

Picatrix

Von viv-heart

"Hermione? Are you alright?" Cho waved a hand in front of her friend's face. Hermione blinked a few times before scanning her surroundings quickly. Three pairs of eyes were looking at her, various degrees of worry and boredom in them. "Yeah, sure," she said quickly and smiled. "I just zoned out."

"You do that quite a lot lately," Padma said before taking a bite from her sandwich. "I am sorry. I just have a lot on my mind," Hermione replied with a shrug.

"Just don't let that happen on a mission," Marcus muttered and Hermione rolled her eyes.

"You know better than anyone that I am at my best when we do field work."

"Doesn't change the fact, that you haven't been yourself lately," Marcus said, looking at the others for support.

"Oh, come on, Flint. Give her a break. It's not like we have had some interesting work those past weeks. I am sure the boredom is just getting to Hermione," Cho said, leaning back in her chair.

"Speaking of which, we should probably go back to work," Hermione glanced at the clock, before reaching back for her jacket.

"Why should we?" Padma asked. "We will be finished with that pile of trinkets in less than an hour, leaving us with nothing to do the rest of the afternoon."

"Even if it's a pile of junk, we have to take it seriously. One of those things might have some powerful curse on them and if we aren't paying attention, we could injure ourselves!" Hermione protested and Padma rolled her eyes.

"Really, Granger? We all could do that in our sleep," Marcus joined in. "We are the best curse-breaker team in England. Relax. Everything will be fine."

Hermione went to say something, but bit her tongue when she saw Padma's expression.

"Fine," she muttered. "We can stay here a bit longer."

"Good," Padma grinned in satisfaction. "But back to the topic: have you heard about the new antique bookstore that opened just around the corner?"

Hermione shook her head.

"Rumours say, that it has the rarest of books, both wizard and muggle and that if they don't have what you are looking for, they'll look for it for you and get it within a month. It has been open for less than a month, but everybody says, that they've gotten their special orders already. Apparently, it usually takes less than three days!" Padma explained with excitement. "Do you understand what it means?"

Hermione grinned back at her. "We might finally get our hands on Picatrix!"

Cho exchanged an amused look with Marcus, as she took a sip from her tea. Hermione

and Padma were obsessed with the idea of getting their hands on Picatrix and talked about it on every occasion.

"I guess we are going to stop there before we make our way back?" Marcus asked.

"Oh, you don't have to join us!" Padma replied.

"We do," Marcus sighed. "Or you won't come back to work for the next two days and I really don't want to deal with that rubbish all by myself."

"And what am I? Decoration?" Cho rose an eyebrow and Hermione snorted.

"Well, you could do the paperwork," Marcus winked at her, earning himself a glare.

"Forget it, Flint. It's your turn to do paperwork!"

Hermione stood up, suppressing her laughter as good as she could. "We should leave now, if we want to get to the bookstore. Marcus is right after all, we all love our books."

"You mean Marcus and I love our books, you and Padma are obsessed with them," Cho muttered, but stood up as well.

They paid for their meals and left the small cafe, chatting along the way to the bookstore. They stopped in front of a recently renovated Victorian building that had two shops on the ground level. A sign over one of them announced, that the store was called "Magical books" and Hermione rose an eyebrow.

"This is a muggle shop, isn't it?" she asked.

"It is. And the owner of this shop has quite the sense of humour," Marcus said, before pushing the door open.

They entered, and Hermione closed her eyes immediately, taking the smell of old and used books in. It was amazing, and she had to agree with the owner, that the books felt magical, even though she was clearly standing in the muggle part of the shop.

"Let's go," Padma pushed past her in an attempt to go to the magic section, dragging Cho with her.

"Go ahead," Hermione told Marcus, who was waiting for her. "I want to look around here for a bit and will join you later. If you find what we are looking for, get me."

Marcus nodded and left without another word. He had had the pleasure to go shopping for books with the girls before and knew, that the one he had to worry about was Padma, even though Cho was with her. Sometimes one person wasn't enough to restrain her.

Hermione wandered through the aisles, occasionally stopping to scan the back of a book before putting it back, until she found something that really piqued her interest. She took the battered copy of the Iliad from the shelf and opened it, closing her eyes to take in the smell again. She knew that this edition had amazing artwork in it, but she could look at it later.

"Granger?" somebody called from behind her, and Hermione startled, letting go of the book in surprise. Luckily, the person standing behind her caught it mid-air and Hermione exhaled.

"I am so sorry and thank you," she said, turning around quickly, her hand outstretched in a silent request to the stranger to return the book.

Hermione blinked a few times when she saw who was currently looking down at her, amusement on his face.

"It's fine," Draco said and offered her the book. "Did you find what you were looking for?"

"Um, I didn't have time to look properly yet," she said uncomfortably. "But why are you asking, Malfoy? I mean, this is the first time we've seen each other in what, five years, and it's quite the weird way to start a conversation."

"Oh. You don't know," Draco stated, his hand shooting up to scratch his neck as he shifted from one foot to another. "I own this place."

"Oh," Hermione echoed. "Padma didn't mention that. And neither did Marcus... I am sure they all didn't know."

"Marcus as in Flint?" Draco asked in confusion. "Is he here too?"

Hermione nodded. "Padma Patil, Cho Chang, Marcus and I came here together," Hermione explained and Draco rose an eyebrow.

"That's quite unexpected," he said slowly.

"Well, we are looking for a book, and Padma heard that you get rare books for people."

Draco smiled suddenly, tilting his head a bit and a strand of hair fell into his face. It was longer than in school and ruffled, complimenting his sharp features perfectly. Hermione's breath hitched at the sight, and she couldn't help herself but to question how she hadn't noticed before how attractive he had become. He had always been pretty, but his personality had always overshadowed that, making him absolutely unattractive to Hermione. Now that he was acting decent to her now, she could appreciate his looks.

"I am almost sure, that we have what you are looking for, and if we don't, I can get it," he said and Hermione nodded. She felt like she had ended up in some kind of parallel universe or a dream. But then, why would she dream about a ridiculously hot Malfoy? "I have to say this is all quite unexpected," she said suddenly. "You owning a shop with both muggle and wizard books and trading the rarest of rare. I would have never expected it."

"People change," Draco shrugged. "But would you kindly tell me now what you are trying to find?"

Hermione's brows furrowed. "You've asked me before?" she asked and sighed when Draco nodded. "Sorry. We are looking for Picatrix. But the original Spanish or even better Arab versions! Have you heard about it?"

"Of course. Who hasn't? But I have never seen it before, at least not in the old translations you want. What do you need it for? I could get you the Latin version easily."

"That's none of your business," Hermione replied harshly and Draco's face fell.

"You are right," he said. "It's not my place to ask. We should get your friends now and go over the details of the hunt," he turned on his heel, but Hermione caught his arm.

"Look, Malfoy," she said, "that was uncalled for. I am sorry. It's just... I have my reasons for wanting it and I don't like talking about them. But we all are mostly interested in the archaic counter-curses. We are curse-breakers, you know."

Draco's features relaxed slightly. "I understand. It's just that most people aren't too happy to see me and come here only because I am their last resort. You are one of the people who actually have every right to be angry at me and... Well, you are civil to me. It's really unexpected and I don't know what to say," he shifted from one foot to another. "I am just really sorry about everything."

Hermione nodded awkwardly. "Maybe we should get to the others?" she said and heat rose to Draco's cheeks.

"Sure," he said and led her to the magical part of the store.

"Malfoy!" Marcus called out as soon as he saw them. "What are you doing here? I am surprised that you are still alive!"

"I own this place," Draco said automatically and Marcus rose an eyebrow.

"You are hunting down rare books?"

"Growing up surrounded by the Malfoy and Black libraries does this weird thing to you, where you are an expert on rare books," Draco shrugged. "I mean, your home library is huge, but I had two which were both even bigger, with my mother's inheritance consisting of their family library and all."

"That's true," Marcus admitted. "Makes quite some sense if you put it like that."

"Now let's go over the details. Granger here said you were looking for Picatrix. I have to admit, that I haven't seen one yet, but I am sure I can manage to get a copy for you given enough time," Draco said. "Usually I am able to deliver within the week, but my deadline is a month. With this, it might actually take that long. If you manage to get your hands on the book faster than I do, you can cancel the order any time. The price of the book depends on the quality of the copy I am able to get."

"The price doesn't matter," Padma rushed to say. "What matters is that we get the book."

"Alright," Draco nodded. "Do you have any questions?"

"No," Cho, who had just checked her watch said. "If they have, they'll owl you. We have to go now or our boss will kill us."

They all left reluctantly, Padma and Hermione looking wistfully at the books, and made their way back to their office, where a pile of trinkets was still waiting for them.

Ooo

Two days later, Hermione found herself standing in front of the book shop once again. She had a day off work, as they still hadn't gotten any real work thanks to the summer break, and had wandered off, her feet carrying her here.

She pushed the door open and stepped inside.

Draco was sitting at the small table at the back of the room, reading, and looked up when he heard the bell signalling that he had a customer.

Hermione walked over to him, and he smiled at her.

"Back so soon?" he asked. "I don't have your book yet."

"I came to look at other books," Hermione replied. "Like the Iliad from last time."

"Ah, the one you almost dropped."

"Exactly," she said.

"Well, I believe I sold it earlier today," Draco said and Hermione grimaced.

"I hope you are joking," she muttered. "I was really looking forward to it."

"Maybe there is something else I can offer you? Like the magical version of the book?" he pulled out a beautiful leather-bound copy from his bag that was swung over his chair, and wiggled his eyebrows. "It's even better than the muggle version. The illustrations are the same, but they move."

"Let me take a look," Hermione took the book carefully and opened it, scanning the pages with interest. "They aren't the same," she said finally and put the book in front of Draco, who had been watching her. "Look," she said, pointing at one of the illustrations, "this illustration is missing in the other one. And in the muggle version, you have a picture of Agamemnon and Achilles arguing over Briseis on its place, not Apollo shooting the Greeks!"

"You are describing the third muggle edition," Draco drawled. "The first has this exact same motive there."

Hermione snorted. "No. The second edition had this motive there. The book you had was a first edition and had Agamemnon and Achilles."

"If you know so much about the book why do you even want it?" Draco asked, leaning back in his chair.

"It's beautiful," Hermione shrugged. "Will you get it for me? You know, since you sold

the copy I wanted."

Draco rolled his eyes. "On one condition."

"Which would be?"

"Have dinner with me," he grinned at her and Hermione blinked a few times, reminding herself that she was indeed awake.

"Excuse me?"

Draco sighed. "Come on, Granger. You've grown up quite nicely and you are still one of the only people who can match me on an intellectual level. And I know that you and Weasley broke up – I've read about his engagement to Parvati Patil in the Prophet."

"Fine," Hermione ran a hand through her hair. "I'll have dinner with you. But I want the book."

"It's a pleasure doing business with you, Granger," Draco grinned up at her. "I'll pick you up at seven."

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Draco picked Hermione up exactly at seven, just as he had promised and they went to a small Italian restaurant in muggle part of London.

"I still think it is weird that you frequent muggle London," Hermione said after they ordered.

"Magical London wasn't exactly welcoming after the war," he shrugged. "I just wish I had had taken Muggle studies or had any muggleborn friends. It would have made things a lot easier."

"You could have asked me," Hermione took a sip from her wine.

"You hated me."

"I testified in your favour at the trials," she shot back and Draco's cheeks turned slightly pink.

"I haven't thanked you for that yet," he whispered.

"Just let it be," Hermione sighed. "I just want to let everything behind. We all lost too much and deserve a new start."

Draco smiled weakly at her. "Is that why you aren't usually dating? You want to let everything behind?"

Hermione chuckled darkly. "No. I don't usually date, because it's hard to have a relationship if you are constantly away. Sure, we don't have much to do right now, but we work all around the world the rest of the year. I mean, Marcus and Oliver Wood work only because Oliver travels a lot too, and Marcus tries to be at the same place as him if it's possible."

"Well, under these circumstances I might be the perfect match for you," Draco smiled smugly.

"Oh really?" Hermione rose an eyebrow.

"Really. I travel a lot too, with looking for books and all, and I am quite flexible," he winked at her and Hermione snorted.

"You are unbelievable."

"I tried to tell you that all during school, but you didn't listen," he said, putting on his most angelic face and Hermione rolled her eyes.

"Yes, because that was what it was. I am sorry to inform you that my memory serves me just right. But really, why did you ask me out?" she asked, not looking at him, and playing with her glass instead.

"I told you. You are smart and pretty. And a good person. I would be stupid to not ask you out."

"Even after everything?" Hermione looked up at him.

"Especially after everything. Though I have to admit that I am surprised you agreed. It is you who has more than enough reasons to hate me. I have nothing that I can or want to hold against you, as it was my behaviour that caused our rivalry and hatred back in school, and I am deeply sorry about that."

Hermione nodded, biting her lip. "When did you stop believing in... that?" she asked finally.

"End of the fifth year, just after my father had been arrested. Everything went to hell after that and when I saw that he treated his followers as bad as his enemies I reconsidered everything. Some ideology wasn't worth going to Azkaban or losing my life, but he had leverage and I had to follow the orders. I wish I had had a choice."

"I am sorry for asking," Hermione whispered and Draco gave her a crooked smile.

"It's fine," he said just as their meals arrived.

After that, the tension lifted considerably and they chatted about their lives after the war and got into several heated discussions about books and curses and books about curses. The last one ended with Hermione jumping up from her chair and pointing her finger at Draco, announcing that she couldn't understand how he was collecting rare books if he clearly had absolutely no idea about them.

They were asked to leave after that and Draco paid, before they exited the place, laughing.

"I am so sorry," Hermione said, trying to catch her breath. "But you were wrong."

"I wasn't!" Draco protested, a smile on his face as well, and pulled Hermione closer by her hand. "Should I bring you home?" he asked and when Hermione nodded, they walked together to her place hand-in-hand.

"Well, that was nice," Hermione said awkwardly when they stood in front of her door and Draco grinned.

"It was. Thank you for going out with me," he said.

"Thank you for inviting me out," she replied.

"May I kiss you now?" Draco asked, his eyes on Hermione's lips.

Hermione blushed, and nodded slightly and Draco leaned down, capturing her lips with his. She put her arms around his neck as he pulled her closer.

"Well, that's what years of sexual tension do to you," Draco said after they finally broke apart, his cheeks flushed and lips slightly swollen.

Hermione, who was still in his arms, huffed and hit him playfully on the chest. "That's your excuse now, isn't it?"

Draco leaned down and pressed another chaste kiss on her lips before letting go of her. "It is. And I think I should leave now before we test the effects of that sexual tension any further."

Hermione rolled her eyes, but grinned to herself as she watched him leave.

Ooo

They went on several dates in the following three weeks, until Draco announced that he had to go out of the country to get Hermione and her friends their book.

He had been away for six days when an owl knocked at Hermione's window late at night, disturbing her reading. She stood up and walked over to let the animal in and took the letter after offering it a few treats.

Hermione opened it and squeaked in delight when she skimmed the contents, grabbing her jacket immediately, before running out of her apartment to get to the nearest apparation spot.

She apparated to work and ran to Draco's shop from there, knowing that he had a flat above it. The light was still on in the shop and Hermione pushed the door open.

The bell alerted Draco of her presence once again and he stood up from his chair behind his desk when he saw her to greet her.

"Where is it?" Hermione blurted out instead of a greeting and Draco rolled his eyes. He pulled the book from his bag, but lifted it over his head when Hermione reached for it.

"Haven't you forgotten something?" he said with amusement, looking down at Hermione's pouting face.

She stepped closer to him and stood on her toes to kiss him, and Draco swung his free arm around her waist.

Hermione snatched the book from his other hand suddenly, stepping back, her eyes glued to it. Draco cursed himself as he had gotten distracted, lowering his arm subconsciously.

"I still don't know why you wanted it so badly," he said, stepping behind Hermione and resting his chin on her shoulder as to peek into the book alongside her.

"If I am not wrong there is a way to reverse the effects of the Cruciatus," Hermione explained, not looking up from the text. "I promised Neville I would help his parents a long time ago and I might finally be able to do it."

Draco hummed, indicating that he had heard. "But don't you want to thank me to finally getting it for you?" he drawled into her ear and Hermione reached behind to pat his cheek with one hand.

"Later?" she asked and Draco sighed before stepping around and swooping her up into his arms together with the book.

"If you have to read it immediately, at least do it in my bed. I can't let you catch a cold," he said, carrying her to the back door of the small shop that lead upstairs and to his comfortable bed. "That way, I actually might get my reward some time next week." Hermione laughed and kissed his jaw and Draco grinned back at her.

"Thank you," she whispered.

"It's the least I could do."