

Winter Solstice



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Rating: R

Pairing: Draco/Hermione

Summary: Hermione struggles with romance.

Notes: Written for the **dhr_advent** calendar. The prompt was **winter solstice**. I saw the prompt and panicked, because I know nothing about pagan festivals, but then I remembered a Christmas present I was given (and loved) as a teenager, though its name was 'White Fire', not 'Winter Solstice'.

Disclaimers: **This story is rated R.**

The main characters in this story were created by JK Rowling. No offence is intended and no profit is being made by borrowing them for use in this story, which is intended as a transformative commentary on the original.

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20 December

Winter Solstice.

Leafing through the *Daily Prophet*, Hermione Granger paused at a full-page advertisement, her eye caught, not by the perfume in the foreground, but by the misty image in the background, of an elegant couple kissing passionately against a fiery sunrise...

Hermione sighed, and turned the page.

"It's Winter Solstice," said Draco Malfoy.

His fiancée, Astoria Greengrass, who until then had been excitedly tearing the coloured wrapping paper from her gift, stopped, and scowled. "You're giving me a sample of your own perfume?!" she exclaimed, in her ever-so-slightly grating voice.

Draco winced inwardly.

"First of all, my dear," he assured her, "there is no such thing as a 'sample' of one of my perfumes—nobody gets a free bottle, not even Blaise. Secondly, this isn't just any bottle of Winter Solstice, this is the very first bottle off the production line, and I'm giving it to you, my muse."

"Well," said Astoria, "when you put it like that..."

"I want you to wear it tonight," he continued, "with your new robes."

He'd had a fairy-tale gown created for her, to match the perfume's exotic packaging. He knew that, with her elfin face and her long, sable hair, she'd look stunning in it, and that photographs of them—the brilliant young entrepreneur and his beautiful fiancée—arm in arm at the Gringotts Yuletide Ball, would fill the society pages of the following morning's newspapers—on the very day that Winter Solstice officially went on sale.

He just hoped that Astoria wouldn't ruin everything by treating the reporters to one of her 'life's so unfair to us pure-blood socialites' monologues. *If only Father had chosen himself a daughter-in-law with something other than fluff between her ears*, he thought.

"...Winter Solstice," said the reporter from the *Daily Prophet*. "If I might be so bold, Miss Greengrass?" He held out his hand.

Astoria placed her hand in his, and he brought it to his nose. "Delightful," he murmured, raising his eyes to meet hers, and holding her gaze as he kissed the back of her hand. "Absolutely delightful."

Annoyed by the man's antics, Draco seized Astoria's arm and led her away, up the red carpet, towards the waiting photographers—but he hadn't taken many steps before he remembered the importance of keeping the Press on side, and he called over his shoulder, "We'll talk later. You'll find I can open doors for you." He reached into his magically extended breast pocket, drew out a spare invitation to the ball, and handed it over before he and Astoria entered the storm of camera flashes.

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The great hall of Gringotts had been transformed into a ballroom—thousands of candles danced beneath the vaulted ceiling; garlands of evergreens swathed the marble columns and festooned the wooden counters; somewhere, an orchestra was playing Viennese waltzes.

Draco scanned the merry crowd for anyone worth 'mingling' with, and was surprised to see Hermione Granger and her ginger boyfriend hovering on the fringes of the fun—both frowning as though they'd rather have been mucking out Hippogriffs than attending one of the wizarding world's most prestigious events.

Draco ran a curious eye over his former schoolmate. *It's a shame that Granger looks so cross, he thought, because she's cleaned up pretty well...* And he'd just decided that she was one of the most attractive witches he'd seen in a long while, when she suddenly turned, caught him staring, and stared right back at him.

For a long moment, each held the other's gaze.

Then Draco broke off, because Astoria was tugging at his arm, but—as he followed his fiancée onto the dance floor—he filed away the expression on Granger's face for future consideration.

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"Have you seen Astoria?" asked Draco, accosting Blaise Zabini and his pretty French girlfriend. "She told me she was going to the Ladies' room, but that was ages ago." He cast an anxious glance around the great hall. "Go and look for her, would you, Marguerite?"

"What's getting *your* shorts in a twist?" asked Blaise, after his slightly disgruntled girlfriend had disappeared on her errand.

Draco shrugged. "Astoria's acting strange."

"All women act strange." Blaise drained his champagne.

Draco considered his friend's statement. "No, they don't," he said, seriously. "But Astoria is. She's up to something, and I can't afford any trouble tonight."

Blaise dumped his empty glass with a passing waiter, and grabbed another drink. "What *are* you talking about, Draco?"

"She is not zair," said Marguerite, returning from the Ladies' room.

Draco sighed. "Thanks."

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It was the scent of Winter Solstice that gave her away.

She and her reporter friend had found themselves a broom cupboard. Draco opened the door without any warning, and almost laughed at their expressions. "You can find your own way home," he told Astoria, and left them to it.

Draco was no saint—that, he'd readily admit—but he'd been raised to believe that a pure-blood husband did not betray his wife—at least, not until after their union had borne fruit and they'd come to some mutual arrangement—and he'd been faithful to Astoria since the day their fathers had drawn up the Marriage Contract.

He wondered how many times she'd cheated on *him*.

When he got back to the great hall, he realised that it would have been better for business—

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and would certainly have meant less trouble with his father—if he'd dragged Astoria out of the cupboard, cleaned her up, and taken her back to the party, smiling as though nothing had happened.

But the thought of that made him feel... somehow, less of a Malfoy, and he left the ball without another word to anyone—not even to Hermione Granger, who still seemed to be staring at him.

21 December

"Winter Solstice," said Ginny, excitedly, "that's Draco Malfoy's new perfume!" She grabbed Hermione by the arm and steered her towards the window of Madam Malkin's Robes for All Occasions. "Look!"

Hermione's head was aching and her stomach was queasy, but she was refusing to admit that—thanks to Ron's usual grumpiness, and the embarrassment of having been caught ogling the Draco Malfoy in question—she'd drunk far more than she should have done the night before, and had a hangover. She willed her stomach to behave itself and, gingerly leaning forwards, peered through the window at the bottle of glittering, iridescent glass—vaguely familiar from the adverts—standing on a pale, silver-gold pyramid, beneath garlands of vivid green leaves and plump red berries—and felt a sudden and uncharacteristic desire to own it.

"Come on," said Ginny, excitedly, "let's try it on!"

"You do know," Hermione protested, as she followed her friend into the shop, "that the perfume part of a perfume only costs a few Knuts to make, don't you? They spend the real money on the seductive packaging—and then they add a huge mark up—"

"No, this is different," Ginny insisted, weaving through the crowd of excited women. "I read all about it in last week's *Witch Weekly*. It's filled with tiny flakes of pure, white gold, charmed to vibrate on your skin so it shines like winter sunlight,"—Hermione's stomach heaved—"and there's a rumour it contains a rare secret ingredient, so it transforms itself according to whoever's wearing it. I've been dying to see what it does for me!"

"That rumour was obviously started by Malfoy himself, Ginny, to—oh, Merlin!" Hermione clamped her hands on the edge of the perfume counter and swallowed hard. "And there's no price on it. It must cost a fortune."

"One hundred Galleons an ounce," said Ginny, "according to *Witch Weekly*."

"As if the Malfoys needed any more money."

Ginny's hand shot out, beating two other women's to the Tester. "Hold out your wrist," she ordered, expertly spreading her elbows to fend off her angry rivals.

Hermione responded with a murderous—if rather sickly—scowl.

"Hurry up, Miss Boring Knickers—hold it out."

"Grrr," said Hermione, but it was easiest just to give in.

Ginny pulled the tall, elegant stopper from the bottle and stroked the delicate glass rod, loaded with perfume, on Hermione's wrist, then she dipped the rod again, and applied it to her own. The Tester was immediately torn from her grasp by Millicent Bulstrode.

In concert, Hermione and Ginny raised their hands, and sniffed.

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Hermione smelled a sharp tang, like something rotten, which might possibly have had something to do with the hangover, but which—coupled with her earlier reaction to the bottle in the window—immediately made her spider-senses prickle. *Is Malfoy using Dark magic to snare his customers?* she wondered.

She sniffed again, but the sour smell had already disappeared, leaving behind a glorious bouquet of green winter blossoms, warmed by the fragrant equivalent of pale yellow sunlight, then cooled by just a hint of frosty white cloud...

Hermione had to admit that it was absolutely ravishing—but, of course, Malfoy had always been good at potions.

She looked at Ginny.

Her friend smiled back at her with dewy eyes. "This will have Harry down on his knees, proposing to me all over again," she said, dreamily.

"Hmmm," said Hermione. *It would certainly do no harm, she thought, to search the Ministry's archives for anything suspicious about Draco Malfoy, his business, his perfumes, and any other potions he might be foisting on the innocent public.*

"Winter Solstice," Astoria muttered, screwing up the weird robes that Draco had made her wear to the Gringotts Yuletide Ball, and stuffing them in a cardboard box.

Her ex-fiancé's note had been short and, though far from sweet, unambiguous:

I cannot marry a woman who might try to pass off another man's bastard as my son. You may keep the ring.

The breakup was admittedly a setback, because her parents were counting on her to marry money, but she was confident her father would soon find her another husband—someone with an even bigger fortune.

The ring was already at Glister and Finding's, awaiting a valuation.

And Draco...

Well, she thought, Draco has only himself to blame, always making me feel stupid—of course I had the odd fling, when a man treated me like a proper woman.

She picked up the bottle of his precious perfume, dumped it on top of the robes, closed the box, and called for one of the house-elves: "Parsley, take this to St Mungo's Charity Shop for me."

22 December

"Winter Solstice," murmured Hermione, tapping her quill against her lips, "hmm, Winter Solstice."

So far, her search for evidence of wrongdoing on Malfoy's part had proved fruitless. She re-read her notes:

*Sentenced to two years in Azkaban.
Overturned after served 8 months. Fortune restored.*

Winter Solstice

Licence to purvey potions granted 3 September 2003.

Malfoy Perfumes registered 11 December 2003.

Draco Malfoy + Blaise Zabini partners.

Accounts 2004 - 2007 deposited with Department of Company Regulation.

Registered Trademarks: Queen of the May (2005) | Saturnalia (2006) | Winter Solstice (2008).

Magical Patent pending on new process for extracting essential oils.

"Nothing particularly suspicious there..."

She scoured the *Daily Prophet's* weekly consumer column for reports of shoddy merchandise, and drew a blank. She hunted through three years of court records for law suits filed by wronged employees, or by customers poisoned or disfigured by Malfoy's perfumes, and found none.

"But I *know* you're up to something, you sly, unscrupulous... impossibly sexy person!"

She scratched her forehead, and the scent of Winter Solstice, lingering on her wrist, summoned up an image of the man she'd seen at the Gringotts Yuletide Ball—tall, lean and beautiful in his white tie and tails—making her hungry in places that, quite frankly, hadn't been hungry in years—though that was, *obviously*, as much her fault as Ron's.

Merlin, she wanted a bottle of that perfume!

And—oh, Merlin—she wanted Malfoy himself, in her bed or, better still, in one of the lifts at the Ministry of Magic, trapped between two floors, and completely at her mercy...

Hermione raked back her hair. *He must have cast a charm on the bottle, she thought, or incorporated a love potion in the scent, or—or SOMETHING! It's Dark magic that's making me so obsessed with him!*

"Arrggh!" She thumped her desk.

There was only one thing to do.

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Since the Being Division, despite some very creative pleading on Hermione's part, had declined to foot the bill for a bottle of Winter Solstice, a little ingenuity was called for.

It took her almost ten minutes to work her way to the front of the jostling crowd, grab the perfume Tester, drop a bead of perfume into the specially miniaturised and Disillusioned vial strapped to her wrist, and beat a hasty retreat.

Women were still fighting to buy the stuff.

And Hermione would soon know why.

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"Arrggh," she cried, thumping the workbench. Winter Solstice had defied her every attempt to analyse its ingredients.

Malfoy had definitely wrapped the finished product in a charm, but—as Anthony Goldstein had pointed out, when he'd come to see what all the yelling and thumping was about—that was standard practice with consumer potions, and didn't necessarily mean that there was anything Dark going on.

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Hermione slumped on her stool. The smell of the perfume was driving her crazy, conjuring up detailed mental images of herself doing unspeakable things to Malfoy...

And of Malfoy enjoying it.

And the strangest thing was that she actually felt that, wearing Winter Solstice, she *would* have the nerve to seduce him.

She was so tempted to go back to Madam Malkin's and buy a bottle of perfume.

But, no.

That would be like sleeping with the enemy.

There was only one thing—one other thing—to do.

Winter Solstice, wrote Draco, in his elegant handwriting.

He was adding up the first day's sales figures. They were phenomenal—the new perfume seemed to appeal to all ages and, despite its price tag, to all pockets. Winter Solstice was already a brilliant success.

He sighed.

He hadn't loved Astoria—fortunately, as it turned out—she'd been his father's choice, not his. *But what sad sort of bastard*, he wondered, *despite having wealth and social position to offer, despite being reasonably presentable and—he'd been told—a more than decent lover, couldn't hold on to his own fiancée?*

His father had wanted him to give Astoria a second chance, until Draco had pointed out that the reporter he'd caught her shagging had been a Squib. He hadn't needed, then, to explain her potential impact on the Malfoy bloodline.

Draco tried to focus on the figures.

But he'd created Winter Solstice with Astoria—an idealised Astoria—in mind: her style, her vivacity, her scent when they were intimate. He'd lost more than his fiancée; he'd lost his muse.

What he needed was another woman to inspire him.

What he *wanted* was a woman he could love, and who would love him; a woman he could trust; a woman who was as bright as she was sexy...

And he was shocked when a face appeared in his mind's eye.

23 December

"Winter Solstice!" said Ron Weasley. "Wow!"

Ron knew nothing about lip colours, or eyeliners, or any of those other things women seemed to think were so important, but even *he* had heard of Draco Malfoy's new perfume, which had been featured in the previous week's *Quidditch Scoreboard*—'Score with HER this Christmas'—and which seemed to have every woman he knew in a tizzy...

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And *there* was a bottle of the stuff, sitting in the window of the St Mungo's Charity Shop!

If that won't smooth things over with Hermione, he thought, *nothing will*. He glanced furtively up and down Diagon Alley. It was still early. The only people out and about were shopkeepers, like himself, going about their business. There was no competition.

He peered through the window. The Charity Shop, staffed by volunteers, didn't open until ten o'clock, but he could see Susan Bones pottering about in the storeroom at the back.

He knocked on the glass.

Susan came out into the shop, and pointed at the clock behind the counter.

Ron clasped his hands together and begged.

Susan's expression changed—Ron knew she'd always been a little bit sweet on him—and, with a rueful smile, she opened the door.

"I'm sorry, Susan," he said, "I know you're still closed, but you might just be able to save my life."

"...and, *especially*," said Hermione, slapping her Ministry paperwork down on the reception desk, "Winter Solstice production." She'd had to call in every favour she was owed—and a few she wasn't—to get a warrant to inspect Malfoy's perfume manufactory.

The receptionist selected an extendible ear. "Mr Malfoy..."

As she was waiting, Hermione looked round Malfoy's premises. The building was Victorian, formerly a broom factory, located not far from Diagon Alley and, if the foyer was anything to go by, Malfoy had spent a fortune converting it—

She saw the receptionist's face light up and, realising that Malfoy must be standing right behind her, she slowly turned round.

He was much taller than she remembered, and even more impressive, dressed impeccably in severe, traditional robes.

She tried to take a deep, calming breath—

"Granger," said Malfoy, holding out his hand as though he were pleased to see her.

Hermione took it, then made the mistake of looking up into his eyes, and—

Oh, those eyes! Like a stormy winter sky!

And those lips—

Merlin, those lips are moving, she thought. *Malfoy must be saying something!*

"...so we'll start with the workshop," he was explaining, "which is where I compose the perfumes, and then I'll show you round the manufactory." He stepped aside, indicating that she should precede him through the door. "But what I don't understand, Granger, is why the Being Division's so interested in Malfoy Perfumes. I mean, we don't employ any goblins or elves, and the few animal-based ingredients we use are traditional, and sourced from licensed suppliers."

Those were all excellent points. "Well, we—um—we just need to make sure," Hermione stammered.

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"Now this one." Malfoy scattered a few drops of his latest blend onto a silk handkerchief and waved it in the air.

Hermione closed her eyes and—as he'd shown her earlier—took a few short, sharp sniffs, followed by one long inhale. "A warm summer evening," she announced. "There's definitely orange in there. And ginger. And... Is it cola?" She opened her eyes and looked up at him.

Malfoy was smiling. "Very good," he said, "but you've missed one very important ingredient."

Hermione sniffed again. "No. I've no idea." She shook her head.

"Flitterbloom." He re-corked the flask. "We find that tiny traces of an unpleasant odour can add a real kick to the blend."

"Is that why Winter Solstice smells so sour when it first touches your skin?"

Malfoy looked surprised. "That's impressive, Granger. Most people don't notice that." He leaned closer and spoke softly, as though sharing a secret, "You know, you have an exceptional nose."

Hermione was suddenly feeling rather warm. "Are you going to show me round the manufactory now?" she asked.

Malfoy stepped back, and carefully set the flask down on his workbench. "Of course."

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It was fascinating to see how Malfoy had combined the traditional, Mediaeval extraction processes with more modern potion-making techniques, all in a scrupulously clean environment—the last factor, Hermione suspected, influenced by Muggle science.

He introduced her to four witches, capped and robed in white, whose job it was to fill and stopper the bottles.

"And then," he said, "they're levitated to the security department, where Septimus,"—a young wizard bowed to Hermione—"casts a Wrapping Charm on them to prevent anyone separating the perfume into its constituent parts and copying the mixture—though I don't know how well the charm would stand up to a serious attack."

"Pretty well," said Hermione, before she realised what she was saying. "That is, I assume..."

"You tried?"

Hermione bit her lip.

"Why, Granger?" His voice was soft, and she wasn't sure whether he was angry, or just curious.

"I—um—well, it was the effect it was having. On—um—on women... On *me*. I wanted to be sure there was nothing... Um... You know..."

"I know," he said, quietly. Then he added, "There isn't."

"I'm sorry..."

"We sell a dream, Granger. We design the whole thing—the fragrance, the packaging, the advertising—advertising's Blaise's department—to make women feel they can have a little bit of the life they long for; the life they truly deserve."

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"It works."

"It may be cynical, but it's not illegal. And you mustn't think, because of it," he continued, "that my perfumes aren't genuine works of art. I'm very proud of them. They use all of my potions skills. Winter Solstice actually contains—"

"A secret ingredient," said Hermione, smiling now, "so that it transforms itself to match the wearer."

"It's fluxweed," said Malfoy.

"The key ingredient in Polyjuice Potion. Clever!"

"My perfumes break new ground, Granger. Uncle Sev—I mean, Severus Snape—would be proud of his pupil."

"I'm sure he would," said Hermione. "And your father must be proud, too," she added, because it seemed odd that he should mention Snape but not Lucius Malfoy, and something about the way he was being so open with her—and seemed so anxious to impress her—was making her feel strange—almost *protective* towards him.

"Well," he said, "I think Father's proud of the money."

As they'd been talking, Malfoy had led her back to the foyer. He opened the front door for her and, as he held it, he asked, "Will you be at the Ministry Ball tomorrow night, Granger?"

Hermione had been dreading the Ministry Ball—all the dressing up, the wearing high heels, the pretending not to notice Ron's foul mood—but, for some reason, when Malfoy asked her, she simply smiled, and said, "Yes."

"Then I'll see you there," he replied.

"You've bought a bottle of Winter Solstice!" said Pansy Parkinson. Ron looked over his shoulder.

Pansy, who had a part-time job at Weasleys' Wizarding Wheezes 'just to get out of the house', had been tidying the broom cupboard, and had spotted the elaborate box sticking out of his cloak pocket. "Hermione's a lucky woman," she said, giving him a brave little smile...

And, at that very moment, Ron realised that he and Hermione were a lost cause, and that Hermione must have come to the same conclusion months earlier. He decided that they needed to talk—to plan how to break the news to their family and friends, and to work out how to ensure that their own friendship survived unscathed—as *soon* as possible.

"Well," he said, turning to Pansy, his heart feeling lighter than it had in years, "I actually got it for *you*,"—which, in retrospect, he realised, was true—"and it was supposed to be a surprise, but it's better if I give it to you now, then you can wear it."

"And is Winter Solstice performing as well as expected?" asked Lucius Malfoy, in the disdainful drawl he always affected when talking about Draco's perfumes. He was seated at his desk, perusing *An Anthology of Eighteenth-Century Charms*.

"Yes, Father," replied Draco. "In fact, *better*." He pulled up a chair, and sat down.

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Lucius eyed him, curiously.

"I've chosen myself a wife," said Draco, because he knew there was no sense in beating about the bush. "She's beautiful, intelligent, considerate; she's loyal to a fault; and she's interested in my work. I like her, Father, and I believe that she likes me."

Lucius leaned back in his chair, steeping his elegant hands. "And do I know this paragon?" he asked.

Draco smiled. "Yes, Father. Quite well, in fact."

Lucius's haughty expression suddenly slipped; his pale face turned ashen. "Who is it?" he asked, hoarsely.

"Hermione Granger," said Draco.

Lucius's eyes narrowed: "Marry that Mudblood, Draco," he whispered, "and I will cut you off without a penny."

"I don't need a penny, Father."

"I shall disown you."

Draco had already decided that the best way to deal with his father's anger would be to withdraw and let it burn itself out—though he realised that *that* might take several years. But, as he reached for the door handle, he couldn't resist turning back, and saying, "This family *needs* new blood, Father. And I know that, in time, you'll come to love your grandchildren, because it isn't in your nature to do anything else."

24 December

"Is that Winter Solstice?"

"Yes!" said Pansy, happily. She'd had to empty out the entire contents of her make up purse to find the lip colour she was carefully touching up, so the perfume was lying in full view. She glanced at the speaker in the mirror, and was shocked to find herself eye-to-eye with Hermione Granger.

Pansy had agreed with Ron that he should bring Hermione to the ball as planned, and she knew that he wouldn't have had the opportunity to have 'the talk' with her as yet. "I—er,"—she tried not to look guilty—"a friend gave it to me. Would you like to put some on?"

Hermione smiled back at her—"Yes. Thank you,"—and waited patiently whilst Pansy popped her vial of lip colour back in her purse, then handed her the bottle of perfume. "You know," she said, as she stroked the glass rod on her wrist, "I visited the manufactory yesterday."

"Really?" said Pansy, surprised. "Draco's usually so secretive about his perfumes. *I've* never been allowed in his workshop, and I was rubbish at potions."

"Well," said Hermione, thoughtfully. "It was official Ministry business."

"You're wearing Winter Solstice," said the sexiest voice in the world.

Hermione spun round, smiling.

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"I hope you didn't buy a bottle?" he added.

"No," she said, her smile turning into a cheeky grin, "Pansy Parkinson let me put on some of hers."

"Ah. Well, I shall have to thank Pansy. She's given me a reason to be proud of it again." He held out his hand. "Care for a walk on the terrace, Granger?"

"The Ministry has a terrace?"

"Only for tonight. It's up on the roof."

Hermione scanned the ballroom until she spotted Ron. He was dancing with Pansy Parkinson, looking happier than she'd ever seen him, and a little bell rang in her head—but she decided that *that* could wait until later. "I'd love to," she said, taking Malfoy's arm, and letting him lead her out into the hallway, and into a waiting lift.

"Terrace," said Malfoy. Then, after they'd risen a few floors, he seemed to change his mind. "Wait!"

The lift stopped.

Hermione looked up at him, puzzled.

"What's your opinion on blood purity, Granger?" he asked.

"Is that a trick question, Draco? Or have you forgotten that I'm a Mudblood?"

"Oh, Granger..." Tentatively, Malfoy seized her hands. "What I'm asking," he said, softly, "is, do you think you can forgive a man who's committed cruelties—crimes—in the name of blood purity?"

"Do you mean your father?" she asked.

"I mean me."

"You didn't commit any crimes, Draco."

"You don't know, Granger."

"Yes, I do," she replied, firmly. "I've read the transcript of your trial, and I know that what you did, you did under duress. I've read the transcript of your appeal, and I know what you refused to do. And I *remember* how you refused to betray Harry and Ron and me. You paid for what you did, with eight months in Azkaban and, since then, you've built a life you can be proud of."

"Merlin, I want you," he whispered.

For several long moments they gazed at each other, the tension between them almost audible.

Then Hermione pulled Malfoy closer, and they were kissing—

He was kissing her in the lift at the Ministry of Magic! He was dipping her like the man in the Winter Solstice advert!

And, although he was trying to keep it from her, Hermione knew—she could feel—that he was aroused, and she smiled at his delicacy, because—oh, Merlin!—she'd had sex that was less exciting than the mere grasp of his hands at her waist—even her tingles had tingles!

She wanted *him*, too! So much!

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"Ron," she gasped.

Malfoy drew back. "I'm sorry?"

"I have to make things right with Ron, Draco," she explained. "First. Before we... You know. Before we let things go any further. I *want* them to go further, Draco—I do!—but..."

"Oh, Granger!" Malfoy hugged her tightly. "You're perfect!"

She wasn't sure what he meant by that, but when he kissed her again it was with a restraint that told her he understood her scruples.

"Lemon, honeycomb, and just a hint of nutmeg," he breathed.

"Hmm?"

"You," he said. "Lemon, honeycomb, and just a hint of nutmeg. You're a powerful aphrodisiac, Granger."

"Are you planning to make me into a perfume?"

Draco nuzzled her ear. "No way," he said. "I'm not having every Tom, Dirk or Albus turned on by the scent of my woman. But I'll make perfumes *for* you, Hermione. And *with* you, I hope."

In answer, Hermione stretched up on tip-toe, and kissed him thoroughly. Then, "*Your* woman?" she teased.

"*My* woman." He returned her kiss just as thoroughly. "Better get used to the idea," he murmured.

"Mmmm," said Hermione, blissfully. "I really don't think that's going to be much of a problem, Draco. Though I do think I ought to go and have that talk with Ron before I let you get *too* possessive."

THE END