten minutes passed before the door finally clicked open again and his mother entered.

She looked horrendous, haggard, pale and bedraggled, her dress wrinkled, her hair tangled around her face. Draco had never seen her look this bad.

She sat on the chair opposite him and waited until the Auror had left. They had taken her wand but she looked towards the door and cast a wandless Muffliato, then turned back to Draco, her eyes tired and puffy.

Draco stared back at her, his gut churning. He had always been so focused on his father and his hatred of him, that he had managed to mostly block out the myriad of hurtful emotions he felt regarding his mother.

But looking at her now was hard.

He felt so much bitterness, so much anger, but the worst thing he felt, the thing that hurt the most, was the love he still had for her, somewhere deep inside him.

He still felt that pull towards her, he wanted to cry and for her to hold him and comfort him and tell him everything was going to be alright. He didn't know why that need was still there, she'd never done it, so why did he still crave it?

She looked at him sadly and reached her hands across the table towards him. Draco jerked back away from her violently, making the chains rattle, causing his mother to jump and withdraw her hands. She put them in her lap, fiddling with her black skirt.

'Where is she? Is she ok?' He asked, his voice low.

'She's fine, Draco.' His mother answered. 'Theo took her to his house, we got a healer there, Confunded now obviously. They gave her a blood replenisher and checked her over.'

'Is she awake? What has she said?'

Draco was desperate, he needed to know that she was alright. As long as she was okay... Narcissa looked at him then, and Draco knew whatever his mother was going to say was bad, it was so bad.

'Draco darling.' He hated it when she called him that, it was a remnant from his childhood, their fake outings into Pureblood society.

'Hermione lost a lot of blood. The healer said she had a massive seizure. You were too close to her for too long. You didn't know.'

Draco frowned. What was she saying?

'Hermione will be ok, she will recover. We left her at St Mungo's. But Draco, you need to know, that she was very confused when she woke- the amount of blood she lost, the magnitude of her seizure- it affected her mind.'

'What do you mean?' Draco said, feeling himself begin to panic.

Narcissa looked down at the table.

'She had blocked out what she did to Lucius, she was confused, as to who I was and who Theo was.'

Draco's brow furrowed, there was more, he waited.

'Darling, it appears that she couldn't remember much of the last few years, and, I'm sorry to tell you this, but I helped her on her way. I've ensured that she won't remember us, or you Draco. At all. It's for the best.'

Draco stared at his mother, his mouth open in shock. She couldn't mean-?

'Hermione can't remember me?'

'Nothing past your time in school. She was confused Draco, she was scared. You need to know, it's better this way. You can't be close to her, if she can't remember you, it will be easier, on both of you.'

You will be here, she can recover and move on with her life.' She looked at him, her hands came back up to the table.

'It was never going to work anyway was it? She's a Muggleborn, and you're a Malfoy. All the history you have. Even if you weren't stuck in here, it still wouldn't work. I don't know why you ever thought it would.'

'She can't remember me, at all?'

'No. I've made sure of it. If there was anything left after her seizure- it's gone,'

Draco thought of his mother's magical abilities, his own most certainly passed down from her, made stronger by the circumstances of his life.

He felt himself sway in his seat.

All their time together, their kisses, their words, all of their love, gone? She didn't remember any of it? He clenched his fist, feeling his ring cut into the flesh of his palm.

His mother reached inside her dress and pulled out Hermione's necklace, the one he had given to her. 'I'll put this safe at the manor where it belongs,' she said, and he watched as it fell back against Narcissa's chest instead of Hermione's, where it was supposed to be.

Draco closed his eyes, feeling like he was going to be sick. This couldn't be happening.

'Draco.'

He opened them and looked into her hateful face. 'I've done this to help you. This is for the best.'

'To help me?' He couldn't process her words. Now, she was helping him? When she never had before?

'You? Help me?'

‘Yes! I’ve helped you. Do you really want Hermione to suffer, the way you are now? Do you want her to feel this pain? She clearly loves you Draco, so much. She- she killed your father for you. A love like that is painful, it makes you do terrible things, makes you lose all reason, do things you regret.’

She looked over at Draco, sadness etched on her face.

‘I can see how much you love her too. You don’t want that for her, you don’t want to keep your woman trapped. Set her free, let her live her life.’

Draco couldn’t speak.

Set her free.

She was free now, she couldn’t remember him.

His poison couldn’t hurt her if she wasn’t around him.

‘Her friends will think she had an accident and hit her head. They will help her recover. She can live a long and happy life Draco. Isn’t that what you want?’

Draco stared at his mother, his chest contracted, he felt his breath leave him. That was what he had always wanted, from when he had first seen her on the train. He wanted her to be safe and happy.

Draco felt something inside him snap, some sort of thread. He knew what he needed to do.

Hermione would get that life, he would make sure of it. He would carry on with the same mission he had had since he was a boy and ensure that she was safe, but he would do it away from her, in the shadows.

He would allow Hermione to live her life in the sun.

And once he knew he had done all he could, he could stop. He could finally get the long sleep he craved so badly.

He could finally rest.

Draco spent the next few months in the build up to his trial steadily losing his mind.

He remained in the ministry cells, in the small dingy room and he forgot who he had been when he had Hermione.

That Draco had had a reason for living, something to be good for, but all his reasons escaped him now.

As he looked back over his life, he felt the dragon growing, felt its claws finally sink deep into his skin, felt them hook inwards and retract, it slunk its head all the way up his throat, so that when it breathed fire, it was him that breathed it.

He had tried, so hard. All he ever wanted to do was make people proud. He had tried to do his best.

But this life wasn't meant for him, no matter what he did, it was never enough.

He accepted that now, there was no more trying left in him, he was going to give into the darkness, get the job done and move on to the next life, where maybe he could find happiness.

They came to get him on the morning of his trial and he knew the Aurors were slightly concerned. He had Occluded so far into himself that he was barely reachable again. They asked him question after question regarding his trial but it was like they were coming from very far away.

They watched him as he dressed, slowly putting on his black suit, fixing his cufflinks, slipping on his shoes. No more red bottoms for him- too many memories. He did up his own tie, straightening it under his collar and combed his hair, he was immaculate, controlled.

When they arrived at the Courthouse there were crowds of people outside, screaming at him, shouting his name. Some people bayed for his blood like animals, others screamed his name like he was some sort of hero.

As he let his eyes drift over them all, Draco suddenly felt a shift- a slight jolt as he saw Blaise stood off to one side, talking to one of the Aurors. Their eyes met for a moment, Draco held his old friend's gaze for only a second before he had to look away, it was too much.

He knew Theo and Pansy would be there too, Polyjuiced, hidden in the crowd, they needed to distance themselves from him now.

He followed the Aurors inside, making his way down the long, black tiled corridors and saw them leading his mother in. Narcissa was hunched over, like an old woman.

She looked like her life decisions had hit her all at once since he had last seen her. She was weak, no make up, no jewellery, a shell of the Narcissa Malfoy she had once been.

Draco avoided looking at her, he avoided looking at anything, he just stared at the ground, planning, preparing.

Suddenly, he was forced to stop walking, his body went rigid, as a painfully familiar scent crept up his nose and into his brain.

He was violently thrown from his Occlusion the second as he recognised it.

Hermione.

Draco looked up and- he didn't know how he didn't collapse- she was there, stood in the corridor down from him. She was wearing full Auror robes, her hair braided back, loose curls framing her beautiful face. She looked healthy, full of life as she pointed at something on a parchment she held in her hand, her brown eyes darting over her words as she read it out loud to the other Auror she was speaking to.

She looked up as the spectacle of Draco Malfoy passed- and he couldn't do it.

If he met her eyes he would crumble, he would forget all the new rules and kneel at her feet, he wouldn't be strong enough to carry on.

So he didn't look at her.

He mentally threw the strongest barrier charm he knew around her as he passed, protecting her from his poison. He felt his mother's own barrier charm rush past him to surround her also. She appeared to barely feel him as he passed, a slight furrow of her eyebrows, maybe she'd have a headache later, but she was alive and well, there was no blood.

He closed his eyes as the memory of her as he had last seen her assaulted him briefly before he managed to push it back out.

Draco breathed her in as he passed, keeping his eyes firmly on the ground, even though it half killed him, and as he entered the courtroom to face his future, the thought of her, healthy and happy, gave him the strength to do what he needed to.

It was easy to stay silent during the trial, he sunk down deep and waited for it to be over, non responsive, non reactive- a passive participant.

He almost felt bad as they took him later, towards Azkaban on the small transport boat.

Howe and Johnson didn't deserve what he did to them, they were just doing their jobs. But they were in his way, and the shell of Draco that was left - now the fire had burned and the embers blown away- he didn't have time for guilt. He waited until they weren't looking at him, then he raised his hands, wrists bound together. He opened his palms and let them drop as he did what he did best.

The two Aurors were dead before they even knew what was happening, he felt the shackles around his wrists spark and fade to nothing.

He sent the dementors soaring, shooting a wave of his black, black magic their way. They recognised it, and turned away.

The two additional guards- he looked at them, they were younger than him, maybe eighteen or nineteen, they were just kids.

He couldn't kill them.

Instead he gave them the Draco Malfoy version of a Confundus, holding his palm over their foreheads for a few seconds as they both stared, opened mouthed at the dead Aurors. He had learned he needed to be careful with this one, a few times he'd gone too hard with it, and the person had died, a huge aneurism causing them to bleed from every orifice, sometimes immediately, sometimes later. Draco had done it accidentally a few times during his hunt for his fathers associates- the hunt he could now resume.

So, he was gentle with them, and in their confusion afterwards he transfigured a broom from the oar of the small boat they had been transferring him in and soared up into the night sky.

He was back at the manor within the hour.

He Apparated in, and almost immediately heard a pop.

Moddles rushed towards him, tears streaming down her face. He hugged her tightly, apologising to her as she beat him with her little fists, crying out her frustration at his situation.

She had done what he had always said to do and hidden the second his father had appeared in the manor.

She had stayed away until she had sensed her master's return.

‘Why did you do it, master Draco?’ she asked through her tears, ‘why did you leave me?’ He soothed her as best he could, explaining that he couldn’t help it and that he wouldn’t be able to live at the manor any more, he would only return sporadically, that she should move on.

She cried and clung to him, refusing to leave. Draco held her little body tight and eventually accepted that she wanted to stay at the manor. She would wait for him, and if he ever needed her, she would be there.

After allowing Moddles to make him something to eat, Draco headed down to the dungeon having found his ring hidden in the exact spot his mother had told him it would be on one of her visits.

All the blood had been cleaned from the floors, but Draco could still see it, still smell it. Once again he was tied to Malfoy manor, the place from his nightmares, but the place he still needed all the same.

The dungeon room would keep him hidden, it would be a base for him now he was on the run.

Draco made his way down to the office. He found the paperwork in the study then he walked through the manor, collecting everything he needed.

He found Hermione’s journals, still in the dining room where she had left them and clutched them to his chest, taking them and laying them carefully on his bed, before he spent some time moving clothes and essentials down to the dungeon room.

He went to the library and moved down all the books he thought might help him. Everything took longer without a wand but he used his wandless magic for the things he could.

He transfigured a bed and a small desk and chair, a wardrobe and finally a cabinet where he stored all the supplies he had hidden- Polyjuice, Blood Replenishment, Pepper Up, things that would be useful. After a few hours Draco looked around. It was basic, but it would do. He didn’t want to live, he just wanted to survive.

He heard the Aurors enter above him several hours later, heard them turning the manor upside down looking for him.

He barely registered it - they'd never find him, and if they did- he'd kill them. After a time, he tuned the noise out, he was busy, reading, researching, Occluding.

A few nights later, Draco thought it was safe to visit Pansy and Theo. He Apparated in, just down the road from their townhouse. It was harder now he didn't have his wand to disillusion, he needed to be careful.

He stood in the dark outside their beautiful home and looked in the window. They were sitting together on the sofa, their legs intertwined, Theo was reading a book, Pansy was idly making flowers float down from the ceiling with her wand as she sipped at a glass of wine. Draco watched them and felt the pain of the loss of Hermione cut him again.

He had tried to push her down, rolled her up tight on scrolls and hidden her, if he let himself think of her too much he would break.

His mind was trying to give in, trying to lead him to oblivion, but he couldn't do it yet.

He dragged his eyes away and knocked on the door.

He heard Pansy's rushing feet and the door swung open. She looked at him under his hood and her face paled, but she reached for him, yanking him into the house and towards her immediately. Draco slammed the door behind him and allowed himself to melt into Pansy's arms. It felt so good to be cared for.

'Theo, he's here,' she called, and a few seconds later Draco felt Theo's arms around him also.

He stood in their warm hallway and he shuddered as he felt their love wrap around him, he had been so lonely, he had forgotten how good human touch could feel. He heard Pansy sob against him and Draco felt the same guilt he had had for years trying to resurface again, why had he ever let them do this to themselves?

Eventually, they all let go and Theo led them back to the sitting room away from the windows.

'Draco, what are you going to do?' Pansy asked him, her face tracked with tears. 'Everyone is looking for you.'

He didn't say anything, he just looked up at Theo.

'I'm scared, Draco,' she said. 'I'm so scared of what the future holds for you.'

He reached for her again, 'Don't be scared,' he said, 'I'll be fine. You know me, Pans, you know I can look after myself.'

'But I don't want you to, Draco!' Pansy shouted. 'I don't want you to be alone! I want you to be with us. It's not fair! You don't deserve it,' she dissolved again and Draco and Theo held her and comforted her until she eventually cried herself to sleep.

When Draco was sure she could no longer hear him, he spoke quietly to Theo. He said the words that he had come to say.

Theo's blue eyes darkened as Draco spoke.

Draco thanked Theo for everything he had done for him, he told him how much he loved him, told him that he was the best friend anyone could ever ask for, and then asked him for one last thing. He made Theo swear that he would help him when the time came.

Theo looked at him for a long moment, while the magnitude of Draco's request hit him.

Then Theo broke.

He pleaded with Draco, begged him to change his mind, tried hard to find a different way, a possible solution.

But Draco was tired, he was too tired of this life.

He made Theo promise.

Eventually it was time for him to leave. He bent and kissed Pansy's head, smoothing back her silky black hair, 'I love you Pans, I'm sorry,' he whispered quietly so as not to wake her up.

Theo walked him to the door and the two friends held each other for a long time.

Draco pulled away and looked at Theo, someone who had been there for him through every challenge he had ever faced. He knew that he would never forgive himself for hurting him the way he was, but he thought that Theo was the only person who understood.

Eventually, he walked away from the warm comfort of his friend's love, feeling Theo's eyes on him until he Disapparated away, and all he hoped was that his friends lived a long and happy life, free of the worry and pain that being in his life had brought them.

That was the night Draco truly lost himself.

He left the manor and restarted his mission to kill everyone who had ever posed a threat to Hermione Granger. He sourced an unregistered wand on one of his Polyjuiced visits to Knockturn alley. It was a poor substitute for his own, but that had been destroyed upon his sentencing and was long gone. This one was basic, but it did what he needed it to do.

Then, he searched Wizarding Britain. He hunted his fathers associates down like the foul vermin they were, and he finally got his retribution for every hurt and injustice he had experienced during his life.

Draco shed all remnants of his old self. He let the dragon tear through his skin and burst outwards from him.

He didn't just kill, he maimed, he ripped, he tore.

He tortured people, feeling his dragon's pleasure as he ran his knife through skin and muscle, he laughed when they begged for mercy. He reached out his tongue and licked the blood from their faces as he carved his initials into their skin. He pressed a hand to their chest just to feel their hearts shudder and stop. Draco breathed in the scent of their fear and their pain and he

let it strengthen him.

He rarely used magic, unless he was in a rush, preferring the brutality of Muggle murder, there was no mercy left in him now.

Draco Malfoy was the monster they had always wanted him to be.

Draco knew that they were looking for him, that they would never stop looking for him, but he didn't care. They would never take him, he was too powerful.

He only had to raise his arms and they were dead. He only had to press a palm to their forehead and they forgot him. He Polyjuiced when he needed to, moved from place to place, doing with he needed to do with a cold brutality, never stopping to think for too long incase he felt too much.

Rodolphus Lestrage was the last person on Draco's list. Despite all the help he had had finding him, Rodolphus was smart. He knew to hide, like a rat in the sewer. He was the only person stopping Draco from finding his peace.

By the time he finally cornered him, at an old shack on a windy hilltop in Scotland, Draco was half insane, his humanity had completely abandoned him.

He ripped Rodolphus Lestrage to pieces.

Draco felt the man's blood slipping down his face, wet and hot, and he closed his eyes and savoured it.

He was finally done.

That morning Draco finally returned to the manor. It was time to prepare. He took out Hermione's journals, lay down on his small bed and read them for the hundredth time. He practically knew them off by heart now, but he loved to read her words anyway. Loved to trace his fingers over the letters that told him how much she really had loved him.

He read about her first visit to the manor, her confusing emotions, he read about the time he had arrived outside her front door, how desperately she had wanted him as he had pushed her back onto her stairs. He read about her fury at his parents, her jealousy in Marbella, all of it. He read their love story like a novel, over and over again.

Throughout the long years, Draco had watched Hermione from afar, it was the only way he could remind himself why he was doing everything he did.

He watched as she went from strength to strength in her job, how she had remained loyal to her friends, how she smiled and laughed as she walked down the street arm in arm with Ginny Weasley, how she visited Potter and Weasley every week, how she relied on Blaise for support.

Blaise had done what he had vowed he would do, all those years ago when he had come to visit Draco at the manor after the battle of Hogwarts. He had told Draco of his need to break away, how he wanted to live in the light. Draco understood. He had only had one thing to ask

of Blaise then and it was the same now.

He had looked after Hermione, and he would continue to, Draco knew.

Blaise loved her, why wouldn't he?

Draco watched Hermione, and he saw that her life was happy, but incomplete.

In all the years since his father's death and his disappearance from her life, she had never found love.

She had remained alone, watching her friends move on around her. She didn't seem to want anyone, or to have any interest in love. Draco often wondered whether some part of her, deep inside, still waited for him, even though she didn't know what she was waiting for.

He wanted Hermione to know, once he was gone, that he had loved her.

He wanted her to know that she had been the brightest star in his sky.

He had never wanted her to come looking for him, knowing that he could never go near her, but once he was gone, she deserved to know what had been stolen from her, from them. She needed to know she was worthy of the greatest love.

So, Draco took out a quill, and he added his own pages to Hermione's journals. He wrote about everything that had happened since she stopped writing in them. He told her what she had done for him, and the lives they had both lived since.

He told her how much he loved her, what he had sacrificed for her. He knew he was selfish but he didn't want her to hate him, in death he wanted her to know who he really was.

He wanted her to know he had done it all so that she could live, really live, in the knowledge that she had been so loved, and she could maybe find that kind of love again, even if it could never be with him.

Once he was done, he cleaned himself up, showered, shaved and dressed himself smartly. Then he sat on his bed and prepared, he was almost ready.

He swallowed the Polyjuice potion with a grimace still unsure where Moddles was getting it from, but grateful she had kept him stocked up over the years, the way she had with pain relief as a little boy.

She had looked after him until the end.

Draco knew he was going to break her heart, but he couldn't say goodbye, it would be too painful.

Once he was ready, Draco fastened his cloak and gathered what he needed into a bag, he put Hermione's journals inside and then he went to his desk and gathered up the memories he had been slowly collecting. He loaded them up into his bag, hearing them tinkle together, such an innocuous sound for a life so full of pain.

Finally, Draco climbed the stairs and walked around the manor one last time, he looked into rooms, reliving his memories, good and bad. He remembered every hurt, every loss and also

every kiss, every time Hermione had healed his heart as she had loved him there, in the place where his parents had not.

When he was ready, Draco Apparated away, to the place he had seen in his dreams for five years.

He slunk into the shadows, outside the same house he had waited outside years ago, with the intention of showing the girl inside how much he loved her. He intended to do the same tonight, just in a very different way.

Draco pulled his cloak around him as he waited in the shadows, watching Hermione's house. He watched the lights flicker inside and then his heart quickened as her front door opened and she stepped out.

He inched forward as he took in all details of her for the last time.

Her hair was down, as though she had known that was how he wanted to remember her, curling in a soft cloud around her head. She was wearing a dress, and he took in the shapely curve of her calves and ankles, remembering how they had felt wrapped around him. He shuddered at the memory of how good she felt, how good she had made him feel.

He had blocked it all out for so long.

He saw her soft lips, her kind eyes and he felt the sharp pain of wanting something so desperately, something so close, but so far away, it hurt worse than Potter's curse ever had.

Draco watched her, and he wished he could freeze time, just to look at her for longer, but before he knew it, the moment had passed and she was gone, down the street to continue with her life, oblivious to him, hiding in the shadows.

Draco had often wondered whether Hermione ever dreamed of him, the way he dreamed of her night after night.

He had suspected years ago, with Johnson's death, that the wards on Hermione's house had disappeared.

He had never wanted to risk it, but tonight he had something he needed to do.

Once he was sure she was gone, Draco moved through the dark and slipped into the house. He stood in the entrance hall for a moment, his eyes closed as he breathed in her scent, felt her presence like a physical thing, a blanket wrapping around him, warming him in a way he hadn't felt for so long.

Then, he moved through the house, taking in every detail for the last time. When he got to her bedroom he almost gave up, almost lost his nerve.

It was all too much.

For the first time in so long, Draco felt himself begin to struggle to breathe. His chest tightened and he fought to suck in deeply enough. He sat on the bed, his fingers gripping the

sheets tightly and he waited until the dark spots stopped floating in front of his eyes, breathing slowly, deeply, picturing his lungs inflating and deflating.

Then, when he was stronger, he reached a hand up to his shirt sleeve and carefully unhooked his cufflink.

It was in the shape of a trident with a circle around it- the Clavicula Nox.

It was an old symbol, important to the Black family, said to have come from a form of ancient Draconian magic. It was the same shape as Hermione's necklace.

The symbol was sometimes referred to as 'the key of the night,' and had been used by witches and wizards through the years to access a deeper state of consciousness, opening the portal between the living and the dead.

Draco didn't know if it would work, but he hoped that maybe, he could visit Hermione, once he crossed over to the other side, and be with her in her dreams, the way he couldn't be in life.

He bent under her bed and rolled the cufflink back, among the dust bunnies and old scrolls of parchment, where hopefully she wouldn't see it, but maybe it could help her to see him, even if it was only in a dream.

Draco stood up, he dusted his hands off and looked around. He felt like he had done all he could.

The Polyjuice was wearing off, he could feel his body returning to normal but he didn't care now, he was ready.

He left Hermione's house and he set off to Hogsmeade, to the Hog's Head.

As Draco climbed the stairs to the room that would be the last place he ever saw, he didn't feel scared, he felt peace, he was ready. He knew he had done all he could possibly do, his most trusted friends were left now to do the rest.

He put down his bag of memories, set out Hermione's journals in neat piles on the floor next to him and he took a deep breath.

Draco allowed himself now, to think one last time of Hermione. He didn't need to be strong any more, he could give in.

He let his mind drift over the way her hair felt as he ran it through his fingers, her kind brown eyes with the long lashes he had always felt tickling his face when he kissed her.

He thought about the feel of her lips on his, the softness of her skin, the sound of her laugh. He let himself remember the way she smelled, so sweet like the honeysuckle in the manor gardens. It felt like just yesterday he had held her in his arms, not five long years.

Draco was so tired, he was so tired of missing her, so tired of hurting.

It was time.

Hermione - June 2006

Hermione rose up out of her memories and she screamed.

She lay on the bed, next to this new version of the man she loved so desperately and she screamed for everything they had had, everything they had lost, and everything they still stood to lose.

She thought of her last memory of Draco, his desperate face as he had watched her fade away.

All of Draco's efforts, all of hers- they had been for nothing.

Draco's stones wouldn't protect her forever- even now she could feel the pressure building in her head, the pain pulsing behind her eyes.

She was cursed, she was clearly still dying, even in this timeline. Hermione had realised that it wasn't just Draco's proximity that caused her to bleed, it was her very love for him that poisoned her.

Her seizures had started the minute she began to fall in love with him, again, through his memories. Clearly Draco hadn't known that detail of the curse.

Fuck Lucius Malfoy, she thought. Fuck him.

Love wasn't enough, it never had been.

Draco sat up too, and she looked at him, older than she'd ever known him, healthier. He wasn't tortured the way her Draco had been.

Was he still hers underneath?

'Is this real Draco?' She asked, 'Is there any way we can both survive it?'

She looked into his eyes as he brought a hand up to her face and wiped a tear from her cheek, the silver was burning, determined.

'Don't cry Granger,' he said. 'I've got a plan.'

Chapter End Notes

Edited to add: I'm loving the song recs you have been putting in the comments and I've listened to them all.

The song which inspired Draco for this chapter was 'My Immortal' by Evanescence- listen with caution!

Say It Again, Granger

Hermione - June- 2006

Draco stood up from the bed and stepped into his trousers, pulling them up over his hips and buttoning them.

Then, he began pacing, kicking up fluttering pieces of the Falmouth Falcons poster.

He looked almost manic, his eyes shining as he ran his hands through his hair, exactly the way Hermione's Draco always had, grasping tight at the front. Although his hair was longer, so it didn't stick up, it fell over his eyes.

His stomach muscles were taut, trousers slung low.

The sight of him made Hermione's stomach flip.

She watched him, and she felt herself becoming incredibly overwhelmed. She felt like she might vomit again.

The memories the journals had triggered in her mind had finally shown her the real reason for the painful obsession she had developed with Draco throughout her investigation.

The reason she had instantly been so affected by his death, the way he made her feel- it wasn't just a reaction to finding him, it hadn't only been discovering everything he had done for her.

She and Draco had lived a life together.

They had loved each other so very, very much- she just hadn't been able to remember it.

Hermione realised that she had experienced just a fraction of their love through watching Draco's memories, and it had hurt her so badly that she had resorted to desperate actions to get him back.

But Draco had felt it all - for five years he had had to go through life without her.

He had been so alone.

She understood now why he had felt that he needed to leave the world behind, she wouldn't have wanted to live without him either.

She felt bitter tears slip down her cheeks as she thought about how the world had never given Draco anything except suffering, and when he had finally experienced a little bit of happiness, it had been snatched from him by the very person who was supposed to protect him.

Hermione felt the injustice like a physical pain.

He had deserved so much better.

She watched him pace now, and she took some comfort that despite everything, she had achieved her goal- he was alive again.

His face was tanned and healthy looking, whereas her Draco had looked pinched and anxious, with dark circles under his eyes where he didn't sleep.

He was broad, and his defined muscles looked like they came from a training regime and a good diet.

She thought of how her Draco hadn't been able to eat in the final months they had spent together, he had become so thin, so tortured.

The way this version of Draco moved was more relaxed, he had the same catlike elegance, but he wasn't jumpy and he didn't look like he was always prepared to defend himself the way hers had been, especially towards the end - he had a different sort of confidence.

She thought about his heartbeat, thudding so strong and sure under her palm, the blood pumping through his veins as he'd kissed her, held her tightly and moved inside her- he was so full of life.

He wasn't a cold, scarred corpse laying on an autopsy table- he was here, warm and breathing.

But now instead, Hermione was the one dying - she could feel it.
She had been for months, she had just ignored it in her desperation to get Draco back.

She couldn't stop herself from loving him.

He had inadvertently triggered the curse by showing her his memories, not knowing that it was love, not proximity that was killing her.

Even when he had been her captor, standing in the dark of her dirty cell, she had still wanted him, she had been desperate for him.

She had felt like she would do anything for him, and now she knew that she had.

She had killed for him, the way he had killed for her, time and time again.

She had given away an unknown part of herself to be with him again, and there were consequences for what she had done.

In trying to change things for Draco, she had forfeited her friends.

Ron was dead, Harry was missing, and countless others were being kept, chained up inside Azkaban, by Lucius Malfoy, and, yes- by General Draco Malfoy.

Hermione squeezed her eyes shut. It was just too much.

Draco had been taken from Hogwarts twelve years ago and had all his memories obliterated.

He hadn't remembered the abuse he had endured as a young boy, he couldn't remember being at Hogwarts, his determination to keep her safe.

He had lived a whole other life since then.

So who was he?

Hermione didn't know if she could have broken through the years of his fathers lies and manipulation that easily.

Draco stopped pacing and turned to her.

'If my plan is going to work, I need to stay back from you,' he said suddenly.

'In the journals, I wrote that my mother told me my proximity hurts you. It's me, I'm the one making you bleed.'

He went to stand in the far corner of the room, chewing his lip, appearing deep in thought.

'You need to stay there on the bed,' he said, holding a hand up towards her, 'Keep away from me.'

'Draco,' Hermione said gently, 'you don't know do you?'

He frowned, 'know what?'

'I've realised something.' She said, and she could see by the look on his face that he knew it was nothing good.

'My seizures. They started whilst I was watching your memories.'

He looked into her eyes, his face open as he nodded earnestly, 'Yes, you showed me that.'

He didn't understand.

'But you weren't there, Draco.' She said gently. 'When I started having seizures. You weren't close to me. You had already died.'

He started slightly at her words, then realisation dawned on his face as he heard them fully.

'Then why-?'

He stopped, and she watched him make the connections, 'It's not just being near me that makes you sick.'

'No,' said Hermione. 'I think, I think that my feelings for you are what caused the seizures.'

Every time I've been this age, on any timeline, past the age I was when your father cursed me, I get these symptoms.'

He frowned, taking in what she was saying.

'I think- it's simple Draco.' She said sadly. 'Loving you poisons me.'

Your father found the perfect way to keep us apart, no matter what.

It seems that the stones hold off the symptoms, but I don't know for how long.'

She watched the anger rising in him again, as it had earlier when he had torn the room to shreds, his frustration was clear, his face tight, jaw clenching, but it wasn't just anger, he looked bereft.

‘You made a stone out of your own magic? To get here?’

She nodded and he brought a hand up to his face, rubbing hard.

‘Fuck,’ his voice was soft, ‘You shouldn't have done that. Not for me.’

He sat down hard on the floor, his back sliding against the wall, the heels of his hands pressed into his eyes.

‘This is so fucked,’ he said quietly. ‘We are so fucked.’ He looked back at her,

‘You being here, it's messing with my head so much. I just don't know what's real and what's not.’ His hands were fists as he balled them up and pushed them into his eyes harder.

‘Granger,’ he said, eventually dropping his fists to look at her.

‘The Legilimency I performed on you before. It's done something to me,’

Hermione glanced sharply over at him, she frowned.

‘What do you mean?’

He stood up and resumed his pacing. ‘I told you, ever since I saw you, when Zabini brought you to me, I've seen flashes of you. Images of you, smiling, crying. The things you showed me in your mind. I know they're true.’

He stepped towards her slightly, then remembered himself and moved back, ‘When you showed me, it was so fucked up because, I felt like I already knew. That was why I reacted so strongly.’

‘You already knew?’

‘Yes, somewhere in my mind, I'd seen flashes of the things you showed me before. I always thought they were dreams.’

He looked at her from across the room, and he was so beautiful. Hermione wanted to reach for him, she wanted to touch him, to feel his arms around her.

‘What you wrote in the journal, about how I showed you to keep memories safe. I told you to roll them up on scrolls and hide them, to push them so far back in your mind. You did that, and you did it so well you didn't find them until now.’

‘I didn't know they were there to look for them.’

‘Right.’ He swallowed. ‘Granger, I- I remember things about being at Hogwarts, those things before I was obliterated.’

I found more, in my own head, fragments of things I'd hidden too.

I think, I'd pushed them so far back, that they didn't get totally destroyed when my father obliterated me. I've just never known they were there.'

Draco's face began growing slightly pale, she watched as his jaw trembled slightly.

'Draco,' Hermione said, feeling her breath stutter, at the devastation on his face. 'What did you see?'

Draco looked over at her, and she could see his reluctance. He took a deep breath.

'I saw myself as a boy. I saw some of the things he did to me. My mother, she, she never came. I called her but-'

He broke off, his voice getting caught in his throat.

'I remember being in so much pain all the time, wanting to be brave, but I couldn't. I couldn't do enough to make him proud of me, to stop him being angry all the time. I was such a fucking crybaby.'

'Draco,' she said, horrified. 'You were only a child, you shouldn't have had to be brave, you should have been loved and protected. It wasn't your fault.'

Draco leant against the wall, he crossed one long leg over the other, he fiddled with his signet ring. Hermione noted with sadness that it was the only ring he wore.

He squeezed his eyes shut.

'I've always known that he's a fucking sadist, but- I remember things now. I was too small to fight back. He almost killed me so many times.'

Hermione felt sick, she had only seen a small part of his childhood in the memories he had left. She dreaded to think what else he had endured.

'I remember being in school.

You.

Gods I wanted you so badly, your hair- it was the first thing I noticed. It was what made me notice you in Azkaban too.'

He glanced up at her, his eyes on the cloud of curls she knew would be wild after the events of the day.

She smiled sadly to herself, her Draco had always loved her hair too.

'My father wanted you. He wanted me to help him get to you, but by then, I already was so determined to keep you safe. You were so kind, so loyal, so intelligent. I remember being so in awe of you.'

Hermione felt tears in her eyes. He remembered her.

This version of Draco- he remembered who he was before.

‘He broke my shoulder, my father- do you know that?’

Hermione nodded, swallowing back tears.

‘You all laughed when Buckbeak kicked me, but he got me on my bad shoulder. It was so painful and I was so embarrassed, it was one of the worst days of my life.’

Hermione felt the shame of that realisation wash over her again. She knew how much the injury had affected him.

He brought a hand up and massaged the shoulder the way Hermione had seen him do countless times over the years, not seeming to notice himself doing it. He was deep in thought.

‘My magic, it's always been like this, so black and dark. I remember being so angry all the time- when I was a teenager. I was always trashing things. I wasn't really happy, ever.’

Hermione couldn't reply. She didn't want to think about Draco's childhood, the pain she had seen him in so many times in the memories. He had had such a troubled life.

‘My parents, they've lied to me for so long.’ He said. ‘The things I've done, because I believed their lies. I thought-’ he looked at her, his eyes wide. ‘I would have hurt you too. I did come so close to hurting you- In Azkaban, I nearly killed you- I didn't know-’

He suddenly sobbed, it was low sound, from deep in his chest. ‘My whole fucking life is a lie. I don't know what's real-’

Hermione watched as Draco's eyes started to widen, his breathing suddenly increased in pace, a hand reaching up to his chest.

‘Oh fuck, I-I can't,’ he was panicking, she realised, he was overwhelmed.

‘Oh- fuck- Granger- I can't-’

His eyes widened further, he was frantic, he couldn't breathe.

Hermione watched him pale dramatically now, his face bone white.

He put a hand to his chest and his breathing became noisy, wheezing.

She watched him suddenly stumble, and she couldn't stay where she was any more.

She crossed the room and reached for him.

She wrapped her arms around him and pulled him to the ground with her as he gripped her tightly, blinking away tears as he panted, trying to force air into his lungs.

She talked him through his breathing, the way she always had, and he gradually began to calm, looking into her eyes like she was the only thing tethering him to the world.

She listened as his shaky inhales and exhales became longer, his body allowing him to take in more air.

He squeezed his eyes shut, and two small tears rolled down his cheeks.

‘Oh. Fuck.’ He panted, his hands still clutching at her waist. He dropped his head onto her shoulder as they knelt together, ‘I’m sorry, I -I keep failing you,’ he stuttered in between breaths, and she wanted to cry.

‘You aren’t failing me, Draco. How can you say that?’ She said softly. ‘You’ve done so much for me, none of this has been your fault.’

She kept one steadying hand wrapped around his back, the other was in his hair, running through it, smoothing the soft strands as she murmured words of comfort to him.

Hermione swiped at the blood she felt drip from her nose, before Draco could see it, wiping her hand quickly behind her back.

Draco pulled away from her and looked at her, his eyes full of a defeated sort of anger.

‘But I have failed Granger.’ He said, ‘you’ve had to come back here, after I fucking killed myself. To try and save me.

But you’re dying, and it’s me that’s doing it.

If I’d been braver, if I’d killed my father before he cursed you, you’d be okay now. You wouldn’t have had to do all this.’

His fists were balled at his sides. He brought one up, pressed it to his heart, punctuating his words with hard thumps to his chest.

‘I took the easy way out. I killed myself and left you memories to show you how shit my life was and now- you’ve come back here, you’ve sacrificed your fucking soul to bring me back, and now you’re fucking DYING! So don’t tell me I haven’t failed Granger. Because I have- again. Everything you showed me, it was all for NOTHING!’

She couldn’t respond.

The Draco she knew had been fighting against the odds for almost his entire life, and their relationship had been the same.

He was right, every time one of them did something to try and make things better, they ended up hurting the other.

But still, she wanted him, she wanted to be with him.

Draco let go of her and leaned forward, his head bent, hands resting on his thighs. He closed his eyes.

Hermione reached for him. She felt another pulse of pain in her head but she didn’t care. She caught him gently by his jaw, and she turned his face to hers.

‘Draco, look at me.’

The molten silver turned to her again, so clear, so beautiful.

The way he looked at her, there on his knees in front of her, it was the same, she knew that her Draco was in there.

‘I didn’t do all of this for you to suffer, Draco. I did it to give you another chance at life, because the life you had, it was so unfair. You deserved more. We deserved more. You read our story Draco, we really loved each other. That kind of love, it’s worth fighting for, don’t you think?’

He stared at her and his eyes were stormy, he looked like he was in pain as he reached up and pulled her hand away, bringing her fingers down.

‘He deserved more.’ His voice was quiet. The other version of me. Not me as I am now. I deserve to hang for the things I’ve done.’

Hermione felt sick at his choice of words.

‘Draco, I have the memories you left, they’re in the bag you got for me. I showed you the potion I have, Anima Adamantino. I’ve got enough left for one more try. If we can get to a Pensieve, I can try again. If you want me to, if you want to try and change things- undo some of this- this carnage-’

Draco suddenly interrupted her. ‘My father has a Pensieve, here at the manor.’

Hermione stopped dead, feeling a faint stirring of hope, more than she could have wished for.

‘What? He does? Really?’

‘Yes. He took it from Dumbledore’s office, when we- when he...’ he didn’t finish. He didn’t need to.

She watched as his expression changed, he brought his eyes up to meet hers.

‘Granger, ever since I saw you again, I’ve been so consumed by you.’

Hermione felt her heart begin to beat quicker.

‘I feel like I’ve been waiting for you, for as long as I can remember. You feel like you’re meant for me, Granger.’

They looked at each other, their fingers linked as they knelt on the manor floor, and Hermione was so desperate to hear him say that he wanted her still.

‘This house, this manor- it’s never felt like home. My father, he only wants me for what I can do for him, and my mother- she will always choose him.’ Draco said, and his face crumpled slightly.

‘I don’t want this life Granger. I didn’t know what I wanted until I saw you. But since then, you’re all I want. And this time, I won’t fucking choke. I’m stronger. You’ve given me that. You’ve given me a life where I’ve been valued, even if I haven’t been loved, and I’m a stronger person for it.’

He reached up, and took her face in his hands again, he placed one soft kiss on her lips.

‘I think I can be strong for us this time.’

Hermione felt the tears tracking down her face as he pulled her close and kissed her again, tasting the salt of them on her tongue.

She melted into his strong arms, breathing him in, she needed him so badly.

She ignored the pain that lanced through her head as she kissed him back, bringing her arms up around his neck.

After a moment Draco pulled away.

‘Hermione, I need to make my father undo the curse before it’s too late. The stone you made, your symptoms and what we know about the curse now, I’m worried that we don’t have long.

My plan, if it’s going to work, it needs to be soon.’

He suddenly inhaled sharply as Hermione felt another thin line of blood trickle from her nose, she wiped it quickly, but Draco looked at her in horror.

‘Oh, no. This can’t- oh fuck, Granger.’ His hands came up to her face, his fingers gently wiping at the blood. ‘This can’t be happening again. Not yet. can’t lose you-,’ his words were a moan.

‘I can- I need to go and get something,’ he said, ‘will you be okay here? I won’t leave you for long,’

Hermione looked around Draco’s ruined bedroom and nodded. ‘I’ll be fine. She didn’t want him to go, she didn’t want to let him out of her sight in case she lost him again.

Draco looked around himself and seemed to finally take in the level of destruction he had wrought on the room, he looked at her and she could see he was embarrassed.

He closed his eyes, and his hands came from his sides, he raised them, palm up and Hermione watched the room fix itself in front of her, just like she’d seen him do before.

‘I’m worried about leaving you.’ He said, his eyes raking over her. Hermione didn’t want to admit she was still on the ground because she didn’t quite feel strong enough to stand yet.

Draco rose, from where he had been on his knees in front of her. He bent slightly and brought an arm around her back. Hermione felt herself being lifted effortlessly and gently as he carried her to the bed.

He lay her down, his eyes on hers, the look on his face so different to the last time he had laid her down in the hospital. He pulled the covers back around her, tucking her in gently.

Draco pressed his lips together in a thin line and then called out. There was a sudden pop and a house elf appeared.

‘Moddles!’ Hermione cried, feeling her heart jolt at the sight of the familiar little elf.

Moddles frowned at Hermione, clearly not recognising her. She looked at her suspiciously, then back to Draco.

‘Yes master Draco? What can I do for you?’

Moddles was wearing a pillowcase, Hermione realised, she wasn’t free.

‘I need you Moddles,’ he said, one large hand on her shoulder. ‘I need you to do something important for me.’

She looked at him, her eyes wide, then over to Hermione again, where she lay in the bed.

‘Moddles, I need you to stay here, okay? I need you to look after my friend. If anything happens, you come to me immediately. Do you understand? Straight away, don’t wait.’

The house elf looked worried, ‘Does master Lucius know she is here?’

Draco looked at her, his eyes boring into hers, ‘no, and it’s very important that if my father arrives at the manor unexpectedly, you hide her, okay? She’s very important to me, Moddles.’

The little elf looked at Hermione once more and then turned back to Draco, nodding enthusiastically, her huge ears flapping. ‘I will do it Master Draco, I’ll look after her’

‘Thank you, I’ll be quick.’

She nodded again, ‘of course Master Draco.’

‘I’ll be back’ he said softly, ‘I’ll make you feel better.’ He bent and kissed her, his lips brushing hers lightly, then hurriedly dressed and Disapparated, a worried expression on his face as he went.

Hermione turned to Moddles next to her, the elf’s blue eyes now on Hermione too, fixed on the blood steadily leaking from her nose.

‘Don’t worry Miss.’ she said in her squeaky voice. ‘Master Draco will look after you. He looks after everyone.’

‘Everyone?’ Hermione asked, surprised.

‘Oh yes. He looks after Mistress Malfoy. He heals us when Mast-‘ she stopped herself.

‘Mistress Malfoy? He heals his mother?’

The elf squeaked and hid her face.

‘No, Moddles has said too much. No more questions please.’ And she scurried to the other side of the room, picking up Hermione’s wet towel where she had draped it over a chair hours before.

‘Moddles?’ Hermione’s voice was quiet, but the elf still jumped. ‘Just one question, please.’ The elf turned, she was quivering slightly.

‘Is he good, Master Draco, in his heart, do you think he is kind?’

Moddles eyes filled with tears. ‘He is. He is kind to us all.’

Hermione’s eyes also filled with tears.

‘Thank you,’ she said, then lay down on the bed, squeezing her eyes shut. The pain in her head was getting worse.

Draco - June - 2006

Draco made his way back from Gringotts, a large velvet bag in his hands, and his mind was reeling.

He was so confused by the memories he had uncovered, tucked, far back in the recesses of his mind. They were ripped and torn, but the fragments were enough to prove to him that it really was her, the girl he always saw in his dreams- The one he always tried to chase, to find, but never could.

She was a fleeting image, a puff of wind, soft lips on his.

Sometimes she was kissing him, other times she was crying, covered in blood.

As soon as he’d seen her, when Blaise brought her to him, he’d known it was her- she was the one he had been waiting for.

Draco’s memories of his childhood had always been extremely hazy.

His parents told him he had fallen out of a tree and hit his head, they explained away his shoulder injury with that incident also.

Draco had always felt that it wasn’t right, but he had no other explanation. He looked down at his body, at the countless scars he couldn’t explain, and he wondered, but he never asked.

He’d tried Legilimency on his mother once to see if he could find out more about his past, but she had instantly closed down on him and he got nowhere. He didn’t want to try it on his father, he was scared of what he would see.

Draco’s life, as much as he could remember, had been lonely.

His father told him that he had to stay at the manor instead of going to school.

He was too dangerous to be in class with other children, they would never want him at Hogwarts.

Draco’s magic was unpredictable.

As a teenager he had had bursts of uncontrolled anger, destroying everything around him, terrifying the house elves and making his parents look at each other shiftily, his mothers face worried, his fathers grimly satisfied.

Draco was extremely competent in all kinds of magic, charms, potions. His father told him he had had a governess who had taught him all he knew- couldn't he remember her? Draco thought he could.

His father began training him when he was sixteen, training him to be a fighter, a weapon. Draco was an exceptionally quick learner, nimble and efficient. His father's friends would come to the manor to teach him different skills, to drill him in duelling, sending hex after hex at him, until he could doge and whirl his way out of anything .

Lucius would watch him, smiling proudly as Draco disarmed men twice his age, casting complex hexes and curses, without hesitation.

His father told him all about Albus Dumbledore and the damage he was doing to the wizarding world by allowing Muggles and half bloods into the schools and workplaces. Lucius explained that the magical ability of witches and wizards was being diluted, that soon there would be none left.

It was their job to collect the magic, to keep it safe for people.

Draco was ashamed of how long it took him to realise that it was all lies.

The Death Eaters were taking people's magic and selling it for huge amounts of money- Essentiaspis Magicae- soul stones.

The stronger the magic, the more valuable they were.

They could boost the wearers magical ability, or their intelligence. They could strengthen a person who was weak, even stop death temporarily.

His parents both wore them always, claiming it made them more powerful, Draco had never needed one.

By the time he fully understood what they were doing to the people they were taken from, he was his fathers right hand man, having killed Voldemort not long after his return, destroying him at his fathers behest, along with anyone else who didn't follow Lucius's tyrannical views.

His father kept him on a leash. Draco was a trained dog, vicious and dangerous- His father's favourite pet.

Lucius didn't hurt Draco, he didn't dare, he knew the power of the monster he had created.

But if Draco ever disappointed his father, Lucius would take it out on the only people Draco had in his life, the only people he cared about - his mother or the house elves.

He would use Draco's guilt as a punishment, and if Draco really upset him, he would remind him about what could have become of him.

He'd remind him about Theo, about what happened to boys who let their fathers down.

Theo had been the only friend Draco had ever had.

Draco didn't know where he was now, all he knew was that after his father volunteered him to make one of the earlier attempts at a soul stone, Theo had been different, he had declined slowly, the effect of making the stone much stronger than his father had expected.

When his father brought him to the manor after he was like a child, his wit and intelligence a thing of the past, he couldn't even cast the simplest of spells.

Theo was hidden away now, like a guilty secret.

Ending up like that was Draco's biggest fear. How could he protect anyone if he didn't even know his own name?

Draco couldn't let that happen to Hermione too.

He had thought about killing his father many times over the years. He could do it easily, he could even take over as Dark Lord.

But his father always made him feel so valued, always told him that he made him proud, and until now, that had been all Draco had known.

He knew differently now. Knew he wasn't valued for who he was, he was valued for what he was.

Draco hoped that Hermione never found out the things he had done for his father, the amount of people he had hurt or killed.

He had always just done what he was told, trying to be cold, emotionless. The colder he was, the less his father had to use hold over him, to bribe him with.

But now, Draco really felt something.

The second Zabini had arrived with her, he had almost keeled over with the strength of emotion that had hit him, an avalanche of feelings that Draco wasn't accustomed to. It had taken all of his years of learned control to keep his face indifferent.

He had tried to fight against it, to treat her the way he treated everyone- vicious and ruthless, but he was drawn to her, to the kindness in her huge brown eyes, they warmed him from the inside in a way he had never felt.

As he had held her against the wall, his magic creeping up around her neck, slowly turning her face blue, Draco had looked into her eyes and felt remorse for the first time.

Remorse, and something else- fear.

Fear of the emotions she was making him feel, fear that he wanted her, to keep her for himself, and fear that he never could.

She was dying, Draco knew. He had seen enough dying people in his life to see the signs. The light was fading from her, she was so pale, so fragile, like a little bird, like one of the creatures from the manor gardens, so delicate, so easy to hurt.

Draco needed her to live.

He felt sure she was his redemption, his lifeline, he had dreamed of her for so long, she was his angel, waiting to grant him absolution for all his crimes, to undo all the hurt he had caused.

As Draco Apparated back to her, he knew he would do whatever it took, he would use his ruthlessness, the way he had been taught to have no mercy, and he would use it against the people that had made him that way.

When he arrived back at the manor, Moddles was fretting over her as she lay beneath the covers, a pale, thin almost ghostlike creature.

Her skin was so pale, almost see-through, her eyes sunken in her head. He could see blood congealed around her nostrils. She had declined so much since he had brought her there, weakened as her feelings for him suffocated her.

Draco thanked Moddles, expecting her to pop away, but she didn't, she hovered by the bed, her little hands fussing at the blankets.

'Is this her? Master Draco?' she asked in her high pitched voice. 'The one you are dreaming about?'

Draco looked down at Hermione, his mouth a grim line as he tipped out the contents of the bag onto the bed.

'Yes Moddles,' he said. 'This is definitely her.'

Hermione - May - 2006

Hermione didn't know how long had passed since Draco had left, but she was woken again by the delicious scent of him, permeating her consciousness as she breathed it in- smoke, caramel apples.

She opened her eyes, finding she was back in Draco's bed, but this time he wasn't across the room from her, he was sitting on the end of her bed, back straight, stock still, head bent like he was in prayer.

'Draco?'

As soon as he heard her voice he moved to be by her side, his eyes worried, searching hers. 'How do you feel?'

She lifted her arm to reach for him, and suddenly became aware of a weight, a noise as she moved her arms. She looked down to see that she was wearing at least six bracelets on her wrists, each one either made from, or encrusted with soul stones. She looked down at herself as she pushed herself up in the bed and realised that she was dripping in jewellery, all made from the stones- necklaces, bracelets, rings- Draco or Moddles must have put them on while she slept. She was also wearing a white silk nightgown that whispered against her skin as she moved.

He watched her warily, looking she knew, for signs that she was going to fight against him again, to try and take them off. But she didn't.
She felt better than she had in so long, her weakness after he had left earlier had scared her. She wouldn't fight him on this, not now.

'I'm - I'm okay,' she said, and she thought she was. The stones were working.

Draco's face changed then, he smiled and some of his colour came back.
Hermione moved her legs to the side of the bed, testing her weight as she put her feet on the floor.

She was stronger, she felt almost normal.
Draco watched her, his eyes never leaving her. 'You're okay?' he asked, and his concern touched her, it made her heart feel like it was growing in her chest.

She stood, and he watched her, his eyes following the hem of her nightdress as it fell, raking over her face and body as she walked around a little, testing her strength.
He suddenly rubbed a hand hard over his face, tipping his head up to the sky and taking a deep, shuddering breath.

'What?' she asked.

'Nothing,' he replied, shaking his head slightly, 'It's just- do you know how fucking beautiful you are? Do people tell you all the time? because, fuck, you are the most beautiful girl I've ever seen in my life- I-' He stopped speaking and suddenly flung himself backwards on the bed, covering his eyes with his hand.

Despite everything, Hermione felt herself smiling, feeling a blush creep up her cheeks.

She walked back towards him, where he lay on the bed and leaned over him. 'Draco? Are you ok?'

'No.' came the muffled reply from behind his hands.
'I'm fucked Granger, in so many different ways.'

She smiled slightly, and stayed where she was until he moved his hand, his silver eyes appearing from behind it, staring into hers. She could see all the flecks of colour there, so bright and stark against his tanned skin.

She looked down at his full lips, his soft mouth and she needed absolutely no encouragement when his hands came up and he gently pulled her down towards him.

She opened her mouth as his tongue slipped between her lips, tasting him, closing her eyes as she felt his lips move against hers, his hands winding through her hair.

She crawled onto the bed, rucking up her nightdress so she could straddle him, making him moan into her mouth and move his hands down to run over the expensive silk, cupping her ass and pulling her down gently.

They kissed and they kissed, Hermione feeling herself grow uncomfortably hot, the slickness between her legs increasing as she felt the hardness of him beneath her.

Hermione was bitterly disappointed when Draco suddenly stopped kissing her, and opened his eyes.

'Fuck Granger, we need to stop.' he said, his words punctuated by his short breaths, 'This can't be good for you.'

He sat up, bringing her with him and gently moving his erection out from underneath her as she clambered off him.

He stood, running a hand through his hair, the large tent in his trousers standing up, impossible to miss from Hermione's vantage point.

She was so tempted to take hold of his belt buckle and pull him to her, but he was right.

They had more important things to be worrying about.

Draco licked his lips as he looked down at her again, before he reached into his back pocket and took out his wand, flicking it at her so that suddenly, she was wearing a soft green jumper and jeans, an almost muggle style outfit.

'Thank fuck,' he said, 'I can concentrate. Are these clothes okay?' She nodded, not really caring.

'Okay,' Draco said, appearing to be getting more control over himself. 'My parents are back tomorrow, that means we have one day to find the curse he used, and find out what the counter curse is. My father won't know, he did it in another timeline.'

Hermione nodded. She had realised the same.

'If you're well enough, let's go down to the library and start looking. I think that's where the book will be, but there are a few other places if it's not there.'

Hermione nodded again, and Draco held her hand and walked with her on slightly shaky legs down to the library, Hermione moving through the long hallways confidently, knowing her way there already, making him look at her in slight consternation.

Moddles brought them drinks and snacks as they remained in the library for the next eleven hours, working their way through the books.

Although she had read many of them before, Hermione was still shocked at the amount of books on the occult and dark magic in the Malfoy family collection.

She gasped as she opened one book and saw the shape of the Clavicula Nox drawn on one of the pages.

Draco explained how it had been used by witches and wizards- a Draconian symbol, to supposedly open the portal between the living and the dead.

It was believed it could allow people to communicate, even to send subtle messages from beyond the grave.

'I don't believe in it. It's a load of shite.' he announced airily, waving a hand at the page.

Hermione pressed her lips together as she thought of his cufflink, hopefully still in the bottom of her bag, the one he had worn in another life, when clearly he had believed in it.

Eventually Hermione felt her eyes begin to grow tired, she felt her head drop a few times as she fought to stay awake. Draco sat next to her, on the couch where they had settled, his long legs crossed as he pored through book after book, his lips moving slightly as he read.

She didn't even realise she had fallen asleep until she heard him shout out, his exclaim jolting her awake.

'Shit! I think this is it!' he said, and Hermione's eyes snapped open.

She leaned over Draco and read the words on the page, feeling a shudder as she read the purpose of the spell.

'That's it.' she said.

Draco incanted the counter curse, a simple spell, just four simple words, Latin, she thought: *Emundare amor venenum sanguine*. They hoped that maybe anyone saying it might help, but Hermione didn't feel anything at all.

It needed to be Lucius.

Draco ripped the page from the book unceremoniously, making Hermione gasp.

'What?' he asked, looking at her horrified face.

'Draco! you cant- you can't-' Hermione was speechless. He had just defaced a book like it was nothing.

Draco looked at her for a moment, then grinned, rather mischievously she thought.

'It's just a book, Granger,' he said, laughing as she whacked him with the other book she had in her hand, 'Ow!' he muttered, but he pulled her towards him, kissing her enthusiastically, her arms around his neck, his body pressing her into the couch until one of her bracelets got caught in his hair, yanking a few blonde strands out and making him yelp.

He put a hand to his head, pulling away from her for a moment.

They looked at each other, both breathing heavily, the incantation which could be the key to their salvation still clutched in Draco's other hand.

Hermione stared into Draco's eyes and once again she was overwhelmed by love for him. She so desperately wanted one more chance with him, she wanted to love him the way he deserved to be loved- wholly and completely.

'We need to get ready,' Draco said softly, his voice calm but his eyes blazing.

Hermione took in a deep breath,

'What's the plan?'

Draco - June- 2006

Several hours later, Draco was pacing once again.

His parents were due back from their trip in the next hour.

His father was expecting Draco to fetch Hermione from Azkaban ready for the Soul Stone procedure.

What they were doing was wholly illegal, but they were the Malfoys and no-one dared to try and stop them.

They had all seen what Draco did to people who fought them, so he and his father basically had free reign.

People were deferential to Lucius, but it was Draco they were really afraid of.

He knew that people thought that he was unstable - not all there in the mind.

The rumours about him said that he had gone mad after a head injury when he was thirteen, which was why he never went to school.

Draco and his father did nothing to dispel the rumours.

His parents had attempted to marry him off a few times, but all the women were too scared of him to even meet him, and that suited Draco just fine.

There was only one woman he wanted, the one he had always dreamed about, but never actually thought he would find.

The woman in question was now disillusioned, wearing thousands of galleons worth of his mother's jewellery, hidden in the parlour room of the manor.

She was holding her wand in a quivering hand, her earlier anger over the fact that Draco wouldn't let her stay next to him dissolving slowly as the magnitude of their situation hit them both.

Draco needed to do this.

He wanted to check her magical ability was still intact and had watched as she completed a few simple spells with her wand, wearing herself out in the process.

He immediately made her stop, worried that even with the amount of stones she was wearing that she might hurt herself, she might start bleeding again.

'I won't need you,' he said, 'stay hidden and you will be fine, but, if in the unlikely event anything happens to me, you defend yourself, do you hear? The way you did before.'

Hermione nodded determinedly and Draco felt so in awe of her.

She was tough.

She had been through so much to get them here, given up a huge part of herself.

Draco thought of the way she had fought for him. She had been so brave to voluntarily put herself through the stone making procedure, leaving her entire life behind to try and save

him.

He only hoped he could pull this next part off for her, to make all their sacrifices worth it.

'I won't let you down Hermione.' he said, kissing her as he left, 'I will make you proud.

When he heard his parents Apparate in an hour later. Draco was ready. He had Occluded Hermione away, along with all the emotions she stirred in him.

He was cold, calm, the picture of control.

He heard his father's shoes clicking down the manor hallway, the sound of his mother's voice asking Moddles for tea.

Draco took a deep breath and stepped out of the side room he had been waiting in and went to the dining room.

'Oh Draco, darling, there you are.' his mother said, fluttering around him the way she did, always appearing nervous. He kissed her on both cheeks, then turned to greet his father.

'Are you ready for later, Draco?' his father asked. 'I've sourced everything we need for the Mudblood's extraction. You will need to go to Azkaban to fetch her.'

Draco nodded, 'of course, I'm always ready.'

His father bared his teeth at him, the closest Lucius got to a smile. 'Very well, run along then. Your mother and I have been travelling all day. We need rest beforehand.'

Draco didn't run along. He walked into the room, his chest was tight, but his stride was sure. 'I've just got one thing I needed to check, before I fetch her, father.' he said, and somehow, Lucius immediately sensed something in the air, and tensed.

'Yes?' his voice was tight, enquiring.

Draco didn't say anything initially. He advanced on his father slowly, his hands by his sides, trying not to ball them into fists as he looked at the man who had first given him life and then destroyed it, using him like a pawn in a game, a commodity. A man who surely didn't know what love was, or he could never have been so cruel.

'I was just wondering how it felt?' Draco asked him, moving closer to his father.

'How what felt?' Lucius was wary, on his guard.

'I wondered how it felt when you realised you had broken my shoulder that first time.' Draco said, keeping his voice light. He heard his mothers gasp from somewhere behind him.

'Did it feel good? Knowing you had done that to your seven year old son? Kicked him until his bones snapped?' Draco asked, 'Did you like it?'

Lucius looked as though he had been slapped.

'Excuse me? What on earth-'

'Don't even attempt to deny it,' Draco said, his eyes burning into his fathers, 'I remember it all father. I've taken a little trip down memory lane while you've been gone.'

Draco heard his mother begin to sob quietly behind him, but he was solely focused on his father.

'I remember now. I remember you kicking me, stamping on me, forcing me to eat balled up paper until I nearly choked, burning me, cursing me for fun.

So I want to know, DID. IT. FEEL. GOOD?'

Lucius was mute, his eyes staring into Draco's, so much like his own.

'Draco-' his mother put a hand on his arm, he shook her off, 'SHUT UP!' he shouted, causing her to jump back, absolute terror in her eyes.

Draco rounded on her, keeping one palm up to his father, holding him in place.

'You did nothing either. You never protected me, never came when I called. I don't know how you've fucking lived with yourself all these years knowing what you let him do to me, knowing you never helped me.'

Draco watched Narcissa shrink from his words.

'You let me heal you now when he gets too handsy don't you? Even though you know you left ME hurt and crying countless times, and you did NOTHING!'

Narcissa sobbed, clutching at her skirts, Lucius was silent, his face twisted with an ugly rage.

'You insolent little bastard.' he said, his eyes burning.

'That was discipline, you needed it. You were out of control.'

'Was I?' Draco said, 'Was I dangerous? Or was I just an easy target?' Lucius didn't reply.

'Well, guess who's the easy target now?' Draco whispered, and he allowed his magic to sneak up his father's body, curling slowly up and around his neck.

He watched as his fathers eyes widened, seeing the blood vessels stand out red in the whites of his eyes, almost immediately.

'What are you-' Lucius's words cut off as Draco tightened his grip, lifting his father off the ground.

'Draco!-' His mother tried to pull at him. He sent her flying back onto the ground, sliding backwards across the wooden floor. 'Draco, don't!' She cried, but she did nothing, she never did.

Lucius just looked at Draco, his face slowly turning darker. Draco smiled as he watched the colour change. Lucius tried to cry out, but he couldn't get enough oxygen.

Draco knew what it felt like, not being able to breathe. He knew very well. He smiled, inhaling deeply, scenting his father's fear.

He was beginning to enjoy himself.

His father's legs began kicking at the wall behind him as he struggled, Draco watched as the red in his face slowly turned purple. His father's hands came up to try and scrabble at the ligature around his neck, but there was nothing to hold onto. He began to go limp.

He was hanging, his feet pointing downwards in his expensive shoes, black socks showing under his trouser legs.

Was that what I looked like? Draco wondered, as he watched his father's lips turn blue, is this how it was for me?

He was so spellbound by his father's face that he didn't notice Lucius's one hand sneaking into his pocket. Draco didn't even feel the wand as it stabbed into his side, didn't see his father mouthing the curse as he thrust it forward.

Lucius came crashing to the ground as Draco took the Cruciatus, falling onto his back, his muscles tensed and screaming, his jaw locked, the agonising pain ripping through his body somehow horrifically familiar.

Lucius wasn't strong enough to hold the curse for more than a second or two, and as soon as he felt it wane, Draco pushed himself up off the ground clambering sluggishly to his feet.

His father sat, back to the wall, heaving in huge rasping breaths, a red ring around his neck, indents in his skin where Draco's magical binds had been. He was pointing his wand at Draco, the tip of it trembling.

Draco struggled to get his bearings after the Cruciatus, only just managing to dodge as his father sent another one his way.

'Expelliarmus!'

Draco heard her voice come from behind him in the same second he saw his father's eyes widen.

Lucius's wand was in his mother's hand before Draco even turned around.

'Enough Lucius!' Narcissa screamed. 'He's our son! I cannot sit by and watch you hurt him any more!'

Draco watched as his mother came to stand next to him, her own wand pointed down at Lucius.

Draco suddenly felt a rage overtake him as he recovered from the pain of the curse. He looked down at his father and was overwhelmed by the urge to kill him where he sat. He felt the dark magic within him begin pouring out of him, like smoke. There was a dragon

living inside him and it wanted to be set free.

This wasn't like the magic he performed on command, controlled and intentional, this was a wild kind of magic, one he felt coming from within him, ripping and tearing at his skin. The need for revenge taking over his body.

Draco had always feared he would lose control of his magic one day- lose a grip on it entirely.

He realised that this was it, he wasn't able to stop himself.

He roared as he advanced on his father, his eyes murderous.

He was barely aware of what he was doing as his magic tore through his fathers body, twisting his limbs, breaking his bones and shattering his teeth.

Lucius screamed as Draco stood in front of him, his eyes rolled back in his head as he thought of all the injuries his father had ever given him, and he inflicted them right back upon Lucius, one at a time, in slow motion, making sure Lucius felt everything he had felt as a small boy.

'DRACO!'

Hermione's voice pierced through his rage, clear and high, blowing away the red mist in a puff of air.

Draco came back to himself, somehow.

He blinked and looked around the room. Hermione was entering from the hallway, no longer disillusioned, her wand going between Lucius and Narcissa, who looked at her in astonishment, her eyes raking over Hermione's thin frame, adorned with copious amounts of her jewellery.

'Draco, what's going on? What is she-?'

'Don't kill him Draco,' Hermione said, her eyes on him. 'Make him say the incantation first!'

His father lay back against the wall, his face and body a twisted mess, his breathing was laboured, his inhaled whistling through his collapsed nose, the arm where his shoulder was broken hanging limply by his side, his ankle turned sharply inwards, broken ribs piercing his lung, causing air to leak from it as he breathed slowly in and out.

Draco reached into his back pocket for the crumpled piece of paper he had torn from the spell book, he held it in front of his fathers face.

'Say this.' he demanded. 'Say it now.'

Lucius couldn't respond initially. He looked at the incantation, his eyes scanning over the words, confusion written amongst the pain in his face.

'Say the words,' Draco whispered, and he raised his palms to his father, making Lucius shrink back against the wall. But Lucius didn't open his mouth, he just looked at Draco through the one eye that wasn't battered and swollen shut.

Draco watched as his mother looked at Hermione as she approached, coming to stand next to Draco and Narcissa as they all stood in front of Lucius.

Hermione pointed her wand down at Lucius, a barely perceptible tremble in her arm, as she swayed slightly.

His mother seemed to suddenly recognise who Hermione was, giving a loud gasp of shock.

'Draco,- what is she-'

'Help me, Mum.' Draco said, flicking his eyes from his father's to look at his mother now.

'Don't ask questions, just help me, for once in your life. I need you now. If you ever loved me, now is the time to prove it. Help me to make him say these words, I'll explain later, please.'

His mother nodded, her eyes wild.

'Lucius, he's our son.' Narcissa said, standing in front of Lucius where he sat, the puddle of blood beneath him steadily growing.

She pointed her own wand at his chest.

'Let him go, Lucius.' His mother said 'he has suffered enough.'

Draco watched his father's eyes track between his mother and him for a moment, widening as he realised she had finally taken her son's side.

She wasn't going to help him.

He watched as his father opened his eyes one last time, he looked at Draco, and all the malevolence was gone. He seemed to give up.

'I'm sorry,'

The words were a croak, he lay back against the wall, his breathing laboured and Draco thought it was too late.

But he watched as his father's eyes opened again, they were glassy, fading.

He flicked them to Draco as he opened his mouth. Blood dribbled from the one corner, Draco could see his cracked and missing teeth as he spoke.

'I was- proud of you son- even if- I didn't show it.'

The words were a broken whisper, so quiet Draco almost wondered if he were imagining them.

Lucius looked then to Hermione and, finally, in his dying breaths, his father uttered the words Draco had been waiting for.

'Emundare amor venenum sanguine.'

Then, Lucius Malfoy closed his eyes and died.

Hermione - June - 2006

Draco and Hermione stood, looking into Dumbledore's old Pensieve, which was now resident in the dungeon room of Malfoy manor, where Lucius had hidden it after he stole it from Hogwarts.

Hermione held the canvas bag close to her body, Draco's precious memories contained within.

'Are you sure you feel better?' Draco asked her for the tenth time.

'Yes, I really do.' She said again, looking into his worried eyes. 'Truly Draco, I felt better the second your father said the words.'

She was telling the truth. The moment Lucius Malfoy had said the incantation, Hermione had felt all the pain leave her body.

She could suddenly think clearly, the pain in her head evaporating along with the pressure.

She realised that the empty feeling she had had since making the stone had also gone.

She had associated the feeling with what she had given up, but she realised now, that any side effects from making the stone would have gone when she changed the timeline, in this life, she had never made one.

She wondered whether Casalia had known that when she made Hermione's stone with her in exchange for the potion. She wondered if she would have cared either way. Hermione didn't imagine that she would, all Casalia cared about was her money.

Regardless, Hermione was incredibly glad to know that her symptoms had all been linked to the first curse, Lucius Malfoy's awful legacy. The curse he had used had been in their blood, a vicious curse, one so potent that it had the power to transcend timelines in a way other curses could not.

She thought that maybe that missing part of her had been Draco.
But she had him back now and she felt strong, powerful with him by her side.

They had left Narcissa, weeping on the floor of the dining room. Crying for all the mistakes she had made in her life, her regrets and her failings.

Draco had looked down at his father's body and this time he hadn't cried.

He had watched him die and he'd barely reacted at all.

He had simply walked away and reached for Hermione, already leaving his past behind him as he moved towards her, holding onto her as she fell into his arms, feeling the hell of the curse leave her as Lucius Malfoy had taken his last breath.

So now, Draco watched her, his silver eyes tracking her carefully as she took his memories out of the bag and lined them up, before reaching into the canvas bag again and bringing out

the dark purple vial containing the last drops of the Adamantino potion.

‘How does it work?’ Draco asked, picking up the vial and squinting as he inspected the contents, tipping the vial sideways to make the liquid swirl.

‘What will you do?’

‘I choose a memory, pour it into the Pensieve, then I add this potion and it gives me the ability to alter the memory.’ Hermione said, chewing her lip.

‘But this is my last attempt, my last chance. Every time I’ve tried, I’ve made things worse.’ She felt her palms beginning to sweat at the enormity of her decision.

Draco nodded. ‘You need to choose carefully.’ He said.

Hermione looked at Draco’s last two memories. She wondered what they were, what he would have thought the most important times in their years together had been. She wondered whether one of these was the right one, but then realised, she needed to go back further than where she had started in this timeline if she was going to undo the mess she had made.

Hermione stood for a long time, reading the dates, looking through her notes.

‘Granger?’ Draco’s voice was quiet.

She looked up at him. He was standing at the Pensieve, his hair falling into his eyes as he looked down into the bowl.

‘What if,’ Draco paused. ‘Maybe, this time, I came back with you, into the memory?’

Hermione looked at him in surprise.

‘Every time we’ve tried to help each other, or tried to protect each other, we’ve done it on our own,’ he said, shrugging slightly. ‘It’s always been about secrets, hiding things from one another, or hiding together from the world. Maybe, if we went back together, we could both make sure that we change the memory for the better, so nothing goes wrong.’

Hermione felt her heart stutter.

He was right - of course he was right.

She looked at her beautiful boy as he stared back at her and she smiled.

He had helped her to finally decide.

Draco watched her as she prepared the memory. She uncorked it and poured it in, her heart pounding as it swirled in the Pensieve. Then she handed Draco the Adamantin. ‘You do the honours,’ she said, her voice shaking slightly.

Draco's eyes met hers as he pulled the cork out with his teeth and looked at her for confirmation, waiting for her small nod before he carefully poured the purple liquid in.

Hermione and Draco bent their heads as they watched the purple liquid swirl within the memory. It sped up, concentric circles forming in the center, the shimmering increased, turning a pale violet shade, until it became totally transparent again.

Looking down, Hermione smiled as she saw Platform nine and three quarters come into view.

They were going back to the day they first met.

Draco's eyes were fixed upon the image shimmering under the clear liquid. He smiled down at it, then looked up at Hermione, and the expression on his face almost broke her heart.

'I get to go back to Hogwarts,' he said, and he looked like a little boy again as he smiled.

Hermione grinned back at him, and she felt her heart swell with hope. Draco was coming with her, she wasn't doing it on her own this time.

'You do Draco, we both do. Shall we?'

He nodded and reached for her hand. She linked her fingers with his squeezing tightly.

'I love you Draco,' she whispered.

He didn't respond and she looked up at him.

He was looking back at her, his jaw was clenched and his throat worked as he swallowed.

'Say it again.' He said.

'What?'

'Just say it again, please,'

Hermione reached for him, her hands either side of his face as she looked into his eyes.

'I love you.'

Draco smiled. 'You're the only person who has ever said that to me.' He said quietly, and Hermione felt her throat grow thick with tears. 'I love you too, Granger.'

Hermione looked at him and she thought she could never love anyone or anything more than she loved Draco Malfoy.

'Let's go.' She said.

She reached for his fingers again and they looked at each other once more. She nodded and Draco took a deep breath.

Then they both looked down at the memory of Hogwarts, bent forwards and dipped their faces in.

I Will Make You Proud

Chapter Notes

Ahhhhh!! It's finally here!!!

Thank you so so much for the support I have received whilst writing this! The comments and love have kept me going, even when I have doubted myself and wanted to quit. I love Hermione and Draco so much, and I'm sad to say goodbye! However, I'm so glad to give them their HEA! They deserve it so much.

Also, there ✨might✨ be an additional epilogue added next week if anyone would like one! So if you're binding it (for personal use only) you might or might not want to add it in. The story is complete as is, but the epilogue is just something I'd like to add to finish.

Thank you again! I appreciate you all!

Nicky

Hermione - September 1991

Hermione and Draco stood on the platform, their fingers laced together as they took in the scene around them.

Hermione felt Draco's anxiety radiating off him as he stood next to her, tense and nervous. His palm was clammy as he gripped her hand tightly, the metal of his ring pressing hard against her skin.

She rubbed her thumb in a circular motion over his knuckle in an attempt to soothe herself as much as him. She took a deep breath, her own heart pounding.

This was their last chance to make things right.

The platform was swarming with young witches and wizards excitedly preparing to board the Hogwarts Express.

Everywhere they looked there were trolleys stacked high with cases, piles of books teetering on top. Various animals peered out of wire cages whilst harassed parents looked around frantically, trying to keep some sort of order.

Hermione smiled as she saw some familiar faces.

They all looked so incredibly young and innocent, their sense of anticipation palpable.

Oliver Wood chatted animatedly with his father as he pushed his trolley towards the platform, his broom firmly in hand, robes already crumpled, shirt collar askew.

The Patil sisters squealed with excitement as they ran up to another group of girls, all jumping up and down as they hugged and giggled, their words a jumble of laughter and exclaimed greetings.

She could see the clamour of Weasleys in the background, Molly's voice ringing out as she admonished Fred and George for whatever form of mischief they had managed to find on Platform nine and three quarters.

And there, in the middle of the mele stood three silent, solemn figures.

Imposing and uncomfortably formal, their blonde hair made them instantly recognisable as they looked disdainfully around at the chaos.

The Malfoy family were the picture of distinguished composure.

They were all immaculately dressed in black, well- cut robes that were clearly expensive and good quality, their shoes polished and shining. All three of their faces were serious as their cold eyes flickered around the station.

Hermione sucked in a sharp breath, her heart stuttering in her chest when she saw him.

Draco.

Her Draco stood in-between his parents, his hair sleek, combed neatly back from his pale pointed face.

He was stiff, fingers clenching and unclenching into fists as he stood, back straight, chin raised, sandwiched between Lucius and Narcissa.

She felt Draco falter beside her as he also saw himself, and then saw his mother and father, back to haunt him again.

She heard his breath leave him in a whooshed exhale, like he had taken a punch to the gut. He swore softly and his grip tightened on hers.

Hermione turned to look at him.

The twenty five year old version of Draco who had entered the memory with her trembled slightly as he looked at the eleven year old memory of himself, so small and vulnerable as he stood solemnly, flanked by his parents, his eyes wide and glassy as they tracked around the station.

'It's okay, Draco,' she whispered, 'I'm here. You aren't alone.'

Draco nodded, his jaw clenched so tight she could see the cords in his neck standing out. He squeezed her hand, but he didn't look at her, his silver eyes were fixed upon his family, mesmerised by the scene.

His breath hitched as he watched them, his whole body taut, muscles tensed as hard as marble.

Of the three, Narcissa's was the only face that betrayed any hint of anxiety, a muscle twitched near her mouth as her eyes moved down to her son.

She shifted to stand in front of Draco, bending her knees slightly to look into his face as she fussed around him, smoothing his hair and straightening his collar.

Young Draco's eyes remained unfocused, looking anywhere but at his mother.

Narcissa moved back to stand next to him, her fingers twisting in the fabric of her long skirt.

Hermione felt Draco jump beside her as Lucius's cane suddenly came down hard onto the little boy's shoulder. The younger version of him also jumped half a foot into the air, his eyes flaring wide and then narrowing slightly as his father leaned in, hissing into his ear.

Lucius's hand came up to grip onto his shoulder, his fingers cruel claws, digging in hard to the fabric of Draco's robes as he pressed his face close and his mouth moved against his ear.

Draco remained still, simply nodding almost imperceptibly as his father spoke, his eyes sweeping the station, looking around for anyone who might be Harry Potter as his father described him.

Hermione watched as the little boy's knees appeared to weaken momentarily at something Lucius said, before he turned around, his eyes wide and earnest.

'I won't let you down father, I'll befriend him, get close to him. I'll tell you everything he does.'

She heard a huff next to her as Lucius gave the boy a false, sickly smile, his lips stretching over his teeth, his eyes remaining cold and cruel.

Hermione let out the breath she'd been holding as the Hogwarts Express finally came screaming onto the platform.

The relief on Narcissa's face was clear, her whole body sagged with it.

'Thank fuck for that,' she heard Draco mutter beside her. His hand in hers was positively sweating now, his grip so tight she wasn't sure she could still feel her fingers.

She thought about how hard this must be for him.

She wished they could have gone back to a memory where she could undo all the hurt that had been inflicted upon him when he had just been a small child, but she needed to have been there, and Draco had been alone at the manor in all of those memories.

She knew that by the age of eleven, the age he was here, he had already endured an untold amount of suffering.

The things he had whispered to her that night in the first timeline had never left her, the things she had seen herself in the memories haunted her dreams.

She knew that her heart would never heal from the images of the brutality he had faced from such a young age.

Hermione had done, and would continue to do everything in her power to keep Draco out of his father's clutches this time.

She and Draco had spent hours before they went to the Pensieve adding pages to the charmed journals.

They had taken it in turns to write their own entries, both filling in the details of their lives, recording all of the things that had happened since Draco's last desperately heartbreaking pages.

Now Hermione held tightly to the bag of journals that contained their story, and a set of instructions, keeping them safe so that their future selves could read them and know of the love that had endured.

A love so powerful that even death hadn't kept them apart.

Hermione desperately hoped that it would be enough.

She just needed to get Draco to safety at Hogwarts- she'd die before she let him go back to that manor.

They watched as eleven year old Draco picked up his case and owl and began to walk towards the train.

Narcissa pulled him back into a hug, fawning over him and kissing his face.

Draco forced a wooden smile, looking increasingly uncomfortable with her false attentions. He began to look almost as though he were in pain as she held him close to her, his face a frozen mask, his eyes glazing over.

Hermione heard Draco take in a shuddering breath next to her, but she didn't turn to look at him, letting him have his privacy whilst he processed the moment.

She knew that in his heart, despite everything, he still loved his mother, still cared for her.

Narcissa had been a victim of Lucius too in her own way, Hermione thought.

She only hoped that this time Narcissa could be stronger, that maybe she could help herself, instead of choosing the same life she had previously.

Narcissa had never kept Draco safe, but Hermione was determined that this time, *she* would.

She knew that somewhere in the station, in contrast to Draco, her own goodbye with her parents was taking place, loving and tearful, her mother and father squeezing her tightly, as she reluctantly parted from them, blowing kisses as she wiped her tears on her sleeve.

Selfishly, she wished she could have seen them one last time, but she thought that maybe it was better this way, Draco certainly didn't need to see the comparison.

As the young boy finally broke free of his mothers ministrations, he began walking purposefully towards the train, his eyes set on the open sliding door, mouth a grim, determined line.

They watched as Draco stepped onto the train, his eyes closing with relief, then snapping open again as he heard his fathers sly voice from behind him.

'Good luck son! I'm sure you will make me proud.'

Then, they couldn't see any more as the doors closed and Draco was free.

The memory jumped now to the inside of the train.

Young Draco appeared to be battling to compose himself as he moved through the carriages, his little chest rising and falling with barely restrained emotion.

Hermione felt her heart jump as she saw Blaise and Theo barreling into view.

‘Malfoy!’ Blaise’s enthusiasm was as evident as ever as he put his hands onto Draco’s shoulders and jumped up and down. She heard Draco’s exhale as he saw Theo smiling, blue eyes twinkling with warmth as he clapped a hand on Draco’s shoulder and followed him and Blaise up the aisle.

As the train left the station, they watched the blurred outline of Lucius and Narcissa whip past the window and young Draco visibly sagged with relief, his whole face changing. The pinched look instantly eased, he smiled, broadly, straight white teeth and dimples appearing as he turned towards his friends and allowed himself to be led enthusiastically down the aisle to the compartment containing the rest of Draco's friends.

Draco - September 1991

Draco's heart was pounding as he watched his own memory unfold.

The relief he felt as the train pulled away from the station and away from his parents had nearly brought him to his knees. He was glad he had Hermione next to him, keeping him upright.

He was never going to see them again.

He knew that this time, he would die before he went back to that manor.

Watching himself standing there on the platform had been one of the hardest things Draco had ever done, and he had done some hard things.

He had been so focused on Hermione, at finally having the chance to live a life that involved her, that he hadn't thought about how difficult it would be to find himself suddenly transported back to that time and all the emotions that came with it.

He had watched his own face and he'd remembered the desperation he had been feeling. The abject terror that something, anything might happen that could stop him from getting onto the train.

Draco remembered the weeks leading up to his departure for Hogwarts.

He hadn't slept, instead he wandered the halls of the manor, peering into doorways and recalling the horrors that he had endured there.

He had knelt down on the floor of the various rooms, his fingers rubbing over the dark marks where his blood stained the woodgrain, reliving the worst moments of his life, sweating and distressed but unable to stop himself from doing it.

Somehow, he told himself that he needed these reminders to make sure that he never allowed himself to be that weak again.

He had waited so very long, and, in his naivety Draco had thought that by getting to Hogwarts, he could free himself from the shackles of the manor and be reborn, throwing off the horror of his past like a cloak, as though it had never happened.

He remembered waiting for the train, every second feeling like an hour as he tensed all the muscles in his body, his feet anxious to carry him onto the train and away from life as he knew it.

His fathers words, the job of befriending Potter had seemed, at the time to be of the utmost importance, a way he could have made Lucius happy and avoided his wrath. At eleven he had still believed that he could please his father, that he just wasn't trying hard enough.

Draco thought again about the next few years of his first life.

Hogwarts hadn't been the salvation he had hoped for after all.

He was given over to Voldemort, used as bait for the dementors and then they had sold his soul for him, forcing him to betray everyone in his life and destroy the one place he had ever felt safe.

Draco thought bitterly about the fact that even afterwards, when he was strong enough to fight back, he had lived a life in the shadows. Other than his unfailingly loyal friends, Hermione had been the only light he had known.

He had fought so hard for her and his father had stolen her from him anyway.

He had been nothing but a commodity, much like he had in his third life, but he had suffered so much more.

Draco looked at Hermione, and again he felt utterly in awe of her bravery and determination.

She had given them this.

She'd done whatever it took to give them one last chance.

This time, his fourth life, it had to be different.

Draco wanted to live.

He wanted to live for Hermione, to make her sacrifices worth it.

He turned to see himself enter the compartment filled with his friends, people who had cared about him.

Theo and Pansy had stayed by his side throughout it all.

Draco thought about what he had read, how they had been there for him through everything, they had forfeited their own lives to support him, even when he had seemed like a lost cause.

He smiled as he thought about Hermione's description of the fight. Of him and Theo, Polyjuiced in the Leaky Cauldron, rolling around on the floor with Harry Potter and his cronies.

He'd been pleased to read that he'd gotten a few good punches in, and the events immediately

afterwards, in the alley with Hermione...Draco had thought about that scenario many times since.

He swallowed hard.

Draco knew that Theo had continued to be there for him, a friend to the end, even after his death.

He thought about what he had written in the journals about his last visit to their house. He had been so incredibly lucky to have them, and still, he had caused them so much pain. Now he had the chance to save Theo from his father, and from the loss of his magic in Draco's own memories of his current life.

He would repay Theo's loyalty and ensure that his father didn't get the chance to hurt him either.

Draco desperately hoped that he and Hermione had included everything in their journal entries. That it was enough to make the new versions of them understand what was at stake. The story of their lives was so tangled, so torn and patched together, so much had happened to them, it was hard to include all of the details.

The only simple thing was the fact that they loved each other, Draco had always loved her, and he always would.

He watched himself follow Blaise into the compartment and greet everyone, Crabbe, Goyle and Pansy all smiling, all happy to see him.

He looked down at Pansy, and felt his heart squeeze at the way she had looked at him. He would always feel guilty that he hadn't been able to give her what she wanted.

'Draco?' Hermione's soft voice came from beside him, jolting him from his thoughts. 'Are you almost ready?'

He felt his chest tighten. Was he ready? Was he strong enough to live his life over again, and had they done enough?

He turned towards her, pausing for a moment to look at Hermione's face, soaking up her beauty.

He felt her warm brown eyes moving over him, soothing the bloodied mess of his heart, flayed open by the rawness of the memories he'd confronted, calming him, comforting him. She gave him a small smile, an encouraging expression on her face.

'We can do this Draco,' she said. 'We've done everything we can. It's going to be okay.'

Fuck, how did she make it seem so simple? Draco would do anything, if Hermione was the one he was doing it for.

He took in a deep, steadying breath and looked around at his friends. This was all he had ever wanted, this- and her.

There was another future waiting for him.

It was time.

Hermione - September 1991

‘What do I do?’ Draco’s question came out as an almost whisper, his nerves were palpable, his desperation painted onto his beautiful face.

‘You don’t need to do anything.’ She replied, ‘you just walk towards the old version of you, and then, as you pass through, you become him again.

We have until tonight at Hogwarts before the memory ends.

It's plenty of time for us to speak to McGonogall and Snape and tell them what’s happening to you at home, to let them know how they can help.’

She watched him cringe.

‘No more secrets Draco, no more hiding things.’

His eyes burned into hers, like he was silently begging her to be right, that this was enough to save his soul, to save both of their souls.

‘Okay,’ he breathed. ‘Let’s do this.’

Draco pulled her to him and she wrapped her arms around his neck and wound her fingers into his hair as she kissed him.

She poured her love into his mouth as she pulled him closer to her, feeling the solid warmth of his body against hers, breathing in his scent, closing her eyes against the overwhelming emotions taking over her as his tongue slid gently against hers, sending shivers through every part of her.

‘I love you so much Draco.’ She whispered against his lips.

‘I fucking love you too Granger,’ he said squeezing his eyes shut and resting his forehead against hers.

‘No matter what happens.’

He opened them now, looking deeply into her eyes, so she could see every fleck of silver in his, every shade of stormy grey.

‘Just know that I have loved you in every lifetime.
There will never be anyone else, as long as I live.

He put his hands either side of her face, ‘It’s you, and only ever you for me.’

She smiled, swallowing down her tears.

This was a happy time, she wasn’t losing him, she was getting him back, she told herself.

Eventually, she let him go and he stepped back, watching the memory version of him jump up from his seat in the compartment.

‘Toilet,’ young Draco said, and they watched his shiny blonde head making his way hurriedly down the aisle.

They followed him down the aisle, their fingers still intertwined.

Draco smirked as they watched him violently shove Dean Thomas out of the way, sending him sprawling sideways before heading into the toilet, the door instantly locking behind him.

They both knew what was happening behind that door. The first but certainly not the last panic attack Hermione had known Draco to have.

They didn’t need to watch him endure it.

The minutes ticked by slowly as Draco wrangled control of himself on the bathroom floor

They watched now as Neville Longbottom approached and began knocking politely on the door. ‘Hello?’ He called. ‘Is anyone in there?’

Hermione noticed immediately when Draco’s face changed.

All the apprehension left his features as he looked at Neville.

‘It’s fucking Longbottom,’ he said, turning to her, ‘you-,’ she looked up at him as his eyes blazed. She knew the journal entry he was thinking of.

‘I’m ready,’ he said. ‘I love you,’ and, as the door opened, she watched as Draco strode forward and back into his eleven year old body, disappearing from sight immediately.

Eleven year old Draco emerged from the bathroom and looked Neville up and down, a vicious glint in his eye.

He reached forward and grabbed him by the tie, drawing Neville’s terrified face close to his, pressing his pale forehead hard against Neville’s red one.

‘You’ll wait your fucking turn next time,’ he snarled.

Neville nodded, holding his hands up,

‘I’m- im sorry- ‘ he stuttered, ‘I- I didn’t realise-‘

‘What don’t you realise about a fucking locked door you little prick?’ Draco said, and Hermione knew him well enough by now to see that he was thoroughly enjoying himself.

‘Cross me again and I’ll bite your fucking nose off,’ Draco said, making Neville’s eyes go wide.

Draco momentarily loosened his grip on Neville’s tie, and Neville stepped back, a look of utter relief on his face, before Draco grabbed hold of him again, smashing his face hard into

poor Neville's.

'Oh yes, and one more thing. If I ever see you touch, talk to or even *look* at Hermione Granger, I'll kill you. Do you understand? I'll gut you like a fish, I'll make you wish you'd never been born.'

A brief look of confused fear crossed Neville's face before he began nodding again enthusiastically.

'Of- of course, I won't even look at her, whoever she is, I promise.'

'Good. Now get out of my way you snivelly little shit.' Draco snapped and he released Neville's tie and marched past him, down the train aisle. His jaw set in a self satisfied grin.

Hermione shook her head, watching Neville stare after him, rubbing his neck where a red mark was already beginning to form, a confused, wounded look on his face.

She jumped as she suddenly realised this was her moment. This was where she came into the memory.

She followed Draco down the aisle and arrived just in time to see him stop dead as her hair suddenly came into view.

A wild bird's nest bobbed down the aisle towards him.

Draco stood frozen, his eyes on her hair as she approached him, looking down, not even noticing him until she almost bumped into him.

Hermione didn't hesitate.

This was it.

She put down the bag of journals and stepped forward, towards the eleven year old version of herself, feeling the now familiar warm water sensation, the jump of her heart as she ceased to exist.

She blinked and suddenly, there he was, standing in front of her.

Draco.

Her Draco- eleven years old and absolutely beautiful to her.

She took him in as he looked down at her, his silver eyes sparkling as they travelled over her face, her hair, her mouth, before finally settling on her eyes.

Draco's soft lips quirked up into the classic Malfoy smirk.

Gods she had missed it.

They just looked at each other for a long moment, statue-still opposite each other in the aisle of the Hogwarts Express.

‘Hello,’ she heard the familiar drawl.

‘Nice hair. What’s your name? I’m Malfoy - Draco Malfoy.’

She looked down at his small extended hand, his ring firmly in place, and smiled as she held out her own even smaller one.

‘I’m Hermione, Hermione Granger. Nice to meet you, Draco.’

‘Call me Malfoy,’ he said.

She smiled, watching him grin as he stepped forward and caught her fingers in his. He smelled the same, smoke, wood, caramel, green apples, Hermione closed her eyes and breathed deeply for a second before snapping them open to find Draco looking at her intently.

She looked down at their joined hands, so much smaller than they had been the last time they had touched. He had no wand or broom callouses yet, the skin was soft, smooth.

He was looking down at them too.

Their eyes slowly came back up to meet, golden brown and molten silver.

Hermione took a deep, shuddering breath.

This was it.

Please, *please* let it work this time.

‘Ok, Malfoy’ She said. ‘Care to introduce me to your friends?’

He raised his eyebrows.

‘Only if you’ll introduce me to yours?’

‘Let’s go.’

And Hermione and Draco headed down the aisle, Draco leading the way, his shining blonde head held high, cheeks rising in a smile, dimples appearing there as he bent to pick up the canvas bag, before he suddenly turned around and stopped, causing her to walk into his chest, and stumble. She looked up at him.

‘Just so you know, I think you’re really pretty Granger,’ he said.

She smiled, her own cheeks rising now, knowing that the pink of her blush would make her freckles stand out.

‘You aren’t too bad yourself Malfoy.’

Hermione - May 2006

Hermione awoke with a jolt.

She had been dreaming.

Dreaming of children, a train, a beautiful, broken hero and a girl that had reversed time to save him.

She scrambled to sit up.

She was in a bed, in an unfamiliar room.

The room was bright and airy, the sun streaming in through a gap in the pale green curtains.

Hermione immediately looked to her left, but the bed was empty.

She swung her legs over the side of the bed, her heart pounding as she stood.

She took in the bright, spacious room, the sound of birds twittering outside in the morning sunlight.

There was an oak desk in one corner, piles of parchment stacked up alongside pots of quills. There was also a camera sitting on the desktop, a large black boxy thing, the strap creased and worn from use.

A black leather satchel sat on a chair next to the desk, paperwork spilling out, a pair of shining black lace up shoes on the floor next to it. They looked very expensive.

In the opposite corner of the room there was an armchair, two piles of clothes folded over it. A shirt, trousers, something white and several black items. Her wand was discarded there, her holster too.

Hermione suddenly gasped as her eyes moved to the far wall of the room.

It was covered with framed photographs.

Countless photographs, some still, some moving the way magical photos did.

She stood up, her silk pyjama shorts and top whispering against her skin as she stepped, mesmerised towards the wall of photos.

She stood in front of the wall, and her eyes immediately filled with tears.

The photos told the story of a life - a beautiful life.

She looked at each one in turn, her breath hitching in her chest.

Herself and Draco, at around age twelve, her in a Gryffindor scarf, him in a Slytherin one, their faces pink from the cold, pushed together as they smiled for the camera in the snow at Hogsmeade.

Draco and Harry, their brooms in hand as they walked together onto the Quidditch pitch, both of them moving in a loop. They were in their respective house colours, their arms slung

around each other's necks good naturedly, smiling up at the person taking the photo, eyes twinkling.

There was that photo again, Harry's 21st, Ron and Harry hugging, Harry's lips pressed to Ron's cheek as Ron grinned proudly at the camera.

Another photo showed Draco, Theo and Blaise, all squished on to a couch in the Slytherin common room.

Blaise held Theo under one muscular arm in a headlock while Draco looked at them both and laughed.

There was a group photo, they were in a restaurant, Blaise and Ginny, Theo and Pansy and there, her and Draco, all smiling up from their plates, Draco's hand covering hers.

The next photo was of the Yule ball.

She sobbed as she saw that she and Draco had gone together.

She was wearing a sparkling blue dress, dipped low in the back.

Draco stood, tall and broad shouldered, facing the camera, his white shirt and waistcoat bringing out the clear silver of his eyes as he smirked confidently.

One arm curled around her waist, his fingers resting at the base of her spine as she leaned into him, her own face turned so she was looking at Draco, rather than at the camera, a proud, proprietary smile on her lips.

Another photo from the Yule ball, all of them, their arms around each other as they posed in the great hall. Harry and Ron stood slightly apart from each other here, as did Ginny and Blaise, who was on his knees, his bow tie askew as he posed with his thumbs up for the camera. But Theo and Pansy were tangled in each other, both with small, secretive smiles on their faces.

She and Draco were in the middle of the photo. His arm was around her waist, and they both grinned broadly, all teeth and eyes. Hermione didn't think she'd ever seen him look so open, so unguarded. He looked truly happy.

The tears dripped freely down her cheeks now, she made no move to stop them.

There was a photo of her, on holiday with her parents, the Eiffel Tower in the background.

Another of her and Draco looking to be around nineteen or twenty, sitting in a booth, an orange glow in the sky as the sun set over the ocean behind them. Draco's hair was gelled and he was wearing a pair of black Ray Ban sunglasses, smiling, looking towards her. She looked at the camera, her face a sunkissed brown, hair blowing like a cloud in the wind.

There was also a framed certificate on the wall, pride of place, in the middle- a qualification. Hermione read the inscription on the parchment and she cried loudly. She couldn't keep it in, it left her body in a rush of emotion.

The framed scroll confirmed Draco Lucius Malfoy's status as a fully qualified Pediatric Medical Wizard, specialising in orthopaedics. The certificate was dated July 2004.

Draco's job was healing injured children.

Hermione almost collapsed to the floor.
She couldn't see through her tears.

She suddenly jumped as she felt two arms come around her from behind, sliding around her waist and holding her upright.
She looked down.

The arms were encased in white shirt sleeves, the cuffs rolled to the muscular forearms.

The fingers that linked around her waist wore one ring on each hand, on one- a signet ring, embossed with the letter M, on the other - a silver snake, curling up a long finger.
She turned around, and there he was.

Draco.

Her Draco.

He smiled at her, his own eyes shining with tears. They gathered on his lower lashes, making the clear silver even more beautiful.

'Draco,' she said, and the word came out on a quiver, 'I think we did it.'

She looked at his face, his soft lips, the small scar below his eye, his long eyelashes, the strands of hair that fell over his forehead.

His hair was shorter now, cut smartly, but she brought her fingers up again, running them through the soft hair at the base of his neck.

'I think we fucking did, Granger,' he said.

She felt the tremble in him as he pulled her close. He pressed his lips to hers, and closed his eyes, bringing a hand up to gently swipe the tears from her cheeks.

She pulled away and looked down at him. He was resplendent in his white shirt, the top button undone. A grey pinstripe waistcoat accentuated the flare of his upper body into a toned, muscular waist. Matching suit trousers clung to thick, strong thighs.

She suddenly had a thought and gasped, pulling his arms from around her and grasping his forearm, pushing his sleeve up slightly and looking down at it. Did he have the mark?

He didn't, but there was a tattoo there.

A black shape, etched into the soft skin of his inner arm, beginning about an inch from where his chunky silver Rolex clasped at his wrist.

A trident, with a circle through the middle.

She stared down at it for a moment before her eyes snagged on her own forearm, where the same tattoo also appeared, a smaller, more delicate version of his.

She looked up at him again, her whole body shaking now.
Draco was smiling down, his eyes full of the same emotion.

‘I love you so much,’ she whispered.

Draco didn’t reply. His jaw clenched, his throat working as she moved her hands from his arm back up, running them across his broad shoulders and down his muscular arms to his hands, linking their fingers together.

He shivered slightly and moved closer to her, so his body was pressed tight, his eyes never leaving hers.

‘Say it again Granger.’ The words were practically a whisper.

She smiled.

‘I fucking love you, Draco Malfoy.’

He grinned and Hermione shrieked as he suddenly grabbed hold of her, lifting her effortlessly.

Her arms came around his neck and her ankles locked around his waist as he walked her back, towards the bed, his lips on hers, his tongue in her mouth.

They fell onto the bed, immediately falling into the same positions they had always found in the first timeline. Hermione lay on her back, her hair splayed out around her.

Draco crawled up between her legs, his lips finding hers again immediately.

She sighed as she felt his tongue sweep over her bottom lip, before he caught it gently between his teeth.

She brought her hands up, running them over the light scruff on his angular jaw, pulling his face down.

His tongue slipped back into her mouth and she sucked it lightly, making him groan and grind his hips forward. His erection pressed hard into the place where she was already wet and sensitive, the tweed of his trousers rubbing over the silk that covered her, the friction of the movement making them both moan.

The same, uncontrollable desperation she always felt when she was around Draco Malfoy, at any age, in any timeline took over Hermione immediately.

She pushed her chest up towards him, exhaling his name softly as his mouth came down to cover her nipple over the silk, his hot breath panting in and out as he ran his tongue around the stiff peaks one at a time before sliding his hands down and lifting the top over her head.

He watched her reverently as her curls fell down over her shoulders to her elbows and she looked at him through her lashes, her eyes half closed.

She was naked on the top half, nipples stiff and wet from his mouth, her legs were open, waiting for him to crawl back between them.

‘Fucking hell, Granger,’ he ground out, his fingers already on the buttons of his waistcoat. Hermione sat forward and helped him, pushing first his waistcoat off his shoulders, then his white shirt, peeling it down his arms.

Draco's body underneath the shirt was hard and muscular, with defined abs and obliques. The skin was smooth and almost unblemished, no Sectumsempra scars.

He bent to kiss her, and then his hands pulled her shorts down, his eyes closing momentarily as he looked at her.

His Adam's apple bobbed dramatically in his throat as he swallowed.

Hermione brought her hands to his belt buckle, pulling the leather through the metal with a snap.

She unzipped him and he stood to push his trousers and boxers off.

She ran her eyes over the hard muscles of his thighs, thinking of the way he squeezed them around his broom.

She felt a pulse of desire, the wetness between her legs increasing as her eyes moved to his cock, rock hard and throbbing.

Draco stood, a fist curled around himself tightly as he pumped once, looking at her, his chest rising and falling, his eyes dark, lips parted to allow his tongue to dart out and wet them.

'Gods Draco, come here,' she commanded and he obeyed instantly, pushing her thighs further apart as he settled between them on his knees.

He lined himself up and slid inside her in one powerful, decisive stroke. He tried to keep his eyes on hers but as he pushed forward they squeezed shut and he sucked his bottom lip inwards.

'Merlin, Granger, you've always been so fucking tight,' he groaned.

Hermione couldn't answer. Her eyes were rolled back in her head, her inner walls clenched around him as he filled her completely, thick and hard.

Draco rolled his hips, his mouth hot on hers as he ground into her, the same perfect rhythm she had always loved.

She wrapped her legs around his waist as he slid and out, pulling back so that he was almost all the way out and then pushing smoothly back in.

Each stroke felt incredible, every glide making her coil tighter and climb higher. She squeezed around him and he groaned into her mouth, his own rhythm increasing.

It felt like no time at all before she was crying out, clenching and fluttering around him as he swore and she felt him throbbing inside her, his come coating her walls, pulling out then thrusting back up to push it back inside her as it dripped out between them.

Draco looked down at her, his eyes wild with desire, sweating and panting and he brought his mouth back to hers.

Hermione kissed him with everything she had, savouring every second and wishing desperately that she could keep him there with her all day, catching up on everything they had missed.

But, after allowing himself a few more minutes Draco broke away, pushed up on his forearms and rose reluctantly to stand, planting one last kiss on her forehead.

‘I think I’ve got to go to work.’ He said, but he looked back at her longingly and she knew he wanted to stay too.

She watched him dress, her eyes roving over him, taking in every detail of this confident, healthy looking version of Draco.

His eyes remained on her as he buttoned his waistcoat and buckled his belt, and then he came and sat on the end of the bed.

‘I woke up early,’ he said quietly.

‘I’ve been exploring. I think- I think this is our house- mine, and yours. It’s cosy. It feels happy here.’

She smiled, feeling her chest tighten again.

‘And do you feel happy, Draco?’

He looked at her.

‘I think this is the happiest I’ve ever felt.’ His chest hitched slightly. ‘The darkness, I- I can’t feel it. It’s not there, my dragon- ‘ he stopped speaking.

‘I feel different, I know that my childhood- it was the same. We couldn’t undo it, but- I think, the rest of my life has been happy. I can feel it, a warmth in me, instead of a fire. The anger, the blackness. It’s all gone.’

Hermione rose from the bed to stand in front of him.

Her beautiful boy, the love of her life, of *all* her lives, and she kissed him.

Draco kissed her back, his eyes squeezed shut, his arms tightly wrapped around her as she felt the tears begin again.

A moment later he broke away.

‘Is this real, Granger?’ He asked, his voice quiet, cracking slightly on his words, he sounded almost desperate.

‘Please, please tell me this time it’s real? That we all survived it.’

She smiled.

‘It’s real Draco. We did,’

Draco -May 2006

An hour later, Draco stepped out of the front door of the little house he now shared with Hermione.

The sun was shining and he stopped for a moment in the doorway, savouring the feel of it on his face.

He closed his eyes and soaked in the warmth of the rays as he listened to the birds chirping and the soft sound of the breeze rustling the trees in their small front garden.

This was it, he thought. Finally he could live a life in the sun.

His heart had felt like it was going to burst when he had opened his eyes and seen her there next to him, and learning that all their friends were alive and healthy was all Draco ever needed.

Their little house was so full of love, they had a happy life, he could tell.

Draco hadn't tried to find out what had happened to his parents yet, he wasn't ready to know. For now, he just wanted to live in this new present, and discover who he had become.

After a moment he closed the door and began walking down the small garden path towards the white wooden gate at the end.

As he did, something caught his eye, moving across the path in front of him and he stopped to look at it.

A hedgehog, making a slow, steady trail back towards the grass.

'Hello little one,' he said, stooping to pick it up carefully. 'Let's put you somewhere safe.'

He walked it over to the hedge and placed it gently down, watching it for a few moments before standing and walking out through the gate, towards St Mungo's where he could heal, instead of hurt.

Draco was going to do some good for the world.

He was going to make them all proud.

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