

## A Fairy Tale Romance



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Title: **A Fairy Tale Romance**

Story Number: -

Rating: NC-17

Pairing: Draco/Hermione

Summary: Hiding his feelings for Hermione, Draco tries to put things right between her and Ron... with a little help from his grandmother.

Author's Notes: Draco pronounces Grand-mama, *Grand-ma-mar*. The lyrics are from *My Life Would Suck Without You* by Kelly Clarkson, as requested by the recipient of the story.

Written for the **dramione\_duet** Challenge.

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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## **A Fairy Tale Romance**

### **I. The Fair Maiden**

"Draco!"

Draco pauses for a split-second to reply, "'Night, Granger," before plunging into the safety of the lift, and growling, "Foyer."

"Wait!" She moves with terrifying speed. "I might as well ride down with you," she says, slipping through the closing doors and smiling up at him, adding, for the lift's benefit, "Archive." She shows Draco an armful of scrolls. "I have to return these, and it's on the way."

He nods.

"Are you coming to Ron's party tomorrow night?" she asks.

"No."

"Oh... That's a shame."

He doesn't offer her any excuse or apology, and they stand side-by-side, in uneasy silence, until the lift stops, the doors open, and she steps out, turning to murmur, "Well... Good night, then, Draco."

He nods again.

Then the doors close, and he relaxes, leaning back against the wall, and shutting his eyes tight.

He's no idea when the buck-toothed, bushy-haired, Muggle-born know-it-all who tormented him at school became the beautiful, sexy, sophisticated know-it-all who torments him at work.

But he thinks it must be Merlin's retribution for his past sins.

In fact, he thinks his entire so-called life must be Merlin's retribution for his past sins.

Because it certainly isn't a bugging *Life*.

...

### **II. Cinderello**

The gates of Malfoy Manor stand tall and proud, which is more than can be said for the house behind them. Draco slips through the bars, and tramps down the long, straight path that leads to his ancestral ruin.

From behind the shattered façade—its stonework cracked and blackened, its windows broken and melted—a few wisps of smoke draw Draco's eye, warning him that the Fiendfyre's broken out again. The seat of the fire's close enough to the kitchens to make him slightly anxious, but experience tells him that once the flames have grown to sufficient size, the Ministry's containment spells will activate, and eventually starve them out.

He sighs.

*Home Crap Home.*

## A Fairy Tale Romance

There's a grubby white peacock scratching about on what used to be the lawn, and Draco gives it a wide berth, turning right, and following the path to the kitchen block.

He pushes the door open and steps inside.

The kitchen, at least, is warm and welcoming—the fire's still glowing, the soup he'd prepared before he left for work that morning's simmering gently on the range, and the laundry he'd washed and wrung out the previous night smells crisp and dry.

There's no sign of his parents and he assumes that, as usual, they've spent the day in their beds.

He dumps his few purchases on the kitchen table and sets about lighting the candles.

There'd been an outcry when the Wizengamot had passed sentence on the Malfoys. The *Daily Prophet*, having campaigned for the Dementor's Kiss, had called it a scandal when Narcissa had been fully pardoned (thanks to the risk she'd taken in protecting Harry Potter), and Draco and his father had been spared Azkaban and, instead, condemned to a life without magic (except in performance of a Ministry-approved job, or in self defence).

The *Prophet* had published a vicious cartoon, showing the Malfoys lounging on sunbeds in some Caribbean retreat, drinking cocktails and paying others to cast their Unforgivable Curses for them.

Draco prepares two trays with silverware and napkins.

In reality, with no house-elves and no domestic magic, with the entire Manor (save the kitchen block) reduced to a pile of perpetually-smouldering rubble, with the Malfoy assets frozen pending further investigation, and with his father and his mother both sulking in their beds, the sentence had condemned Draco to a life of slavery—cooking, and cleaning, and laundering—and forced him to hold down a boring clerical job at the Ministry, just to put bread on the table.

To his mother's tray he adds a tiny crystal vase—bought with his first paltry Yuletide bonus from the Ministry—and a single rosebud, salvaged from the ashes of the rose garden, in the hope that a little cheerful colour might help coax her out of bed.

He lifts the lid from the pot of soup, and tastes it, adjusting the seasoning before he fills two bowls, and sets them on the trays.

*How could a man in his position even contemplate any sort of relationship with a woman?*

He knocks at his father's door and, hearing no response, he opens it and enters, setting down the tray, and lighting a candle.

His father doesn't bother to acknowledge him.

Draco shrugs—"Shout if you want anything else,"—and closes the door behind him, knowing full well that when he goes back to fetch the tray, Lucius will have devoured everything on it.

He takes up the second tray and knocks at his mother's door.

"Come in, darling."

Unlike his father, who's wallowing in self-pity, his mother's taken to her bed as an act of

## A Fairy Tale Romance

defiance, wearing her quilt like a suit of armour, which is why Draco doesn't mind taking care of her so much, and why he hopes that, eventually, she'll get her fight back, and rejoin him in the real world.

He's lonely.

"What is it tonight?" she asks, arranging herself on her pillows.

"Chicken noodle," he says, laying the tray in her lap. He's a decent cook, though he says so himself.

"You're a good boy..."

"Do you need anything else, Mother?"

"No, darling. You go and have yours while it's still hot."

Back in the kitchen, he sits down wearily, and picks up his spoon.

*Granger, he thinks, is probably out on a date with Weasley.*

*Ginger git.*

He eats slowly, savouring his own cooking, enjoying the crusty bread he's bought from the new bakery in Diagon Alley, sipping a glass of the oak apple brandy he's rescued from the partially collapsed wine cellar—and, by the time he's finished, he's decided to leave his chores until the morning, and have an early night.

He fetches the trays from his parents' rooms, has a quick wash, and turns in.

When the Ministry had sent the Malfoys home to a pile of rubble, Draco had had to take the initiative—he'd moved his parents into the undamaged kitchen block and turned the scullery and the pantry into bedrooms for them, scrubbing the floors and painting the walls, and scavenging bits of furniture for them from elsewhere in the Manor.

All that had been left for *him* was a narrow cot shoved into the alcove beside the kitchen fire.

*It's not exactly, he thinks, somewhere you could bring a girlfriend.*

He closes his eyes and thinks of Granger, remembering how lovely she'd looked, with her cute little frown, when he'd told her he wasn't going to Weasley's party.

*She'd almost looked—he frowns, himself—disappointed. Yes, disappointed.*

*Maybe she wanted to dance with me, he thinks. Maybe—*

*Oh, shut the fuck up, Draco!*

He turns onto his side, grabs his pillow, and pulls it down over his head.

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## A Fairy Tale Romance

### III. The Fairy Grandmother

The following morning—Saturday—after making breakfast, and washing up, and preparing the vegetables for lunch, Draco sets out on one of his foraging missions, sifting through those parts of the Manor that aren't either blighted by Fiendfyre, or teetering on the edge of collapse, or buried beneath a ton of fallen masonry.

By midday, his haul includes a set of silver spoons, only slightly tarnished (which he thinks he'll be able to clean up and sell); a porcelain vase, miraculously still intact (ditto); and a book on Advanced Potions (which he can still read, even if he's not allowed to practise potion-making any more).

He's already on his way back to the kitchens when, in the remains of the Entrance Hall, he spots a glint of gold and—with high hopes—he clears away a pile of wood, to find nothing but an old oil painting, in a battered gilt frame.

He lifts the picture up, and turns it over.

"Hello, dear," says its occupant.

Draco pulls out his handkerchief and carefully wipes a smear of soot from her nose.

"Thank you, dear."

He recognises her, of course—she's Sophonisba Malfoy, wife of Abraxas Malfoy, mother of Lucius Malfoy, and his own paternal grandmother.

"I'm sorry you've been left lying here so long, Grand-mama," he says.

"Oh, I'm fine, dear." She smiles with that genuine-looking warmth that only a very old lady—or, sometimes, Granger—can manage to pull off. "How are you?"

He shrugs.

"Oh dear," she says, making herself more comfortable. "Tell Grand-mama what's wrong." And she gives him another of her worryingly kind smiles.

Draco sighs, and sits down on a marble step, and he doesn't even know what he's going to tell her until he starts talking—and then he tells her everything.

"Lucius always was a drama queen," says his grandmother. "Take me to him, dear, and I'll sort him out. And then we'll set to work on you."

...

After thirty minutes shut up with his mother's portrait, Lucius emerges from his bedroom washed and dressed, rouses his wife, and takes her for a walk in the devastated grounds.

*To plot his counter move*, thinks Draco. And he can't help wondering if Grand-mama's intervention is really going to make things any better on the father front.

"Now, dear," says his grandmother, "we need to get *you* ready."

Draco dries the last of the lunch plates, and sets it on the table. "Ready for what?"

## A Fairy Tale Romance

"The Ball tonight."

Draco shakes his head. "It's not a Ball, Grand-mama, it's a party—a Muggle-style thing. And I'm not going."

"Nonsense, dear. Of course you're going."

"I can't, Grand-mama. I've no way of getting there, and—even if I had—I've only one decent set of clothes, which I wear to work. I couldn't—"

"Let me see what you're wearing now, dear. Come here."

Draco hangs up the tea towel and, with a sigh, stands like a statue in front of his grandmother's portrait.

She draws her painted wand.

"That isn't going to work, Grand-mama."

"Oh, pish-posh," she clucks. Then she points the wand at him, and mutters, "*Commuto Vestis.*"

Draco feels a sudden warmth spread across his chest, then along his arms and legs, and he looks down at himself, and gasps, patting his clothes with his hands, scarcely able to believe that his grandmother's managed to transform his faded shirt and patched trousers into a well-cut suit of the darkest green-black silk.

He smiles up at her with new respect.

"It won't last, I'm afraid," she says. "So you'll need to be home before midnight. Now... Yes, fetch me that—that *thing*—over there, dear. The thing with the wooden handle."

"It's called a mop, Grand-mama," says Draco, squeezing the water out of it. "I use it for cleaning the floors."

"Goodness, dear! Well, never mind, it should still do nicely." She points her wand at it. "*Fugio.*"

Draco feels the mop rise in his hand, and silently commands it to wait. "But I'm not allowed to fly, Grand-mama," he points out. "Except to work."

"You're not allowed to fly a *broom*, dear. But that's a whatchamacallit."

Draco grins. *Clever.*

"Now," says his grandmother, "you'll need some flowers for your young lady."

"She's not—"

"That rather pretty plant, dear, on the table—bring it closer."

It's a cauliflower, and Draco watches his grandmother transform it into a bouquet of delicate wild flowers, wondering how she can possibly know that Granger's the sort of girl who likes that sort of thing.

And he feels a sudden, unexpected pang of gratitude. "What must I do to repay you, Grand-mama?" he asks.

## A Fairy Tale Romance

"You've already paid me, dear, by pulling me out of the ashes," she replies. "But," she adds, showing him why she's always been considered the blackest of the Malfoy family's many black sheep, "if you really feel the need to do something more, just pass on a little kindness to someone else."

...

### IV. The Weasley Ball

Draco hides his mop at the back of the stack of brooms, smooths his jacket and straightens his tie, then climbs up the steps to Weasley's front door, and knocks.

The door opens—and a flood of noise pours out—and, "Draco!" cries Granger, greeting him with a hug. "You *came!* I'm so glad!"

Draco shoves the flowers into her hands. "They're for you," he mumbles.

"Oh, they're beautiful," she says, sniffing them. "My favourites! Thank you!" She gives him one of her thousand-candle smiles, and Draco wonders if she's taken some sort of Beautifying potion. "Come inside," she says and, closing the door and taking him by the arm, she leads him into the sitting room, which is dark and crowded, crammed with what seems like hundreds of—unfortunately—familiar faces.

"Just make yourself at home," she says. "I think you know everybody—the drinks are over by the window—help yourself—and there are nibbles all over the place—I'll go and put these in some water..."

Though he knows she means him to mingle, Draco follows her into the kitchen.

She's wearing a long, flowing gown of some translucent Muggle material, with a neckline that plunges all the way down to her waist and, though he's sure she'll have cast a charm to keep herself in place, the thought of what *might* happen brings him out in a cold sweat.

He fixes his eyes on her face, but that does nothing to curb his imagination, and—not for the first time—he finds himself longing for her, aching to take her into his arms, and kiss her, caress her, and—

"Draco?"

"I'm sorry?"

"I said, shall we dance?"

"Oh... Yes."

She flashes him another devastating smile, and then—taking him by the hand—she leads him back into the sitting room, where she drags him into the mass of bodies and carves a little space for them, and they both jig around to some inane music with a repetitive beat, which he's pretty sure's *Muggle*.

"Where's Weasley?" he asks and, as he leans forward to shout the words, the over-enthusiastic dancer on his right decides to throw out her arms and whack him in the face.

He lets it pass.

## A Fairy Tale Romance

"He's in charge of the music," says Granger.

She lifts her hands above her head, and gyrates her hips, and Draco almost passes out but, fortunately, his crazy neighbour chooses that precise moment to stamp on his foot, and revives him.

"I—I need some air..." He flees, pushing his way through the dancing crowd and stumbling through a pair of glass doors, where he finds himself on a narrow balcony.

It's a cool, autumn night. He closes his eyes, and breathes deeply.

"You don't like crowds, do you?" Granger's followed him outside.

He sighs, raking his hand through his long hair and, when he turns towards her, he's surprised by the intensity of her gaze. "I shouldn't have come," he says.

"Of course you should." She moves closer. "You're almost a recluse, Draco. You never eat with us at lunchtime, you never join us for a drink after work. I worry about you."

Her words are like a spell and, for a moment, the world seems to shrink into a tiny bubble of night, holding nothing but him and Granger...

Then she's in his arms, and he's kissing her, and hearing her moan, and her hands are sliding inside his jacket and spreading across his back, and he's holding her tight, and kissing her harder, and she's arching up, and pressing herself into him, and her body—their bodies—their bodies are—

"Hermione?"

They spring apart.

Weasley's standing in the doorway, trying—by the look of him—to kill Draco with a wordless, wandless *Avada Kedavra*. "What's going on?"

"Nothing," says Draco. "Nothing at all."

And he hears Granger gasp, and feels her fury, in his head and in his chest, but he can't bring himself to look at her, can't bring himself to apologise and, after an aeon of angry, sizzling silence, she turns her back on him, and lets Weasley take her inside.

...

Draco has no idea how long he stands on the balcony, getting colder and colder but, by the time he's summoned up the courage to go back inside, the party's changed. Someone's transfigured something into a small stage, and people are taking turns to stand on it and, holding what looks like a large, black ice cream cone, to sing along to Muggle 'music'.

Everyone seems to think it's fun.

Draco scans the crowd, but can't see any sign of Granger, and he's just about to make a run for it when someone shouts, "Come on, Ron!"

"Yeah, Weasley! You next!"

## A Fairy Tale Romance

Draco watches Weasley climb onto the stage.

The song he's chosen has no particular melody (that Draco can discern), but its words, he thinks, are significant:

*...we belong together now  
Forever united here somehow  
You got a piece of me  
And honestly  
My life would suck without you...*

And as Weasley embarks upon the next verse—something about being wrong for *tryin' to pick a fight*—the crowd seems to part, and Draco spots Granger, gazing adoringly at the ginger bastard.

...

"Did you have a good time, dear?" asks his grandmother.

Draco returns the mop to its bucket and, swallowing the lump in his throat, nods half-heartedly. "I need to turn your face to the wall, Grand-mama," he says. "So I can get undressed."

"That's all right, dear." She sits down, and grasps the arms of her chair, as though the manoeuvre might be life-threatening. "Did the suit last long enough impress your young..." She frowns. "Where's your other shoe, dear?"

...

## V. The Love Charm

Sunday, Draco learned in Muggle Studies, is supposed to be a day of rest.

Unfortunately, no one seems to have told that to the Wizengamot and, after getting up, and fetching the coal, and lighting the fire, and cooking the breakfast, and suffering his father's stony silence, and washing the dishes and drying them, Draco collapses onto a chair, his tea towel still in his hands.

"Are you ever going to tell me what happened at the Ball, dear?" asks his grandmother.

Draco turns to face her portrait. "Nothing happened, Grand-mama," he says. "Granger liked her flowers, and we danced, and then..." He shrugs. "I came home."

He doesn't intend to say any more, but she tortures him with one of those expectant silences and, within seconds, he cracks. "She... She likes Ron Weasley, Grand-mama. She's liked him since we were all at school. He goes off with other women sometimes, but they always seem to get back together again, so..." He shrugs again. "That's that."

His grandmother regards him thoughtfully, tapping her finger against her pursed lips. Then, "Suppose I were to grant you one wish, dear," she says. "What would you wish for?"

"Granger," he says, without hesitation.

"Are you sure?"

## A Fairy Tale Romance

Draco's first thought is that five years buried under a pile of rubble has damaged his grandmother's brain, and he's about to say, "Of course I am," when an image of Granger, gazing up at the ginger fuckwad pops into his head.

*I want her to look at me like that, he thinks. I want...*

*I want...*

"I'd wish that Granger was happy," he says, lamely. "With me. Or with him, I suppose, if that's what she really wants." And he slumps in his chair, half expecting the ghosts of his more typical Malfoy ancestors to appear, and haunt his arse off.

"Then what we need, dear," says his grandmother, smiling angelically, "is a love charm."

That comes out of nowhere, like a snitch on a foggy day, and Draco protests. "Those don't work, Grand-mama," he says. "They don't create real love. And, besides, I'm not allowed to use magic, and you—I know you're brilliant at Transfiguration—but even *you* can't brew a love potion in there."

"I'm not talking about a potion, dear. I'm talking about a charm. And it's Muggle magic, so it doesn't count."

"Muggle *magic*," he says, imbuing the oxymoron with the scorn it deserves.

"Oh, Muggles used to use all sorts of charms, dear, for finding husbands, and removing warts, and restoring hair. Before they converted to Modern Science."

Draco shakes his head. She's as mad as a hatter, but—he has to admit—she's really creative when it comes to getting around the Wizengamot's ban. "So," he says, "let me get this straight. We're going to bring Granger and Weasley together for good, and that's going to make *me* live happily ever after?"

"Something like that, dear," says his grandmother. "Now, this is what I want you to do..."

...

The next day—Monday—Draco becomes a stalker.

He's no intention of speaking to Granger, not after the party debacle so, instead, he lurks—beside the lift—behind the scroll cabinets—in the little alcove that has a perfect view of her office door—waiting until she pops out, leaving her door ajar, so that he can slip inside, unseen.

His first two attempts draw a blank, but on his third he hits pay dirt—she's left her little beaded bag lying upon her desk, and he picks up a quill, and gently teases it open. *You're far too trusting, Granger*, he thinks. *You should have put a Caterwauling Charm on this.*

He pokes about amongst her possessions until he spots a handkerchief, carefully pulls it out, pockets it, and makes his escape.

...

Weasley proves much more difficult and, skulking around the men's bathroom for a couple of days, Draco comes perilously close, on more than one occasion, to attracting some very embarrassing attention before he spots Weasley leaning over one of the basins washing his

## A Fairy Tale Romance

face, and he's able to sneak up behind him, and pluck a single hair from his ginger head.

"Ow!" yelps Weasley, rubbing his scalp. "What the hell are you doing, Malfoy?"

All Draco's carefully prepared excuses vanish. "A w-wasp," he stammers. "Crawling on you. I got it off." He holds up his hands. "No magic—you know—just..." He flicks his fingers.

Weasley's eyes narrow, but he says no more and, with a sigh of relief, Draco watches him stalk away.

...

"Take me outside, dear," says his grandmother.

Draco picks up the portrait and, carefully fitting it through the kitchen door, carries it out onto the patch of barren earth that used to be the kitchen garden.

"Put me down over there," says his grandmother, "beside that little house."

Draco leans her against the coal shed.

"Have you brought everything, dear?"

He nods. From his trouser pockets he pulls a trowel, and a vial containing Weasley's hair; from the breast pocket of his shirt (close to his heart), he takes out Granger's handkerchief.

"Dig a small hole."

The ground is hard, and scratching a shallow depression takes a surprising amount of effort.

"Now," says his grandmother, at last, "place the hair on the handkerchief, dear."

With much perseverance, and not a little nausea, Draco's already tied Weasley's hair into a tiny coil. He spreads out Granger's handkerchief, and sets the hair upon it.

"Now dear," says his grandmother, quoting from memory, "'Fold it once, fold it twice, fold it three times...'"

Frowning, Draco does his best.

"Turn it right..."

"What?"

His Grandmother shrugs.

Draco slides his hand under the little parcel, and flips it over.

"Turn it left..."

Muttering a few choice obscenities, Draco flips it back.

"And say the magic words..."

*A proper spell, at last!* "What words, Grand-mama?"

## **A Fairy Tale Romance**

"Well, the Muggles aren't specific, dear, so just say whatever comes into your head."

Draco brushes his fingertips over Granger's handkerchief. "*My life sucks without you,*" he says.

"I suppose that will do," says his grandmother. "Cover it up, dear."

Draco takes the trowel, and carefully buries the parcel. "Now what?"

"Now, we wait and see."

"*Wait and see?*" Draco's entire body sags.

"That's how Muggle magic seems to work, dear."

...

For the next few days, he keeps visiting the patch of ground beside the coal shed.

At work, he hovers outside office doors, and beside cubicles, listening anxiously for any gossip about Granger's love life.

But, although he's pretty sure that *Weasley's* got something going on, Granger seems to be doing nothing, except working ridiculously long hours.

...

## **VI. The Dragonhide Slipper**

Draco's hanging out the laundry when he hears the Manor gates demand to know who's trespassing.

(The wards, counting as self defence, are still in operation).

He dumps the sheets back in the basket, and jogs across the patchy lawn, coming to an abrupt stop when he recognises his visitor. "Granger..."

"Hello, Draco."

She's clasping something to her chest. "I think this is yours," she says, holding it out, and it takes him a moment to recognise the dragonhide shoe he'd lost, fleeing from Weasley's party. "There was a cauliflower, too," she adds, "but I've eaten that."

She waits expectantly.

Then, "Can I come in?" she asks.

Draco glances back at the smoking remains of his home. "Well, um, it's not..."

"Will *you* come out, then?"

Draco imagines himself walking down Diagon Alley in his worn shirt and trousers, drawing scornful looks from anyone who remembers the Malfoys' former arrogance. "Come in," he decides. "Just walk towards me."

## A Fairy Tale Romance

She gives him a brave smile, and then—closing her eyes, and hugging his shoe—she takes three determined steps, and passes through the bars.

She opens her eyes. "Malfoy," she gasps, "it's a ruin!"

"Yes, I know."

"Oh,"—she turns to him, looking contrite—"I'm sorry, Draco, I didn't mean... I just meant... How can you possibly live here?"

He explains about the kitchen block.

"But wouldn't it be better to move out? They've refurbished some of the houses—"

"My parents need me," he says, firmly, "and they'd never move. Besides,"—he shrugs—"I can live here for free. And I manage all right."

She nods, thoughtfully, but doesn't reply and, in the silence that follows, he suddenly remembers his duties as a host. "Would you like to stay for lunch? I made some macaroni cheese, but my parents have gone out—"

"That's my favourite."

He offers her his arm and, taking the long route, which is safer, he leads her past the front of the house, around the corner, along the collapsed east wing, and through the still-standing archway to the kitchen garden. "Um..." he says, "I was just hanging out the washing when you arrived."

Granger smiles up at him. "Do you need some help?"

...

Granger and his grandmother immediately take a liking to one another, and they talk, and laugh, and Draco joins in, serving up his macaroni cheese with roast vegetables, and olive bread, and a lovely white Bordeaux rescued from his father's wine cellar.

He realises he's the happiest he's ever been.

And, later, when Granger goes to 'freshen up', he leans towards his grandmother, and whispers, "I don't think your love charm has worked, Grand-mama." *Thank Merlin.*

"Don't you, dear?" His grandmother glances down the corridor that leads to the lavatory door. "Quick," she hisses, "put me in your father's bedroom!"

...

Granger insists on helping with the washing up. "I've been looking into the reparations you're being forced to pay," she says, drying a plate and setting it on the table, "researching possible legal challenges,"—and Draco realises, with some disappointment, that this is the real reason for her visit—"because I think that, if you could get some of your money back, it might... Well, you know..."

Draco wipes his hands and, gently taking the tea towel from her, risks taking both of her hands in his. "I don't care about the money," he says.

## A Fairy Tale Romance

"But I think," Granger persists, "that, if you had your money back, it might restore some of your self-confidence." Her eyes search his face, uncertainly. Then, suddenly, and to his astonishment, she bobs up on tip-toe, and kisses him.

On the lips.

"Granger!"

"I'm sorry."

"No..." He draws her into his arms, and they kiss again, and this time it's warm, and tender and, when it ends, he holds her close, touching his forehead to hers. "Thank you," he says.

"Come to my office on Monday," she replies, "and we'll go over—"

"No," says Draco. "I mean for *this*."

She blushes. "Well, I knew I'd have to make the first move..."

"But I thought—you and Weasley..."

"Ron?" She shakes her head. "Ron and I are very good friends, Draco, but... No. Besides, Ron's spoken for, and I think it's going to last this time." She smiles. "They're sneaking around like Romeo and Juliet, and he thinks he's got everyone fooled, but I know it's Pansy Parkinson."

"Pansy?"

"She hasn't told you?"

"Pansy and I... We don't... She couldn't possibly marry a squib, so we don't..."

"You're not a squib," she says indignantly. "And, anyway, what if you were? Why would it matter?"

He smiles into her hair. "Spoken like a true Muggle-born."

She pulls away from him, bristling.

"No, Granger! No!" He pulls her back. "That wasn't an insult. Honestly. I just meant that you can see beyond the lack of magic."

"You're not a squib, Draco," she says, firmly. "You're someone who's received a cruel and unusual punishment. And *I'm* stupid, because I should have realised that losing your magic would matter far more than losing your money. I'll start on Monday..."

...

The only comfortable place to sit down is on his bed, and that leads to more kissing, and to cuddling and, gradually, to lying down.

Draco cradles Granger in his arms.

He wants her but, somehow, the desire isn't urgent, it's...

Comfortable.

## A Fairy Tale Romance

*This is enough, he thinks. Just holding her like this, and knowing that she likes me... I can live with taking it slowly, I can wai—"Wow!"*

"Is my hand cold?"

Draco swallows hard. "No, not cold—just—just a surprise."

"A nice surprise?"

"Oh yes. Very nice."

She smiles wickedly, leaning over him to watch his expression as her fingers explore his length, and his girth, and find his most sensitive places, and then...

She nuzzles his neck, and her hand slides down, and cups his—

"Granger!"

Her hand is not cold.

Her hand is warm; bone-meltingly warm.

Words whirl round his head, dire warnings about men, and what can happen to girls who tease them but, before he can voice them—

"Make love to me, Draco," she whispers. "Please."

A muddle of swearwords tumbles from his lips, and Granger giggles, and it's the sexiest thing he's ever heard.

"Does that mean yes?" she asks.

"If you're sure."

"I'm certain."

"My parents could come back at any moment."

"Do you mind if I use magic?"

*Only Granger would think to ask that.* "No."

She withdraws her hand—and, embarrassingly, he hears himself whimper—and, pulling out her wand, she transfigures part of the ceiling into a thick curtain that screens off the alcove, then casts a *Muffliato* Charm.

"All safe," she says.

Draco kisses her gratefully, and she responds, and their kisses quickly grow heated until, suddenly, they're unfastening buttons, and pulling fabric aside, and—

"Oh," she gasps, "oh Draco!"

...

## A Fairy Tale Romance

The next morning, Draco awakes with a startling thought.

His life really isn't that bad—in fact, with Granger beside him, it's good.

He wakes her with a lingering kiss, and shares his revelation, and sure enough—with the aid of his grandmother—she's soon devised a plan, which the three of them put into action.

...

## VII. Happily Ever After

The gates of Malfoy Manor stand tall and proud, unaffected by the building work that's going on behind them. Draco and Hermione slip through the bars and, hand-in-hand, walk across the lawn.

The old façade's still standing—its stonework still cracked and blackened, its windows still broken, a few wisps of smoke still rising from somewhere behind—but to the right, stretching out from the kitchen block, the walls of a new wing are already standing two storeys high.

Draco opens the kitchen door, and they go inside.

The kitchen—now their living room—is warm and welcoming. Above the fireplace, Draco's grandmother stirs and, peering out from her frame, she smiles. "Hello dears. Have you had a good day?"

"Just the usual, Grand-mama," says Draco, putting away their few purchases.

Hermione clears her books from the table and, together, they set to work, preparing supper.

When Hermione had performed a miracle, and persuaded the Ministry to return part of the Malfoy fortune (including a villa in the south of France), and then his Grand-mama had performed another miracle, and talked his parents into emigrating, and then he, himself, had performed the biggest miracle of all, and got Hermione to marry him, the obvious next step would have been to rebuild the Manor.

But they'd resisted, converting his mother's old room into their own bedroom, and using his father's room as a guest room whenever his or Hermione's parents came to stay. *It was as though*, Draco thinks, as he chops the onions, *we were both afraid that changing things might somehow break the spell.*

But two months ago they'd discovered that the guest room would soon be needed as a nursery—Draco smiles—and Hermione had realised that, as a consequence, the number of parental (or, rather, grandparental) visits was likely to go through the roof. *Almost literally.*

So they'd engaged a firm of specialist builders, since—although the Ministry had been persuaded to relax the ban on magic—Draco was still not up to doing the work himself, and Hermione needed to take things easy, in her condition.

"What are you grinning about?" asks his wife, smiling.

"Oh, I was just thinking," replies Draco, "that, if you were to write this story down, no one would ever believe it."

**THE END**