

"Draco, you just—!" She jerked her head, her mind still not quite processing. She rushed to the fire, reaching out to grab the pill before it was destroyed.

A vice on her other arm, yanking her back.

"Let go of me!" she cried, panic overtaking her.

His cold grey eyes were burning almost blue. "You got to play your little game with Chang tonight. But you will under no circumstances end your life."

She gaped at him, breathing hard. He had his teeth bared at her. She ripped her arm from his grip.

"Don't you dare *command* me like a slave."

She huffed and spun back to the fireplace, spying a speck of green near the grate. She knelt quickly to retrieve it, but he yanked her back by her elbow as her fingers brushed the flames. She stumbled, and tried stamping her heel into his foot. He hissed and grabbed her shoulders, shoving her back into the wall, his face snarling down at her.

"Perhaps you didn't hear me, Granger—"

"Oh, I heard you, you prick!" She tried shaking him off, but his fingers dug into her shoulders. "It's a *precaution*. This is *war*—"

"Don't talk to me about *war*," he hissed. "Every day I'm brought to the battle lines while you sit in here playing tea with my mother—"

Her mouth fell open. "Don't you dare—"

"And now you want to lecture me on the cost of war? The things I've had to do — to sacrifice for *you* — and you want to end it all with one swallow."

She struggled to breathe, watching his eyes burn into her. "Worried about protecting your investment? It's still my life—"

"I paid for your life," he snarled, shaking her shoulders. "It's mine. You will not end it without my permission."

She gasped, body stiffening. His breath panted over her face. She could feel the rage bubbling inside of her, spinning low in her stomach. Two

She bristled at his overconfidence. "Sorry, but even if you were capable of fending off an attack from Voldemort himself, I wouldn't risk it. Now, can you get me alone with Cho or not?"

He sent her a glare — so reminiscent of how he would look at her over his cauldron during Potions class when she beat him to an answer.

"I can contact Mulciber about a Share."

Her lips parted, her heart pounding in her ears. He'd agreed. He was going to help her, by — "A Share?"

"Yes. It's..." He looked away from her. "... Exactly what it sounds like, but with large sums of Galleons attached. Mulciber is liberal about Sharing Chang. I've heard she's been lucrative for him."

Hermione's eyes pricked, and she blinked at the ceiling until the stinging passed. She glanced back down to see Draco looking at her bedposts, calculating.

"And you're infamously closed to Sharing, isn't that right?"

His eyes snapped to her, a low-burning fire behind them. "Yes."

"But will it be strange to them? If this is your first time requesting a Share?"

He seemed to consider for a moment. "No. Chang played Seeker against me for several years. It could be said that I'd like a bit of revenge. I'll ask Mulciber for a private booth for the three of us in the Lounge."

"Excellent," said Hermione, wringing her hands while her brain whirled. "And then you'll excuse Cho and I to speak—"

"No," he cut in. "Granger, that won't be possible. I cannot leave either of you unattended."

She spun to him. "Only for five minutes—"

"No."

"Three!"

"Absolutely not. The girls cannot be left alone at Edinburgh." He rolled his jaw. "Look, if you're so worried about your bloody secret, I can cast a soundproof barrier once we're inside—"

"That's not what I'm worried about." Hermione bit her lip. "Cho can't know that you're amenable to this. If she is caught, and her mind read, you and your parents would be exposed. It's an unnecessary risk."

Draco's eyes were hot on hers, and she felt her cheeks flush.

"I disagree," he said at last. "Violating protocol is an enormous risk. If anyone catches us, I won't be able to talk my way out of it—"

"Pretend it's part of your fantasy."

"My — my *what?*" he sputtered.

"Oh *please*, Malfoy." Hermione rolled her eyes at him. "You're an eighteen-year-old boy. I'm sure you can think of *some* reason you might enjoy two scantily-clad girls being alone together for three minutes."

He opened his mouth to argue, but it seemed his throat had gone quite dry. He coughed and looked away, blushing pink on his cheekbones. He turned for the door, wishing her a good day and mumbling something about checking on her that evening.



But he wouldn't be able to check on her that evening.

In the late afternoon, Narcissa brought by a hasty note scribbled on the back of an envelope, stating that he'd been called away for an indefinite amount of time. He wasn't sure where yet, but he'd send an update when he could. He mentioned he'd already sent off the request they had discussed.

Narcissa eyed the unsealed (and therefore un-private) envelope with feigned suspicion and said, "Did he mention anything about when he'd be back?"

"Er, no, he didn't." Hermione folded the envelope into quarters, tucking it into her trouser pocket. She turned to Narcissa, and as their eyes met, the closed book on the shelf in her mind that contained the events of the morning trembled. Hermione swallowed, fiddling with her sleeve. "Narcissa, I should have sought you out immediately after Dolohov left. I

heart pounding in her ears.

"Were you successful?" he finally asked.

She looked up, and met his eyes for the first time since he'd left her alone with Cho in that booth. They were dark, but closed.

"Yes." She cleared her throat. "Cho will pass along the information. It's...it's Charlotte who is the hub." She turned to where he stood in front of the fireplace, watching her. "Charlotte controls the information and who gets messages to whom. If anything can get to the Order, it's through Charlotte."

Draco hummed in thought. "She has access to every room in Edin-burgh," he said slowly. "She has ears on every conversation behind closed doors."

Hermione nodded. She reached up to her shoulder where Cho had tucked the green pill into her seam.

"Cho gave me this. It's in case suspicion is cast on them. If they are ever in danger of having their memories searched."

He stepped forward, staring down at the pill. "What is it?"

"A suicide pill, of sorts," she said. She turned the pill over in her hand, wondering who created it, how they got them to Charlotte.

It was a moment before Draco asked, "And why do you have one?"

She looked up at him. His eyes were tight.

"Cho and Charlotte both have one. Cho gave one to me." She took a breath.

"They wear them in their hems. So if I'm ever caught I'll have to—"

Quick as lightning, Draco snatched the pill from her hand and tossed it into the fire.

Hermione stared at the flames, dumbfounded, her heartbeat pounding beneath her skin. She whipped her head around.

"What—?"

"Like hell you will."

His gaze was murderous.

## THE AUCTION

“Change of plans,” he said roughly. “Granger and I have to go.”

Hermione scrambled up, rushing to find her dress.

“Are you sure?” Cho pouted. “We were just getting started!” But she too was already reaching for her dress.

“Urgent business, I’m afraid. We’ll reschedule.” Draco’s voice was clipped and cold. Hermione didn’t dare look at him as she shimmied into her dress, silently cursing as she gracelessly tugged it up her hips.

A flurry of movement, and Cho’s throaty voice said she looked forward to next time. Hermione was still trying to coax her tight zipper up as Cho slipped from the booth, closing the door behind her.

Hermione’s chest felt impossibly hot as she continued struggling with her dress, staunchly ignoring Draco in the doorway. She heard him step closer to her, and when he moved her hands to the side to close the zipper, her face started burning.

Once she was dressed, he took her arm and led her out of the booth, past the boys whistling—

“Couldn’t make it last, Draco?”

“Emergency Floo call. Just notified,” he responded curtly.

“Sure, sure,” she heard Flint’s voice ring out. “The spoiled prat just likes to fuck on his own sheets.”

“Oi! Is Chang still available then?” another called.

Draco waved them off, setting a quick pace to the fireplaces. He tossed the powder, and tugged her through with him into the silence of his bedroom at the Manor.

The whiplash of the past five minutes seemed to smack her upside the head — the hurried and panicked encounter with Cho, the information she’d learned about Charlotte, the red lingerie he was never supposed to see —

“I’m sorry you had to see that,” she blurted out. “I tried to slow her down, but she insisted.”

Draco was silent, and Hermione stared determinedly at the carpets,

## CHAPTER 20

don’t know how I can ever repay you, but —”

“There is no debt, Hermione,” she said firmly, but kindly. A soft smile across her features. “I take care of my own.”

Hermione stood stunned, watching as Narcissa took a turn about the room, trailing her delicate fingers over the furniture.

“I had difficulty bearing children myself,” she said. Hermione blinked at her. “There was a time where Lucius and I...well, we thought there was a curse on us. Punishing us.” Narcissa turned to her, her eyes drifting over Hermione’s shoulder. “Draco was a *very* difficult pregnancy. He was our fourth try — three stillbirths before him.” Her eyes glazed with the memory before blinking it away. “I’d always wanted a large family, but once we were safe home with Draco, Lucius and I agreed that we would stop at one.”

Narcissa Malfoy’s eyes turned to her, something fierce burning there.

“I hope one day you have children, Hermione, if that is what you want. I hope it is a choice you get to make.”

Hermione nodded, a sudden burning in her throat. Her hand had found its way inside her pocket, and her fingers tightly clutched the parchment there.

She took in the gentle creases around Narcissa’s eyes as she told her to call if she needed anything, and quietly excused herself.

*She cares for you*, Draco had told her.

Whatever had first brought her to Malfoy Manor — whatever schemes or calculations — Hermione couldn’t help but believe him in that.



Draco still wasn’t home the following Friday, and Hermione told herself that her anxiety and disappointment were due to the delayed meeting with Cho. He’d sent a letter addressed to Narcissa that morning, explaining that he was on Groix, an island just off the coast of northwestern France. He expected to be sent elsewhere in Europe soon — “nowhere

worse than Italy” — and wouldn’t be back for another week at least. A postscript at the end asked her to please “let the household know” about his continued absence, as he “didn’t want the elves to fuss.”

Hermione found herself with the letter around mid-day, tucked beneath the napkin on her lunch tray. It was one of three notes she’d received when Draco had departed unexpectedly — the first from when he’d gone to Italy, the second from the day he’d left last week, and now this one. For reasons she allowed only herself, she folded each of them up, and set them close to her bedside in the empty jewelry box.



It was three weeks until Draco returned. Three Fridays without visiting Edinburgh. Three Fridays where anyone could be attempting to communicate with her.

She read the *Prophet* obsessively, looking for anything in Skeeter’s propaganda that could be useful, as well as looking for any mention of France or another country that might hint at Draco’s whereabouts. After lunch, she’d head to the library to research, or bring one of her history books to the observatory. In the evenings, she’d spend another hour or two on Occlumency.

The tattoos were still eluding her. She was convinced that they were based on borrowed spells, but she’d had frustratingly little progress with the books selected by the library catalog. Her next and final book with reference to magical slavery was a volume on the history of magical North America. And once she was through with it, she’d have to think of another plan.

Exactly seven days into August, Hermione realized she’d forgotten Harry’s birthday. When she saw the date on the *Prophet* pages reading August 7th, she gasped, her hand clutching her heart as if a gunshot had gone off somewhere. She’d been too distracted on the 31st, focused on the letter with Draco’s updates.

Hermione winced. “Awful. Normal awful. Look, we don’t really need to—”

Cho dragged her toward the couch, pushing her to sit. “We don’t have time, Hermione. I need you to trust me.” She knelt on the couch next to her, and Hermione caught the slight panic in her features as she took her face in her hands and kissed her.

Hermione squeaked. Cho’s hands slid around her ribs for the clasp on her bra.

“No, no!” Hermione pulled her mouth away. “He... likes to do that himself.”

The excuse was flimsy but Cho accepted it. She began kissing Hermione’s neck, pushing her to lay back toward the arm of the couch.

Hermione had never been this naked with another person in her life, but there was no way to push Cho back and say, “*This isn’t necessary. We aren’t actually having a threesome this evening.*” And even if she did, she doubted Cho would listen.

“What’s this library fantasy?” Cho asked again, shifting down her body, sliding her hands over Hermione’s stomach. “He catches us in the Restricted Section?” Cho rolled her eyes and pried Hermione’s stiff knees open.

“Um, something like that.”

Hermione was desperately trying to think of ways to slow things down when Cho dipped her head and kissed down her stomach.

“It’s alright,” Cho said softly, as Hermione jumped. “This is always a good bet. Just close your eyes and try to relax.”

She kissed her bellybutton, clearly heading south, and that’s how Draco found them when the door banged open.

Hermione wished to evaporate on the spot. Draco’s jaw dropped, his eyes roving over her red knickers and bra. Hermione dimly registered Cho’s breathy claims that they were “only studying,” and “please don’t tell Professor Snape!”

Hermione paused. She thought of everything Draco had told her — about France, and Italy, and Spain. Of Giuliana, and Pansy. Lucius' offer to Voldemort, whispered behind a closing door. There were loads of things she could tell Cho.

"No," she said softly, feeling the guilt weigh heavy in her chest. "But I'll keep my ears open."

Cho nodded, then glanced at the door. "We have less than a minute. Let's get undressed."

Hermione froze, jolted back to the reality of their situation. Her mouth felt dry. "Oh. I think kissing will be fine—"

"You're joking, right?" Cho stared at her. "Hermione, we need to make sure he gets his money's worth. I don't want to risk him getting suspicious. Now tell me about this library fantasy." And Cho pulled her own silky dress over her head, tossing it into the corner and standing before Hermione in only her knickers and bra.

"It's... I..." Hermione stammered, glancing at the door.

Cho's eyes flickered. She stepped forward and placed a reassuring hand on her shoulder. "Have you ever had a third person before?"

"Um, no. But I—"

"It's really easy," Cho said, reaching for the zipper on the side of the red dress. "Just follow my lead." She began peeling Hermione's straps down her shoulders, and Hermione gasped, trying to lift them back up.

"Cho, listen, I—"

"What's he like? Is he rough?"

The question caught her off guard. "Rough? Er, no, but..."

"The more you tell me about his tastes, the faster this will go," Cho said, and then she was tugging Hermione's dress down her hips to pool around her heels.

A flush licked up Hermione's chest, across her sternum. "I don't... um." She cleared her throat. "He's normal."

Cho tilted her head. "Normal?"

She cried herself to sleep that night, and spent eight hours Occluding the next day. Four days later, she crawled under the covers and let herself sing happy birthday to Ginny before succumbing to Mippy's Sleeping Draught.

Draco finally returned on a Monday in mid-August, looking pale and weary. He walked straight into Hermione and Narcissa's breakfast, kissed his mother's cheek, and sat with a flourish to his napkin as the two women sat stunned.

Narcissa recovered quickly, asking him short, simple questions, to which he would nod or reply with a clipped sentence or two.

But as he stirred the honey into his tea, his eyes drifted up to her, studying her face.

And Hermione felt breathless as her pulse fluttered, realizing just how much she'd missed him.



She came to his bedroom that afternoon. He opened the door in the middle of her first knock. Hermione stared up at him, overwhelmed at being so close to him again. He was taller than she'd remembered, even leaning against the doorway. Her lips parted to ask what she'd come for, but her mind remained stubbornly blank.

A ghost of a smirk crept over his face. "Come to gape at me, Granger?" She snapped her mouth shut. "Hardly," she retorted, with a weak roll of her eyes. "I'm all business. I was just coming by to see—"

"I haven't forgotten about Cho, no. You'll see her this Friday. The details have already been arranged."

Hermione blinked at him. "Good. Excellent." She squared her shoulders. "I also wanted to see if—"

"Seven o'clock." He raised a brow at her expression. "I assume you want to practice tonight?"

"I — Yes, I do." He'd already anticipated what she needed from him.

The thought made her stomach flip.

"Alright then," he said, pushing off the doorway. "Meet me here a few minutes before."

She nodded and took a step backward. "Thank you," she said softly, her eyes fixed on his collar.

His throat bobbed as he nodded. "Anything else?"

"It's... good to have you back, Draco." She rushed away before he could comment, and before she could say another stupid thing.

That evening, he led her to a smaller sitting room, away from Narcissa's prying eyes. Hermione was still embarrassed from her outburst earlier, so she sat quietly on his lap for the most part, watching while he ate ravenously. The sight of him devouring his potatoes and roast was oddly satisfying, so she didn't push for any questions that might disrupt his appetite.

On Tuesday, she tried kissing his neck again. Besides a quick breath and a pause of his fork, he let her. She also learned why he'd been in Groix. The Order had been rebuilding in France and had constructed an Apparition Line of their own. Draco had been assigned to cut off suppliers trying to pass the Line by water. Nott Sr. had been assigned to break through the Line's defenses, but still hadn't managed it.

On Wednesday, she pulled out of him that there had been rioting in Spain, which the Dark Lord had overtaken rather sloppily in his haste to isolate France. Draco and a dozen others had been dispatched to control the situation.

After dinner, she licked a stripe up his throat, beginning at his clavicle. Her fingers carded through his hair as she worried his earlobe between her lips, embarrassed to catch her breath hitching right in his ear. She listened to him swallow a large gulp of red wine, and when she wiggled closer, he shifted beneath her with a "That's enough, Granger," before tossing back the rest of his wine and removing her from his lap.

On Thursday, she drained her wine, took a deep breath, and folded

get this to Charlotte, Ginny will know within a few weeks."

Hermione drew a sharp breath and nodded. "Is she in contact with the Order?"

"I have my suspicions, but I couldn't say for sure." Hermione's face fell. "Trust me," Cho continued, "the less we know, the safer it is. All I do is get whispers and notes to Charlotte. The rest is in her hands." Cho looked to the door again and reached for the hemline of her short dress. She wiggled something from between the stitching: a small green pill the size of a mint. "Take this. Charlotte and I each have one. This one's for you."

Hermione took it in her palm and stared down at it. "What is it?"

"A worst-case scenario. A suicide pill," Cho said. Hermione's eyes widened and snapped up to her. "If you're caught, take it before they're able to read your mind. If any of them find out, it's all over."

Hermione swallowed thickly, the saliva burning down her throat. Then nodded. Cho reached up for the strap of Hermione's dress, turning it over and tearing at a seam until she could push the pill through the small hole for her.

"Keep it in your hem at all times."

They had maybe a minute left. Hermione ran through the other questions she thought she could get answered in a minute.

"Is there anything the resistance needs? Any supplies? Anything that needs researching?"

"No, Hermione," Cho warned fiercely. "It's too risky. Don't endanger yourself by stealing or sneaking around."

Hermione bit her tongue, nodding. There was no way she could reveal more about her situation without jeopardizing the Malfoys.

"But it does seem like you have him wrapped around your little finger," said Cho, studying her. "I can't believe he left us alone."

Hermione let out a nervous scott. "I mean...I suppose, but—"

"Is there anything you've seen or heard? Any meetings at the Manor that could help the resistance?"

His eyes were dark on her. She leaned closer, and his hands snapped to her hips, holding her still. He swallowed.

“Three minutes alone.” She pressed her lips to his jaw and whispered, “Please, sir?”

“Two,” he responded, his voice cracking on the single word.

“Yes, sir. Thank you, sir.” Her voice was low and breathy. She ran her lips along his ear and said, “I won’t disappoint you.”

He pushed her back by her hips, and was out the door in seconds.

Hermione spun as the door clicked closed. Within two steps she had thrown her arms around Cho, hugging her close, the dark-haired girl returning her embrace with a tight squeeze.

“Hermione—”

“Cho,” Hermione breathed. “Are you alright? I’ve been dying to speak to you—”

“You *genius*!”

“Listen — we don’t have much time.”

She pulled away and saw Cho staring wide-eyed at the closed door in amazement.

“I need to get information to Ginny, but it can’t be written down.”

Cho’s blinked, and the eyes that snapped back to her hardened in resolve. “Tell me.”

Hermione took a breath, feeling her entire world hang on the next words. “Fiendfyre, Basilisk Venom, Sword of Gryffindor.”

She watched Cho’s mind spin before she pressed her lips together and nodded. “Alright.”

Hermione blinked. “Is that it?”

“The less I know, the better. Consider it done.”

“How soon will you—” Hermione broke off, refocusing. Two minutes. That’s all they had. “Who’s going to tell her? Do you have contact with her?”

“Charlotte,” Cho said simply. “I can’t tell you more than that, but if I

herself against his body as close as space would allow.

“Okay?” she murmured. His arm wrapped around her back in reply, giving up the pretense of eating altogether. She listened to his throat click as he swallowed his wine, then tried turning her chest to face his, pressing closer.

“You should eat,” she said quietly. “We’re going to Edinburgh tomorrow, and we have to act normally.” A long pause before he nodded, picking up his fork and knife. She watched as he began cutting his steak, then slowly leaned forward to brush lazy kisses over his throat and jaw.

A sharp intake of breath, and Draco dropped his cutlery. His hands moved to her hips — still turned to the side — and slid her slightly away from him. She bit her lip as she wobbled, feeling off-balance. She wound her arms around his shoulders to steady herself, suppressing the urge to squeak as her breasts grazed his chest through her thin shirt — and another shift from under her, pushing her even further down his thighs.

Hermione frowned, still unsteady and now irritated. She was just pressed up against him a minute ago, and now he was being stubborn. Determined, she scooted closer again, and his legs jumped under hers. A sharp exhale, a squeeze of his hands on her waist—

And then she was promptly upended, falling over his knees in a heap on the floor. She yelped.

“Fucking *hell*, Granger—”

“Ow! That hurt, Malfoy!”

He glared down at her, furious and oddly hunched in his chair. “You’re a bloody idiot,” he growled, before racing out of the room and away from her.



On Friday, after taking a light dinner in her room, Hermione washed and wrapped herself in a fluffy robe. She examined the utensils and brushes, trying to remember how she’d used them a month ago.

She sat at her vanity, preparing to apply something gooey to her eyelids, when a tapping at her door paused her. Tugging at the tie to her robe, Hermione padded across her room and cracked the door open.

Draco stood there with his hands in his pockets, an anxious expression on his face. His eyes roved over her robe once.

“Are we leaving already?”

“No,” he said, voice scratchy. He cleared his throat. “You have a visitor. If you’ll allow it.”

Hermione blinked at him. “A visitor?”

A voice from behind Draco — “Everyone is so fucking *polite* in this house.”

And then Pansy Parkinson was shoving her way around his shoulder with, “Leave us alone for an hour” — a quick assessing glance to Hermione — “or three.”

Hermione gaped at her as Pansy slammed the door in Draco’s face and turned to her with a catlike smile.

“Pansy, you can’t just—”

“Merlin, Granger. Your hair is outrageous.”

And then Pansy Parkinson’s hands were in her hair, twisting her curls as she babbled about mousse and hydrating potions. She ran her fingers across Hermione’s cheeks, tutting over her skin and brows.

Hermione tried to protest amidst the onslaught. “Pansy—”

“You have excellent pores, but if you don’t start moisturizing you’ll look *ninety* at your fortieth. I have Harper Hoddý’s Hush cream — you’ll use it twice a day for the next—”

“Pansy.” Hermione stopped her with firm hands on Pansy’s thin wrists.

“What are you doing here?”

Pansy tilted her head back at her. “Saving you from yourself, Granger.” She lifted a brow. “Or from what you think qualifies as ‘makeup and hair.’”

Hermione blinked at her, but before she could make total sense of it,

moved to hover near the arm of the couch, standing awkwardly. Draco shut the door, and Cho walked around the other side.

“I’m honored that you chose me for your first Share, Master Malfoy.” Cho brushed her hand over the back of the couch, hips swaying as she moved. “What is it you’d like to do?” Hermione swallowed, glancing over at where Draco still stood silently near the door. A pause, and then Cho moved behind Hermione, her arm slithering around her waist. “Or perhaps you’d like to watch?” she breathed in her ear.

In a blink, Cho had spun her around and was pressing her lips down on Hermione’s, slipping her tongue into her mouth. Hermione gasped as she felt herself pressed against the wall, her mind trying to catch up as Cho’s hands roved over her sides, sliding down to her hips. Hermione’s eyes shot open, her hands awkwardly grasping Cho’s elbows. She needed to stop this. Or start this. She wasn’t sure.

Cho moved to her neck, and Hermione looked over at Draco, her mortification rising. He stood stiffly in the doorway, hands in his pockets, jaw clenched and eyes fixed on the two of them. Hermione drew in several gasps of air. She could do this. She needed to switch gears if this was to be believable.

Hermione wrapped her arms around Cho’s back and pulled her back to her lips. She kissed her with fervor, using her tongue this time, and Cho giggled against her lips. Cho’s hands slid up her hemline to grip her arse, and Hermione abruptly pulled away, panting. She turned to Draco, and whispered, “Let us prepare for you.”

Draco’s eyes snapped up to her from where they’d been tracking the progression of Cho’s hands. He lifted a brow at her.

She disentangled herself from Cho and moved silkily toward him.

“The fantasy you told me about?” Hermione said. “Of finding the two of us in the library? ‘Studying?’” His eyes flashed as she stopped in front of him, pressing her hands to his shoulders. She lifted onto her toes, looked up from under her lashes, and said, “Let me give that to you.”



want me?”

Hermione blinked, feeling blood rush to her ears.

“We have a private booth,” he said.

Draco shifted them to standing, steadying her on her heels with a hand on her waist. It brought her face to face with Cho. Her dark eyes twinkled as they ran over Hermione’s face and hair.

“She’s stunning, Master Malfoy,” Cho said, like she was appraising a piece of art. “You dress her so beautifully.”

Hermione felt her face heat. Cho’s purr was odd, so different from the shy, tomboyish girl who used to outfly Harry on the Quidditch pitch with a ringing laugh. The girl who struggled not to cry all of Hermione’s fifth year over the loss of Cedric.

Draco muttered a “thanks” and wrapped one arm around Hermione’s waist, taking Cho’s hand in the other. He led them around the corner, past the dancing girls and drinking men and couples on couches, to the last private booth on the left wall. They would have plenty of privacy in the corner, but this also meant every eye was on the three of them as they passed.

They had a plan. Hermione would suggest some alone time with Cho so they could “prepare” for him, Draco would agree, and he’d return two minutes later with an emergency that would bring an end to their sordid threeway.

But with every step they took, Hermione’s heart beat more wildly, scared about the amount of time she had and nervous about Cho’s part in all this. What if Cho had too many questions? What if she was too suspicious or surprised to take her seriously?

They reached the corner booth. Draco pushed the door open, and Hermione was met with the sight of a large plush couch and low lit candles. The booth was a bit smaller than her bedroom at home, with deep red wallpaper and a low ceiling. She felt like she was entering a coffin.

Cho’s giggle from behind her pushed her forward, and Hermione

Pansy was dragging her into her bathroom suite and plopping her on the chair in front of the mirror. She frowned at the mess Hermione had left out. “You know, it never ceases to astonish me that you’ve made it this far in life understanding nothing about makeup.”

Hermione snorted. “It’s simple. I don’t care.”

Pansy froze, then spun around to face her. Something icy in her eyes. “And how is that working out for you these days, Granger?” she asked sweetly. “Does that wonderful *brain* of yours get you everything you need in this new world?”

Hermione said nothing, the tips of her ears burning in irritation. She was right. Her cleverness would only get her so far.

“Now we don’t have much time, so listen carefully,” Pansy snatched up a thin makeup brush and waved it in her face. “*This is not a shadow brush!*” She slammed it down and picked up another brush. “*This is a shadow brush.*”

Hermione stared at the two brushes — identical in her eyes — and then glanced to Pansy’s irate face. Pansy took a deep, cleansing breath.

“It’s alright.” A cool smile. “That’s why I’m here.”

She pulled a pouch off her shoulder and opened it on the vanity. Creams, powders, gels, and brushes rolled out.

“But why?” Hermione found her voice to ask. “Why would you come to help?”

Pansy spun to her with a tube of something. “Because you looked atrocious the last time I saw you at Edinburgh, Granger,” she replied flatly. “Like a child had dipped their face in a clown’s makeup bag. And as amusing as it is to see you make a fool of yourself, I’d rather Draco not suffer the consequences of it.”

Hermione frowned at her in the mirror. “Not every girl is done up and dressed to the nines—”

Pansy dragged the chair to face her with surprising strength. “Not every girl fetched sixty-five thousand Galleons,” she said, leaning down

to meet Hermione levelly. “Not every girl is on the arm of the Malfoy heir. Trust me when I say that you need to look and act the part. If you can’t maintain the lie, Granger,” Pansy said, voice sharpening, “you’ll endanger the entire Malfoy family.”

Hermione pressed her lips together. “I’m well aware of that, thanks.”

Pansy stood upright, a bright smile breaking across her lips. “Good.” She pushed a tube of something into Hermione’s hands. “Now moisturize.”

Brushing the cream over her skin, Hermione watched Pansy sort out her makeup kit, her black bob swaying with every turn of her head. Her eyes turned down to Pansy’s left forearm. The flesh was mangled and silver-white. From the acid that Zabini had used.

This was an opportune moment to ask her about the tattoo.

“Did it hurt?” she asked quietly.

“Don’t be an idiot, Granger. You heard me screaming. Now go ahead and ask the real question you want to ask. Don’t pussyfoot around me.”

Pansy came at her with a large makeup brush at that point, promptly covering Hermione’s embarrassed flush with a beige goo.

“What do you know about the tattoos?” Hermione asked, once the brush was away from her mouth.

“Absolutely nothing.” Pansy dipped the brush again. “All I know is that I can come and go as I please.”

“Because you’re ‘dead.’”

Pansy’s lips twitched. “Well, yes. That does tend to be helpful.”

Pansy continued in silent concentration, dabbing at her face and smudging powders onto her cheeks. Hermione felt the same as she did in fourth year, when Parvati and Lavender fussed over her before the Yule Ball.

*She heard an echo of a scream bouncing off black tile floors as Parvati was strangled around a corner — Luna shouting—*

She blinked, refocusing and tuning back into Pansy, who was now

their dates. Goyle was already dragging Susan to a private booth. Higgs’ date was kissing his neck, her hand squeezing him over the front of his trousers as his eyes darted around nervously. And Theo Nott had his Carrow Girl straddling his lap, his hands roving over her waist and thighs as his kisses moved down her neck, starting to mouth at her breasts over the fabric of her dress.

Fifteen minutes of this. Hermione took a deep breath. This is what they’d been practicing for, right?

She turned back towards Draco’s neck, and he leaned in as if she was going to whisper to him again. Her lips brushed softly over his pulse, and she felt his body tense before his muscles relaxed. The hand on her waist felt as heavy as lead.

Her hand came up to rest on his chest to steady herself, and she began to kiss his neck as she usually did during their practice sessions. She could feel his heartbeat pounding beneath her fingertips as she pressed soft kisses to his neck and jaw. Her tongue flicked out to taste him and she felt his ribcage contract. His hand shifted to her hip as she leaned closer, and he adjusted her in his lap, pushing her off a bit.

She pulled back to question him, but he was staring into his full glass of scotch. A quick look around confirmed that no one was watching them. Flint was focused on Penelope, kissing her slowly as he pressed their hips together. Montague had leaned his girl back across the arm of the couch and was mouthing at her neck. Theo had disappeared into a private booth.

In fact, Draco seemed to be the only male in the room *not* touching or kissing his Lot. Hermione frowned. She’d been so focused on getting Draco comfortable around her, she’d forgotten that owners usually were the ones to initiate contact. She needed to push him more next week.

A shadow crossed over them, and Hermione looked up to see Cho Chang smiling down demurely.

“Master Malfoy,” she said, her voice low and velvety. “Where do you

girls near the music. But she noticed that things seemed to be more discreet — no girls on their knees, no moaning from dark corners. If they wanted the evening to progress, the men would drag their girl into a private booth, locking the door behind them.

Draco settled into an armchair, dragging her down onto his knee. A Carrow Girl appeared with drinks before she'd even settled, and Draco took a glass that she knew he wouldn't bother sipping.

"Draco," Flint said, flopping down on the nearest couch. "I hear you have quite a night planned."

Draco looked over at him, lifting a brow. "Glad to hear Mulciber is just as loose-lipped as ever."

"You know," Flint began, draping an arm over Penelope, "the two of you can take Clearwater for a turn whenever you'd like. As long as you let me watch." His gaze slid up to Hermione and he winked at her.

"Your excuses to see my cock are getting lazier and lazier, Marcus," Draco hummed, and Flint laughed.

"Oi, Granger. You ever been with a bird before?" He wiggled his eyebrows at her. "Ever fumbled around in the Gryffindor dormitories?"

Hermione's teeth clenched together, refusing to respond.

Flint laughed. "It's very easy, Granger," he said, leaning in. "No work at all really. Just let Chang do the heavy lifting, and you can just lie there." He ran his tongue across his shiny new teeth. "Play to both of your strengths that way."

Before she could snap back, Draco's hand landed firmly on her waist, pulling her to lean against him. She tried to relax, but she was too anxious about her hemline.

She turned to whisper into Draco's ear, "How long until our meeting?" His jaw brushed hers accidentally. "About fifteen minutes."

Hermione nodded, and turned back to inspect the room. Two Carrow Girls had come over and begun to dance in their section. Pucey and Montague were talking on the couch several yards away, their arms around

grumbling about how her pale complexion was eating up all her bronzer.

"You said you envied me. In the Ministry."

Pansy didn't look up from her palette.

"You said you were envious of 'what my life would be,'" Hermione said.

"What did you mean?"

Pansy laughed, a bark of glee that made Hermione jump in her seat. Pansy looked around the bathroom suite, gesturing with her brush.

"Do you think any other girl has any of this, Granger? Do you think the rest of them sleep soundly at night tucked between their twelve pillows, unafraid of a visitor in the middle of the night?"

A hot wave of guilt and sorrow bubbled in Hermione's belly, but she shoved it aside.

"You knew, even then, that Draco was going to buy me."

Pansy stabbed a new brush into a powder and hummed in confirmation.

Hermione took a breath, heart pounding. "Do you know why?"

Pansy turned to her, fringe swaying delicately. Her eyes took in Hermione's, studying her, before narrowing like a predator.

"I do," said Pansy, with a twist to her lips. And then, "Eyes closed, Granger," ending the conversation.

Hermione opened her mouth to protest, but Pansy was already coming at her with the brush. Hermione closed her eyes, puffing out her breath in defeat.

Once Pansy began attacking her eyelids, Hermione decided to try her next line of questioning.

"Will you be at Edinburgh again? As Giuliana?"

"I will. For the foreseeable future."

Hermione frowned, watching Pansy blend colors together in her palette. Would she always be forced into other girls' bodies, watching from the sidelines as somebody else? It was unfair to ask her to take Giuliana's place. Unfair to both them.

And as that fire sparked in her, Hermione thought of the red nails and red lips her own body had worn while driven by Pansy. She'd clearly done it as a favor to Draco, just like she was here now. He never should have asked her.

Pansy was shaping her brows when Hermione found her voice again.

"About the night you took my body to Edinburgh," she said. Pansy paused over her left brow. "I was quite shocked, and frankly felt quite violated with that discovery. But I realize that you were just trying to help a friend." She dropped her eyes to her hands, her bare fingernails. "I want you to know that I don't hold it against you."

Pansy was still. Hermione glanced up to see an arched brow directed down at her, and eyes as cold as ice.

"And what exactly am I apologizing for, Granger? For saving your arse? Both of yours?"

Hermione's brow furrowed. "I don't expect an apology. I know that you agreed when Draco asked you to go in my place—"

"You think Draco had the sense to suggest it?" Pansy smiled, low and catlike. "It was my idea, Granger. I was sick of hearing Blaise moan about how Draco was going to get himself killed. *Someone* had to take matters into their own hands."

Hermione stared at her. Pansy turned away, flicking her fringe out of her eyes and dabbing a sharp brush into a small jar.

"Sure, Granger. I accept your *forgiveness*. Please *forgive me* for seeing to it that you'll never have to experience that potion yourself. Or make a fool of yourself trying to handle a cock for the first time in your life with fifty drooling men watching. *Forgive me* for getting my lips wet so you could continue playing house with the Malfoys for a little while longer."

Pansy slammed the jar down on the counter and turned to her with the brush. She twirled it between her fingers, her eyes locked on Hermione. Hermione simply stared, closing her mouth slowly from where it had hung open.

"I don't need to be listening at doors," Theo snarled. "I know just as much as you do, Draco. Maybe more."

She felt Draco chuckle under her. And an idea struck in her mind, sharp as lightning: *What did Theo know about his father's work with the tattoos?*

Looking back to Theo, she found him glaring daggers at Draco before turning back to the table.

"The Dark Lord wants to hit France from all sides. Cirillo brought in the German Minister. Practically handed Germany to the Dark Lord," Theo said. "So the Carrows have been instructed to be especially accommodating whenever Cirillo visits Edinburgh. And tonight she wanted Charlorte." Theo took a deep sip from his glass, looking pleased with himself as the boys reacted to his information.

Draco was very stiff underneath her, and Hermione remembered the way Minister Cirillo had looked at her — had seemed disappointed that Draco wouldn't share her. She wasn't the Carrows' property, however. She could only pray that would be enough.

Hermione must have gone still as well, because suddenly Draco's hand was on her back, rubbing softly into her stiff shoulders. She jumped, and relaxed again.

The boys had transitioned into talking about Derrick's stepfather's new manor in Germany. She listened for more details over the course of the next hour, but as the wine bottles emptied, the room became less concerned with the political climate. Montague and Pucey argued about Quidditch while Flint whispered into Penelope's ear. Blaise, Draco, and Theo reminisced together about something from fourth year, but Theo kept getting distracted by the girl in his lap.

When it was time to transition into the Lounge, Hermione's heart began thumping in anticipation. As they walked through the doors to the Lounge, Hermione found that little had changed. There were still gambling tables, private booths, couches and plush armchairs, and dancing

the back.

Except for Draco. Her backside was bare on his thigh, except for the lacy red knickers.

Hermione tried not to squirm — she knew he hated it when she squirmed — but she shifted a bit, crossing and uncrossing her legs. A quick narrowed glare from Giuliana Bravieri settled her.

When it was time for the girls to pour the wine, Hermione simply reached for Draco's bottle from her position on his lap. The sense of decorum that was usually maintained for the first thirty minutes of dinner had dissolved completely, and the girls were sitting in laps as soon as the first wine glass was poured. Following her and Draco's lead.

Susan was accompanying Goyle again. Morrensens was back, looking rather sickly. Penelope with Flint, Carrow Girls with the rest. Theo Nott, who had been unusually silent thus far, was nuzzling the neck of a brunette with silky long hair over her silver collar. She brought his wine glass to his lips, and after he sipped deeply with eyes on her, he leaned in to kiss her, letting her taste the wine on his tongue.

Hermione felt heat crawling up her neck at the display, suddenly feeling like she was trespassing on their privacy. She turned to look at Draco, and found him studying Theo with narrowed eyes. He recovered and addressed the table.

"Where's Charlotte tonight?" He brought his wine to his lips.

Theo was first to respond, pausing his mouth on his girl's neck. "Minister Cirillo is here tonight. She requested Charlotte."

"The fuck?" Marcus exclaimed, jostling Penelope. "Charlotte can't be requested. I've been told explicitly—"

"Well, you don't have Germany in your back pocket, do you?" Theo smirked. "Minister Cirillo does."

Draco set his glass down. "Well, aren't you the little social butterfly, Theo." Theo scowled, and Blaise hid his laugh in Giuliana's shoulder. "What other gossip have you learned listening at daddy's door?"

"Do you still love him?" she finally whispered, breath tight in her chest.

Pansy's face broke into a sneer. "Don't be so sentimental, Granger." She grabbed Hermione's jaw a bit too roughly and lowered her brush to her eyelids. "There's no place for that here."

Hermione kept silent and still as Pansy finished her eyeshadow, and applied eyeliner and mascara. She examined Pansy's rounded nose and sharp eyes, her creamy skin and long neck, remembering how she used to stumble on Pansy and Draco in sixth year during Prefect rounds, pressing each other into corners or slipping behind statues — and the way Draco's thigh pushed between Pansy's as he kissed her.

Pansy started brushing dust over her face with a large brush. There were a million more questions she wanted to ask, and Hermione was about to break the silence when Pansy reached into her pocket and pulled out a wand.

Hermione's eyes widened, watching as Pansy used it to set the powders on her face. "How did you get a wand?"

"Just borrowing. Your hair needs magical assistance, Granger."

She watched the mirror in the corner of her eye as Pansy moved around her, using the wand like a curling iron on Hermione's hair. When she was finally finished, she grabbed the back of Hermione's chair, wrenching her toward the mirror so she could see herself.

Hermione was a shadow. A fragment of someone's imagination. Her cheekbones shimmered and her eyes sunk back. Her brows were crisp and jaw sharp — just like Pansy's. Her curls danced around her face like a lion's mane.

"You hate it, I know," Pansy said, putting her things away with a flick of her wand. "But you'll have to bear it. Now let's take a look at your knickers." She waltzed out the bathroom door before Hermione's brain caught up.

"My — my knickers?"

She ran after her, still only in her robe. Pansy had flung the armoire doors open and was scrounging through its drawers.

"Merlin, are these McGonagall's underthings?" she murmured.

"Why do I need sexy knickers for tonight?" Hermione asked, an edge of panic in her voice.

"You should have sexy knickers for *all* the nights, Granger," Pansy said, holding up a pair to the light before scrunching her nose and tossing them back in the drawer. "Never underestimate how much power you can wield in a pair of sexy knickers." She blew out a frustrated breath before tilting her head back to the ceiling and calling, "Kreacher!"

Hermione's eyes popped when the crotchety old elf appeared in the middle of her bedroom.

"Miss Pansy," he croaked. His eyes roved over Hermione with a scowl. Her mouth fell open.

"I need the red knickers and bra in my drawers," said Pansy. "Quickly."

The elf popped away with a grumble. Hermione stared at the space he used to fill. She hadn't expected to see him again.

"But how did you—" She turned to Pansy to question it just as a *pop!* sounded, making her jump. A pair of red lacy knickers and a matching bra lay across the bed.

"Why is Kreacher obeying you? Where did you find him?"

"That's enough questions for one day, Granger. Now, strip!" The undergarments were shoved into her arms, and then Pansy was standing there waiting. "Oh, please. I've seen your body. I've *been* your body. Just get those on so we can fit this dress to you."

Hermione pulled the knickers on under the robe. "Dress?"

"I had the elves deliver it this morning."

Pansy reached inside the armoire and pulled out a silky red dress, short and low and tight. Hermione's hands paused in untying her sash.

"I... I can't wear that."

Harper's eyes popped at the sight of her, and Hermione struggled with the need to pull her dress *up* and *down*.

"Eyes up, Harper," Draco's voice snapped behind her.

They entered the dining room, and she heard the ambient noise cease as all eyes turned on them. Marcus Flint stood from his chair, as he always did when she entered the room — a display of mockery. But now his gaze slid over her in intense silence, until —

"Merlin, you're trying to kill us, Draco."

Montague laughed, running a hand through his hair. Goyle was turned to her with a wide, greedy expression on his face.

Draco slid behind her, his hands pressed lightly on her waist, his face over her shoulder. "Just reminding everyone what she's worth."

A shiver danced up Hermione's shoulders. He was echoing Pansy's words — it seemed she'd gotten to him as well. But in another life, if they were different people, it might have been a compliment.

Draco led her to their side of the table, interrupting her thoughts.

Blaise entered next, "Giuliana" trailing behind him. The table greeted them, but then Blaise caught sight of Hermione.

"Well, fuck," he laughed, eyes drifting down her body.

The boys laughed. Draco smirked. And before Hermione could take her position behind his chair, Draco was pulling her into his lap. She landed with a gasp. The conversation began, but most gazes were on them. She was supposed to serve the wine and wait behind him.

Draco was changing the rules.

As Blaise took his chair next to Draco, Hermione glanced at Pansy. Her eyes ran approvingly over her hair and dress, but she was able to mask it through Giuliana's eyes as earnest curiosity.

The dress, Hermione was realizing, was not made to be sat in. She wasn't afraid of seams tripping, but the back of her dress... was no longer covering her backside. Thankfully, the front — while unnecessarily short — was still covering her, so hopefully, no one would be the wiser about

"Keep an eye on her, Malfoy," Santos said. "If any of these pets managed to escape, I'd put my gold on her."

Nott Sr. finished a large swig of scotch. "Not likely," he sang. Hermione's eyes snapped up to him. "The protections we have cannot be beat. These tattoos? Unbreakable."

Hermione's skin was pricking. The exact information she needed..

"Ah," said Minister Santos. "So these 'tattoos' cannot be broken, but the French Apparition Line can?" His eyes glinted cruelly as he watched the insult land.

"Precisely," Nott growled, displeasure with the turn of conversation evident on his face. "The magic is impenetrable."

"Indeed." Minister Santos hid a smirk behind a long swig of scotch.

"We have gone further than anyone in *history* to secure our slaves!" Nott gestured to the whole room, sloshing his glass. "The Ancient Egyptians, the Portuguese. Not even the Scourers could succeed where we have!" He was drawing attention, several nearby backs turned to see the commotion.

"Right you are, sir," Draco cut in, after giving Minister Santos a meaningful look. "Please excuse us, but we're late for dinner. Enjoy your visit, Minister." He quickly steered Hermione away.

And it all fell into place.

Nott Sr. had created the tattoos.

Hermione looked down, mind working quickly.

*The Scourers.*

She'd seen the term before. She was burning to get back to her room to investigate.

But one job at a time. She took a deep breath and turned her neck slowly as Draco guided her, eyes flitting to Cho.

Before long, Draco was leading her to the dining room. She cursed Pansy's name as she climbed the stairs ahead of him, wondering just how much the dress covered from that angle.

"And why the hell not?" Pansy snapped.

"Pansy, it's too much. The color is...and the cut..." She stammered while Pansy glared at her. "It will attract so much attention—"

"Have you heard nothing of what I've said? You are the 'Golden Girl.'" She lifted a brow. "You were deemed the most desirable. And now you're on the arm of the most important pure-blood heir — the youngest Death Eater." Pansy moved directly in front of her. "And you're telling me your place is in the background now?"

Hermione stared up at her, mouth slightly open, trying to form the words to explain her discomfort.

"Enough. Stop whining and put on your Gryffindor red," Pansy said.

Hermione squeezed her eyes shut and drew a sharp breath. *Pick your battles*, she reminded herself. She took off her robe, clasped the bra, and let Pansy slide the dress over her torso, avoiding her eyes. It was a tight squeeze around her hips, and Pansy grinned as they let out a few seams.

"I meant what I said about your arse, Granger." Hermione blushed, and Pansy chuckled. "I miss it. Draco's never been as attentive to my arse and hips as when I was in your body."

Hermione's breath caught as a pleasant yet embarrassing heat slid through her veins. She looked down and met Pansy's smirk.

The clock chimed on her mantle, startling her. Ten o'clock already.

Pansy stood, grabbing a pair of golden heels. She cast a Comfort Charm on them that Hermione muttered a quiet "thanks" for. Hermione slid them on and locked the collar around her neck. Before she could walk to the door, Pansy stopped her.

She uncapped a lipstick, and held her jaw steady. Hermione jerked, realizing it was the same color Pansy had worn when she'd gone to Edinburgh in her body.

"Is that really necessary—"

"The lipstick is everything, Granger. Do you really think you can waltz out there in a red dress without red lips?" Pansy huffed. "Merlin, how

you've gotten this far without me..."

Hermione rolled her eyes and let Pansy apply the lipstick, blotting when she demanded. She couldn't bear to look at herself in the mirror before the two of them moved downstairs. Pansy whispered instructions about not watching her shoes or fixing her posture, but all Hermione could focus on was the nervous energy buzzing in her veins — which promptly began to roar when she spotted Draco at the fireplaces.

His black robes, black trousers, black boots. His eyes trained on her legs as she descended. Hermione looked away, feeling warm all over. Pansy said her goodbyes and fixed a few of Hermione's stray curls. She'd meet them there with Blaise once she was Polyjuiced.

With a flash of green flames, she and Draco were left alone. When she looked at him again, she caught him staring at her face and hair before he turned and began leading them out.

She felt like a different person as she wobbled behind him. He paused for her at the bottom of the exterior stairs, and as she reached the last steps, his hand reached for hers to steady her. She looked at him quickly as her hand grasped his, and his gaze drifted across her neck before quickly looking away.

His hand dropped and they continued down the path.

They arrived to Edinburgh as they always did, through the gates and up the stairs to the Great Hall. But when the curtain pulled back at the entrance, it wasn't Charlotte's face that greeted them.

A tall girl with dark skin and a bright smile greeted them with champagne. Draco took two glasses from her, and Hermione could see the slightest bit of surprise on his face.

They entered the Great Hall. Hermione had never felt so exposed as she did now, in Pansy's dress. Men's eyes on her at every turn, dripping across her chest and dragging up her legs. She was a beacon in red, drawing every gaze to her. She lifted her chin, determined not to let her cheeks match her dress.

Her eyes caught Cho's from across the room. Cho lifted a brow, looking her up and down. She smiled before turning back to Mulciber. That helped a little.

Draco charted with several men throughout the room, stopping to ask after their wives, their estates. He steered her along, his hand on her back pulling her to his hip whenever a pair of wandering eyes got too close.

Nott Sr. stepped in their path just as Draco tried to guide her upstairs. He was well on his way to drunkenness, and Hermione thought of his failure in France.

"Ah, Draco. I have someone who wants to meet your Mudblood." He slurred his words, righting himself on his cane as he stumbled. An older gentleman with greying hair joined Nott at his side. "I believe you're familiar with Armando Santos, the new Spanish Minister."

Draco shook his hand. "Minister Santos. A pleasure to see you again. May I present to you Hermione Granger, my Lot," he said elegantly, though he slightly tightened his grip.

Hermione did her best to make eye contact and not react as two pairs of glazed eyes devoured her. Draco's hand on her hip steadied her.

"I'm quite impressed you were able to capture her," said Minister Santos, in a surprisingly deep voice. "I heard she was a clever little Mudblood." "Not so clever after all," Nott Sr. said, chuckling into his scotch glass. "Has she given you much trouble, young Malfroy?" "In the beginning," Draco said smoothly. "Now she's learned a few lessons about how to remain comfortable."

Nott Sr. snorted. "Yes, I've heard she's *quite* 'comfortable.' Theo mentioned her private suite."

Hermione felt her blood chill.

"What can I say," Draco said with a smirk. "I like to be comfortable, too."

The men laughed. She felt Draco's chest rumble against hers, and her heartbeat calmed.