

Behind the lens

Von viv-heart

"Excuse me, do you have a moment?"

Hermione turns around, a half-hearted apology on her lips as she expects yet another poor student trying to get people to give their money to yet another not so charitable charity.

The words die on her lips when she sees who addressed her.

"Granger?" Draco Malfoy asks, staring at her with wide eyes, his lips parted in mild surprise.

"What do you want?" Hermione sighs, too tired to really care and crosses her arms over her chest. It has been a long day at work and the last thing she wants is to chat with her Hogwarts bully when she could be at home reading in her comfortable bed.

"Oh, well," he scratches his neck, looking anywhere but at her out of the sudden, "I didn't know it's you."

Hermione purses her lips, staring him down. "So you wanted to hit on me but now you don't want to because it's me," she says flatly and is ready to leave but Draco is not having any of that.

"No, that's not it! I just wanted to photograph you, but I imagine you wouldn't want to spend any time in my proximity."

Hermione looks him up and down but he seems sincere and she realizes she has no idea what he has been up to since the war. As soon as the trials were over he was gone.

"You are a photographer?" she asks, surprising herself with the question. She is tired, but curiosity is her biggest weakness, and damn is she curious.

Draco shrugs, offering her a half-smile. "It's a hobby," he says and Hermione isn't sure what to think about that.

"Show me your work," she commands and Draco opens his mouth as if to say something but closes it again without actually speaking. He nods instead and motions Hermione to follow him to a nearby apparition spot where he offers her his arm. She takes it, allowing him to side-along her.

Hermione isn't sure what she expects but a small attic with strings running from one wall to another, all of them having photos pinned to them, isn't it.

She lets go of Draco's hand and walks over to the nearest one, wanting to take a closer look at the photos.

She reaches out and turns the first one around to get a better look at it. It's a picture of an old man laughing and it doesn't move. Hermione glances back at Draco, who is standing there, watching her pensively.

"I approached you in muggle London, didn't I?" he says and Hermione reaches for the

next picture. She has to see more before she is ready to talk to him for real.

Two girls in saris are reading a book. Hermione frowns. The picture certainly hasn't been taken in England. Many of them haven't been as she discovers, studying one after another.

An older lady with a samovar, sunny beaches on exotic islands with people working, kimonos and traditional garb from what she assumes is eastern Europe, tigers and snakes and lions, chicken and horses and so much more – so many people and so many motives and they all look so-

"They are all so normal, so beautiful. So happy," she says, the words barely a whisper. Draco doesn't say anything, still standing there as if he was waiting to be judged, but his eyes are firmly on her and Hermione feels like he is stripping her bare to her soul. She hopes he isn't a legilimens.

"Why?" Hermione walks over to stand in front of him and he shrugs again, making her want to slap him. His behaviour is frustrating to say the least. It's as if he has given up, offering himself to her mercy. And maybe that's exactly what he is doing – giving her the opportunity to judge him and decide if he is actually worth her attention.

"Talk to me."

Draco takes a deep breath. "They remind me that not everything is bad, that there are things worth living for," he says, holding her gaze. "I've seen the worst of the worst." Hermione nods. She understands. She wishes she wouldn't but the war had ruined them all and if he wakes up screaming in the middle of the night like she does, she can't blame him for doing this. It's as if he was collecting happiness and if she is honest with herself she is quite angry that it wasn't her who came up with the idea.

"Does it help?" she asks and when he nods she smiles.

"Photograph me then."

Draco shifts from one foot to another uneasily and Hermione suspects he doesn't know how to react. He clearly hasn't expected her to agree. It isn't surprising at all as she hasn't expected herself to do it either.

"If you don't want to it's fine too," Hermione says when the silence gets too much, making her doubt herself. He didn't say he wanted to photograph her since he had seen her face – maybe he doesn't as she isn't pretty enough. It wouldn't be surprising, if she thinks about it. More than one man has hurled that into her face, leaving her for someone who was prettier, more feminine and cared more for her looks than stuff like books and magical creatures. Hermione wouldn't admit it loud but it stings – she knows she isn't the typical femme fatale and has never been, despite what Witch Weekly and the Prophet wanted to make of her. Luckily, she has learned long ago that it's not the fault of the girls that they look the way men want them to, but of the men, that chose based on looks, her only regret being that she hadn't known that back in Hogwarts, ruining many chances at friendship.

"Of course I want to," Draco says in a tone that suggest she is crazy if she thinks otherwise.

She nods slowly, not sure if he is saying it out of pity or chivalry or actually means it. She isn't sure which one is the most concerning – this is Malfoy after all and neither pity, nor chivalry and especially not honesty towards her fit well with her memories of him from her school days.

"Great." Her voice is shrill and fake and Hermione has to do her best to not cringe. She hopes that Draco doesn't notice but his frown tells her he already has.

"You can leave if you are uncomfortable," he says flatly, putting on the mask of disinterest and arrogance she has known so well but his tone is different and it

doesn't sit well with her.

Hermione doesn't move. Instead she sticks out her chin in a challenging manner and stares at him, waiting for him to actually do something.

It feels like they are playing a game of chess and it's his turn now. Then again, she always sucked at chess so she isn't too sure whose turn it is, or if this is a good idea at all. If she is honest with herself, she knows this is a dreadful idea but she is intrigued so she stays.

"I don't need your pity," Draco says and Hermione frowns.

"What part of this looks like pity?" She fights the urge to cross her arms, knowing that it would look defensive and clenches her hands into fists instead. She doesn't want to lose this, even though she isn't sure what they are competing for.

"The part where you are actually talking to me instead of hexing me into oblivion," Draco crosses his arms and Hermione has to bite her cheek to refrain from grinning. She might be tactless at times but she knows that it would ruin the whole thing – whatever it is – anyway.

"I talk to you because I am curious," she says, but it seems to be the wrong thing to say as something dark flashes over Draco's face.

"The war fucked me up and this is my way of coping," his words are dripping with venom and Hermione flinches, "now that you know you can go."

She wants to ask more questions but both her pride and the look on Draco's face tell her that she shouldn't so she leaves without another word.

She doesn't seek him out and in the two next weeks they don't see each other, but when she spots him in the shopping centre just around the corner from her flat, Hermione doesn't hesitate and approaches him.

"What do you want?" Draco asks, letting go of the sleeve of the sweater he had been inspecting and it falls down to hang unceremoniously.

"To talk to you," Hermione says and he scoffs but doesn't protest when she follows him around as he looks at clothes, not trying on a single piece, interestingly enough.

"Do you just browse?" she asks when they walk from one shop to another and he glares at her.

"No," he says and Hermione frowns. It isn't until he buys a sweater with long tight sleeves two stores down the road that she realizes what he had been doing.

"It's about hiding the mark," she says and Draco's silence is answer enough.

"You know you could cover it up with another tattoo."

Draco groans and turns to look at her. "No magical tattoo will do trick. I've tried," he says in exasperation.

"Have you tried muggle too?" she asks and Draco's jaw tightens.

"If a magical tattoo won't cover it, how should a muggle tattoo?"

Hermione shrugs. "Maybe no magic is the solution where too much magic is involved – I've always wondered why wizards don't try to import muggle healing methods as, often enough, they work in cases magic doesn't."

"Like what?" Draco asks, more curious than hostile, Hermione realizes with delight.

"Mind healing and reproductive issues."

Draco's shoulders stiffen, courtesy of the mention of the infamous pureblood reproductive issues Hermione guesses and she notes it down for further reference in the back of her mind.

"And what if it doesn't work? The muggle will certainly have questions."

"Luckily, there is a wizard who does muggle tattoos," Hermione smiles at him and Draco's eyes glint with something as his hand holding the shopping bag twitches.

Even if he wants to reach for his wand and hex her, he doesn't, and that's what counts in Hermione's opinion.

If he did though, she couldn't blame him as she is forcing her company on him every time she sees him.

"What makes you think this wizard would be willing to cover up the Mark?" Draco is looking at the floor and Hermione finally understands what this is about. He is ashamed and afraid. Two things her head struggles to connect with him, but she can't deny it any longer.

"He will if I ask him to," she says and Draco looks up uncertainly.

Hermione smiles and pulls out a piece of paper and a pen from her bag to scribble down an address. "Meet me here tomorrow at seven in the evening."

Draco takes the paper and Hermione walks away with long, purposeful strides.

She doesn't really expect to see him waiting for her in front of Dean's apartment building but there he is, scarf up to his nose and hands deep in his pockets.

"Let's go," Hermione says instead of a greeting and Draco follows. During the elevator ride neither of them speaks as the numbers flash in front of them, but he is staring at her again.

When they finally reach the sixth floor, Hermione knocks on a door on the left and it opens up almost immediately and Dean Thomas appears in the frame.

"You were serious," he says, shaking his head slightly and steps aside to let them in.

Hermione hugs him and Seamus Finnigan hello, while they exchange suspicious glances with Draco.

"Let's just get this over with," Dean says finally and beckons Draco to follow him.

Hermione waits in the kitchen, chatting with Seamus in the meanwhile and keeping him away from the kettle to prevent an explosion.

It takes hours but when Draco finally steps into the kitchen he is practically beaming – at least for Malfoy standards. For normal human standards he simply doesn't look murderous and Hermione assumes it worked.

"What did you get?" she asks and stands up.

"He can't show you. It's not finished and has to heal," Dean says with an exasperated sigh. Spending time with Draco must have cost him quite some nerves but as neither of them has stormed out during the tattoo session, it couldn't have been that bad.

Hermione bites her tongue to not remind him that he had tattooed her too back when they all had gotten tiny coins and phoenixes as a reminder of the war and their fallen friends and thanks him instead.

They leave shortly after and Draco thanks her in return before they part ways again.

When an unknown grey owl knocks on her window two weeks later, Hermione doesn't think much about it, assuming one of her friends simply used a Ministry owl. The greater is her surprise when she reads the note.

"Can you come over to my atelier? DM" is written in perfect script and Hermione hesitates. She looks down on her comfortable pyjama bottoms and sighs, already on her way to get dressed. She is curious after all.

"I am glad you could come," Draco says without looking up as he does something at a table in the corner.

"Uh, sure," Hermione replies, shifting from one foot to another uneasily. "What did you want?"

"I still haven't taken the photo," he says and looks up. Turns out the thing he was working with was his camera.

Hermione blushes when she realizes that he is smiling.

"You want to take it now?" she asks, hugging herself. "I've been ready to go to bed, not to have any pictures taken."

"Well then, we can go and have dinner sometime and take it afterwards," he says nonchalantly, but Hermione isn't listening, her eyes firmly glued on his left forearm. It is almost entirely black, only a few spots remaining white.

Hermione walks over to him, mesmerized, and lifts his arm to take a closer look while he watches her silently.

Hermione's eyes widen when she realized the spots are for stars and constellations, namely those of his family. It's even more surprising that she recognizes Sirius next to Draco himself.

She looks up at his face.

His eyes sparkle with amusement. "I can explain at dinner," he offers again and Hermione blinks.

"What dinner?" she asks and Draco runs his right hand through his hair, Hermione's fingers still clutching his left one.

"The one I offered to take you on before we take the photos while you clearly weren't listening," he drawls and Hermione wants to snap at him for the second she needs to realize that he is just teasing.

"Only if you finally talk to me," she says and Draco grins.

"A dinner would be such a dull affair if it passed in silence," he replies and Hermione doesn't know if she wants to kiss him or slap him. She does neither and rolls her eyes, mentally preparing herself for another game of chess – because that's what this back and forth with Draco is and maybe, just maybe, it's their hearts at stake.

She is determined to win.