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**Title:** Stealing Time

**Author:** hiddenhibernian

**Rating:** PG-13

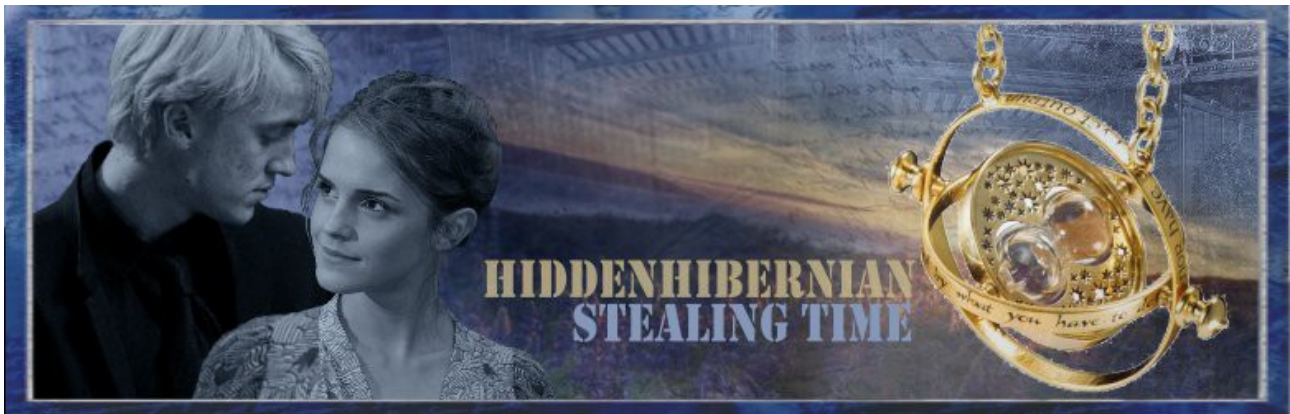
Word Count: ~14,000 words

**Summary:** The stakes are high, and failure is not an option. It's a good thing Draco is on the case.

**Warnings:** Draco occasionally has a foul mouth. That's about it.

**Author's Note(s):** I had so much fun writing this, I can only hope it translates to the reader. I did try to hit as many of your kinks as possible, but after a while the story took flight and wrote itself, more or less. That's why there is a short version, and a long PDF-version.

I had an absolutely fantastic beta reader, 4fanci, who did an amazing job with the draft that kept running away from me. Any remaining mistakes are my own – do please point them out if you notice any.



Draco's dragonhide boots click-click-clicked against the floor as he marched through the double doors to Weasleys' Wizarding Wheezes and up to the sales counter. All eyes turned to him, as he pulled out a small parcel, carefully wrapped, and placed it on the counter.

"This," he declared, "is cursed!"

Draco felt his announcement merited a better audience than Ronald Weasley and a snot-nosed teenager stocking the shelves at the back.

"Really?" Weasley asked, carefully unwrapping the parcel, proving the last decade hadn't improved his understanding one whit. Dark Lords may rise and fall, but Weasley still remained an idiot. He finally extracted the contents, and held it up to the light. "Ah. I've tested all these myself, so I think I would know if they were. Why do you think it's cursed?" He screwed his face up in what probably was meant to be a reassuring smile.

"Whenever I try to use it, everything flickers," Draco explained sullenly. "It's like having a seizure – when it's over, things that I don't remember have happened." He was still shaky from the shock of seeing a glass of water he knew he'd spilt returned to an upright position, full of water, this morning. The little golden disc had seemed like a perfectly ordinary ornament until then, when he finally had connected it with the strange occurrences marring last week. All of them had happened when he had been wearing his new robes, with the golden disc pinned to the collar.

"It's not a curse, it's a feature. Didn't you read the manual?" Weasley asked.

With an elegant shrug Draco conveyed that he didn't read manuals; he employed people who did it for him.

"Well, if you had, you'd have known it's a Mini Time-Turner, our latest bestseller. It's supposed to turn back time." Weasley launched into what was clearly a practised speech. He probably had it tattooed on his left arm so he'd remember it. "Are you tired of life's little disasters mounting up, when they could be easily prevented? With our Mini Time-Turners, you'll never cast a charm just to regret it instantly afterwards again. Turn back time thirty seconds, and you'll save yourself hours."

"You've made Time-Turners?" Draco was reluctantly impressed. Blaise's behaviour when he'd handed Draco his birthday present a few weeks ago made sense now; he'd been very excited about something Draco had assumed was

purely decorative.

"Yeah. Neat, isn't it?" Weasley held out the little disc so Draco could examine the tiny hourglasses engraved on it, with an even tinier WWW at the bottom. "They only work for thirty seconds, but still."

Draco had always wanted to see a Time-Turner. He hadn't expected them to be sold over the counter, however. During the last few days, he had feared his Black heritage finally had caught up with him and he'd lost his marbles. "I still don't think it's right," he muttered.

"You can speak to our Complaints Department if you like. She's over there." Weasley pointed to a desk in the opposite corner, beneath a knitted banner saying "Complain Here". The greying witch behind the desk gave Draco a little wave and a cheery smile.

Recognising her as Weasley's mother, Draco decided he was urgently needed elsewhere. Ever since the Battle of Hogwarts, she'd given him the willies. It was the combination of badly knitted jumpers and magic powerful enough to bring down his mad aunt. Molly Weasley wasn't someone he cared like to cross if he could avoid it.

Draco thought he saw someone in the doorway opposite the shop, but as he emerged on the street in the dripping rain she had disappeared. The weather was probably to blame for the lack of customers – it was a truly rotten day, British weather at its very worst. This time, he noticed the display in the Weasleys' Wizarding Wheezes windows, announcing a Timely Revolution, with a Sold Out! banner plastered across it.

Meandering through Diagon Alley despite the steadily growing downpour, Draco eventually decided to cut his losses and stopped for two takeaway coffees before Apparating to the Ministry. No one accosted him as he made his way from the Atrium to the Department of International Magical Cooperation and Blaise's desk, where he drew up a chair and made himself comfortable.

Strictly speaking, Draco wasn't supposed to be there. He had, however, long since realised that paying attention to what he was supposed to be doing was unlikely to get him where he wanted to be.

To ensure his admittance to the International Magical Office of Law, Draco always brought coffee. The Ministry provided passable tea but its coffee was execrable, and Blaise was a bit of a coffee snob. Being Slytherins, they had ensured their arrangement benefitted both of them – Blaise got a drinkable cup of coffee, and Draco got access to the latest Ministry gossip.

Eventually, Blaise showed up, and Draco put his memos back in his in-tray. It seemed Hopkins was on the verge of resigning from the International Confederation of Wizards, judging by the exasperated tone of his weekly report.

"Morning. Sorry I'm late, someone got themselves arrested in Paris. A Frenchman will never use one word when three would suffice. How are things?"

"Passable," Draco said, lifting the warming charm on the coffee. According to Blaise, it was never quite as good as a fresh cup, but beggars couldn't be choosers. "I saw Weasley this morning. He's as freckled as ever."

"I always thought he forgave you on purpose after the war, so he could feel extra saintly. He doesn't even sneer at you anymore, does he?"

When Weasley had announced he'd buried the hatchet, Draco had resorted to goading him to see if he would crack. He didn't, and Draco had eventually given up. He blamed Granger; she had been full of how different things should be for a few years after the war, and she seemed to have convinced her boyfriend too.

"No. Although his smile is hardly an improvement."

"He and Granger broke up recently, maybe that's why," Blaise suggested.

"Or maybe he was born ugly. Who knows. "

"What were you doing visiting him, anyway? Or the shop, I suppose."

Draco summoned his moleskin pouch, which was insulated against magic to avoid objects inside being detected at inconvenient moments (such as the wand weigh-in at the Ministry of Magic). He carefully pulled out the Mini Time-Turner, and held it up to Blaise.

"I'm afraid I didn't grasp the revolutionary nature of this little gadget when you gave it to me. Did you know what it was?"

"Pansy has talked about little else since they were released. I'm surprised she didn't bend your ear, too."

"She's got a new boyfriend, who apparently finds it hard to grasp that Pansy has no desire to become Mrs Malfoy." So had Draco, not that many years ago, but any awkwardness had been dispelled with time and his belated understanding that marrying your oldest friend just because you have to marry *someone* isn't the best path to future happiness.

"Ah." Blaise picked it up, careful to only touch the edge of the disc. "Pretty, isn't it?"

"That's not really the point. Have you used it?"

"No. As a rule, I tend to give gifts I haven't used first."

"Pansy might have offered you a loan of hers, or something."

"Don't make me laugh – she doesn't trust anyone with it. How would she ever fix her nails if someone broke it?"

"It doesn't matter. It's – it's not right. It's like the whole universe shudders, and then it feels like the ground is a little askew for hours afterwards. And Pansy is using it to paint her nails?!" Draco did have to admit Pansy had always had an admirably practical outlook on things. She only cared about what affected herself directly.

"So you don't like it, then? I thought I'd hit on the perfect present for the man who has everything."

"I didn't come here to complain, I just wanted to find out if you've felt the same. It's eerie. I actually thought it was cursed, at first." Having grown up in Malfoy Manor, this was not a conclusion Draco had come to lightly.

Blaise examined the Time-Turner through narrowed eyes. "I'd offer to give it a go, but you're not exactly selling it to me." He pursed his lips, considering. "Sod it, I'll always wonder if I don't try. How do you use it?"

"Since when did you become an honorary Gryffindor? Put your finger here, and tap three times – not yet!"

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Draco felt like someone had beat him over the head with a hammer made of felt, and he noticed the walls seemed to be vibrating just a little. "You just used it, didn't you?"

Blaise looked at him with concern. "Yes, you just told me not to just as I was doing it, remember?"

"The point is I don't, because it never happened. The last thirty seconds have been erased."

"So you never accused me of being an honorary Gryffindor?"

"What?"

"Forget it, it made sense at the time." Blaise sighed. "I can see what you mean – it's like everything has been given a wobble. And you don't remember anything?"

"No. You're the only one who will ever know."

They stared at each other, horrorstruck.

"How are they allowed to sell that?!" Blaise asked, blinking at the wealth of ways the Mini Time-Tuner could be misused.

"It was designed by a bloody Gryffindor – they have no fucking imagination," Draco said gloomily. Thank Merlin it wasn't his problem – he didn't relish being on the clean-up squad once the Ministry cottoned on to the implications of releasing Weasleys' little time machine to the general public. "Wouldn't they have had to get it approved by the Ministry, anyway? Who's running the Improper Use of Magic Office these days?"

"Good question." Blaise rummaged through his top desk drawer, as always in a deplorable state of disorganisation, and finally pulled out the Ministry directory. "Department of Magical Law Enforcement... Auror Office – did you know

Potter got promoted?... Human Resources... Here it is – Improper Use of Magic Office, Head of. Ah." He showed Draco the page, complete with picture and all.

"Hubert Bones." Draco knew him, of course – he was the widower of Amelia Bones, and had shown little interest in his Ministry career before his wife had been killed during the war. Apparently, he had escaped the attack that killed her because he had been thrown out of the marital home before it occurred. For the remainder of the war, he had holed up with his mistress.

When the dust had settled after the Battle of Hogwarts, Bones hadn't wasted his golden opportunity to milk the Ministry for all it was worth. In addition to a huge compensation claim, he had got promoted several times. No one was going to sack Madam Bones' widower, so each superior ended up passing him on through a sideways promotion rather than putting up with his incompetence permanently. The last time Bones had crossed paths with Draco, he had been mucking up the record of the Accidental Magic Reversal Squad – they must finally have managed to get rid of him.

And now he was in charge of approving new products from Weasleys' Wizarding Wheezes, Merlin help the Wizarding world.

When he left Blaise's office and made his way out of the Ministry, Draco was thoroughly depressed. A complete nincompoop like Bones could screw up again and again, and no one seemed to care. Draco, however, had made one colossal mistake at the age of sixteen, and consequently was still perceived as beyond the pale by most of the wizarding world. All right, it was mostly by the former Order of the Phoenix and associated affiliated organisations he was shunned, but at the moment they happened to be running the Ministry.

Draco wasn't paying attention to his surroundings as he decided against another Apparition – Blaise's use of the Time-Turner still had his head spinning – and chose the exit to the Muggle side instead. Some fresh air might help.

He was staring at the Muggle vehicles racing by – *automobiles*, he reckoned they were called – almost wishing he could go in one. They went so fast – he'd seen some in the countryside that almost had overtaken his broom, and they looked quite comfortable on the inside.

Then someone spoke, right next to his left elbow. "Draco Malfoy, I presume?"

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Once Draco got over the shock of being accosted by Granger in the street – it only figured it had been a Muggle street, at that – he started wondering what she wanted from him. Fortunately, she seemed intent on sharing whatever was ailing her, and Draco allowed her to bundle him into the nearest Muggle cafe, owned by someone called Costa. It was an odd name, but he seemed intent to plaster it all over the place, even on the ungainly cups coffee was served in.

It wasn't very good coffee either, compared to Fortescue's finest, and Draco made a face as he took his first sip.

"It's chain coffee, Malfoy – get over it."

"Funny," he remarked. "I thought I was doing you a favour by consenting to accompanying you here, and you're already complaining. Perhaps I should leave." He pushed out his chair, and was surprised when she grabbed his hand to prevent him from rising.

"Sit down."

She must have laced the command with magic somehow, because Draco's knees folded automatically. "Don't get your knickers in a twist, Granger," he said, to cover it up. It wouldn't do to let her think she could boss him around, like she did with everyone else.

"The future of the wizarding world is at stake. And the rest of the world, but I suppose you don't care about that." Her eyes were bloodshot and lined with fatigue, and her face was so pale the circles under her eyes shone an unhealthy purple. Whatever it was, Granger was taking it utterly seriously.

"Is the Dark Lord due another resurrection?" Draco asked flippantly, trying to hide an unwelcome twist in his stomach. If the thrice-damned tyrant was coming back again –

"Tom Riddle is dead, and he won't be coming back," Granger said confidently, and Draco released a breath he didn't realise he'd been holding. "This time, it's something else."

"Am I permitted to ask what it is, then?"

"You own one. Weasleys' Wizarding Wheezes' Mini Time-Turners."

"What?" How the hell did she know that?

She rolled her eyes, taking a sip of the substandard coffee. "If you'd like to keep it secret, I suggest you refrain from making a scene in Weasleys' Wizarding Wheezes."

"I'm pretty sure you weren't there at the time. And I wouldn't have thought Weasley would be too keen on having you pottering around at the back, either." Now that Blaise had put the idea in his head, Draco vaguely remembered some breathless articles in the *Prophet* about the 'Dream Couple' breaking up. It hadn't been an amicable split; he recalled that much.

"I am a witch, you know."

"Clearly." With distaste, he watched her tear another packet of sugar open and pour it into her coffee – she acted like she was as much at home in the Muggle world as the wizarding one. Perhaps that was the way with Muggle-borns; Draco didn't know many.

"Having established that, I propose we proceed with saving the world. As you've noticed, something is very wrong with the Mini Time-Turner devices. Instead of moving the person holding them back in time, they make the whole world move instead."

Draco frowned. "That's impossible, Granger."

"So you would think. Unfortunately, that's not the case – when you use a Mini Time-Turner, the last thirty seconds never happened. Not just for you, for everyone."

His headache was getting worse just thinking about it. "But that can't be true. What happens if two people use them at the same time, for example? Do we lose a whole minute?"

"Pray that we never find out, is my advice. I think time would stop entirely, but it's impossible to be certain without testing it. Which I'm not keen on, for obvious reasons." Granger looked grim, and Draco was reluctantly beginning to believe her. It would explain the itching sensation that something was utterly wrong, and the distaste he felt at the mere thought of using the device again. As a Malfoy he had strong magical lineage, probably the best in Britain – it was only natural he would detect there was something wrong even if others didn't notice.

That didn't explain Granger's concern, though.

"Have you got one, too? Or how do you know?"

"I've got five." She opened her coat to show him five golden discs, neatly pinned in a row on the inside. "I couldn't afford any more."

"Explain to me again why you're apparently stockpiling these instruments?" Granger didn't look mad, but Draco had learnt these things weren't always obvious to the uninitiated (Black family gatherings were always tricky).

"So I can destroy them, of course. Unfortunately, there is another 146 in circulation – 145, I suppose, excluding yours."

Not mad, then, although perhaps slightly bonkers. "Splendid. Tell me, why didn't you just tell Weasley not to sell them in the first place? It would have made things slightly easier."

Granger blushed an angry red, which granted her appearance no favours whatsoever. She still had the mad hair, but otherwise she looked just like a normal witch – albeit one that hadn't slept in the past week. "Ron refused to listen to me," she said in a tight little voice. "As did his family. They seem to believe that just because we broke up recently, I'm trying to ruin his first big invention."

"And you're not?" Draco didn't think so, but it didn't hurt to be sure.

"I'm slightly more concerned by the integrity of the time-space continuum than Ronald Weasley's feelings."

He had a flash of inspiration. "Tell me, did the fact that he suddenly developed a Time-Turner have anything to do with

you? Didn't you use to have one at school?"

Draco had found out afterwards, long after all Time-Turners had been destroyed. He had always wanted one, and it somehow made sense that Granger should get one and not him. Dumbledore had always favoured Gryffindors – Slytherins had only had Snape who looked out for them.

"Yes, I did, and yes, Ron did take my research notes and build the Mini Time-Turner from them. Adding the fatal flaw of tearing the universe to shreds in order to make it work."

"I see why you're so concerned. Not everyone fucks up so royally they actually destroy time."

"Thank you. You, on the other hand, have always been perfect in every way." She shouldn't sneer; it was like being savaged by a kitten.

"I wouldn't say that," Draco admitted modestly. "I was a bit of a twat at school."

"A bit of a –" Her chest was heaving, and her hair was starting to escape the messy bun she'd wrenched it into. She drew a long, shuddering breath that seemed to calm her somewhat. "What I need you to do is to buy all 146 – no, 145 – Mini Time-Turners, so we can destroy them. Hopefully, we'll do it before something very bad happens and time as we know it disintegrates."

Draco closed his mouth as soon as he realised it was hanging open. "We?"

"Yes. I don't notice anyone else lining up to save the world, so today is your lucky day." She smiled brightly, but it didn't reach her eyes.

"Did I miss something, or how did I suddenly get involved?"

"Because you're filthy rich, and you understand the danger. The good news is that this time, you don't need to get a tattoo."

Draco was about to walk out of the coffee shop to show Granger she couldn't boss him around the way she did with Potter, when her mask slipped a little. She wiped a tear from her eye so quickly he almost didn't notice, and he realised she was on the verge of falling apart.

"When was the last time you slept, Granger?"

"Three days ago, when I got the list of customers who bought the Minis." She drew a heaving breath, trying to keep everything together, and Draco realised he wasn't at all relishing seeing Granger on the edge of a breakdown. Unfortunately, she was in the habit of being right – if she was worried, he probably should be, too.

Sod it – he didn't have any plans for this week. He may as well save the world before he went on holidays on the 17th.

He wasn't going to show Granger he gave in that easily, however. "If I do decide to help you, what's in it for me?"

"Other than a chance to live the rest of your life without constantly fearing time will break down?" When it became obvious Draco wasn't going to be satisfied with that, she continued with bad grace: "Fine, an Order of Merlin, once the Minister finally realises Hubert Bones doesn't have a clue what he's talking about."

"It had better be First Class," he informed her. "Malfoys don't do second class."

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It turned out 150 names came to nearly four full pieces of parchment. Five of the names had already been neatly crossed out, including his own.

"How did you get this?" With the list, their task was a daunting prospect. Without it, it would have been useless to even make the attempt.

"Ginny Wea– Potter, I mean. She's the only Weasley who'll listen to me, but she's not very involved in the shop. I don't know how she got it, but you'd better not tell anyone we have it."

"I'm a Slytherin, Granger. Unlike Weasley, you can assume I can put two and two together without using my fingers."

"Really, because you didn't exactly strike me dumb with your brilliance at school. If I recall correctly." She tapped the list, and the names were rearranged in alphabetical order.

"I should have been so lucky," Draco mumbled, but other than a sharp sideways glance she ignored him.

"I suggest we use some form of common approach to contact the owners start with, to keep it as simple as possible. The question is what we could do to contact them all at the same time."

Draco had spent most of the previous night turning it over in his mind, fascinated by the problem despite his attempts to convince himself he only was doing it for the potential Order of Merlin.

Well that, and the continued existence of time as he knew it.

"A product recall would be the most logical method – we inform them there is a problem with the device, and offer to send an owl to collect it. The punters get reimbursed, so they couldn't care less that it's not WWW that's collecting the Time-Turners."

Granger pursed her lips. "Yes, but what if someone decides just to bring it into the shop instead? Once Ron and George find out, they'll contact all the other customers to tell them it's just a mistake – or a spoof."

"Have you got a better idea?"

"Yes, I do." She launched into the explanation before Draco could take issue with her certainty. "Offer them twice – no, three times what they paid, saying you're a collector looking for one. They don't need to know you're going to buy all of them. That way, they also have an incentive to reply to the ad as quickly as possible. Then we can chase down the ones who don't want to sell."

"How much did they cost?" Draco knew he wasn't going to like the answer, but he didn't expect it was going to be as bad as it was.

"2,500 Galleons." Granger at least had the good grace to look embarrassed.

"Multiplied by 145 – that's..." Draco pulled out his wand, but she beat him to it.

"362,500 Galleons."

"Fucking hell, Granger. Voldemort asked for less than that."

"In this case, it will be money well spent," she said, with asperity. "You'll be buying yourself a future."

"And everyone else," Draco muttered, mentally calculating the state of his vault at Gringotts. He'd have to sell a few bonds early –

"Your family is supposed to be the wealthiest in Britain," she pointed out.

"My family, not I."

"You're their only son – I find it hard to believe they're letting you scrape by without a Knut."

"Not even I burn through a couple of hundred thousand Galleons in a quarter. Where's your contribution, by the way?"

"Besides contributing the brains of the operation –" she began.

"Oh, really? Because –" Draco interjected, but she paid him no heed.

"– I've already spent my savings on acquiring the first four. Once you've none left either, we can consider ourselves equal." Well, that stacked everything in her favour. Bloody Gryffindors and their selective ideas about 'fairness'. The worst thing was that he couldn't think of a counter-argument. "Besides," she continued, "I don't think all 145 will reply anyway."

"What do we do then, oh wise one?"

"Depends on the person. If it's..." She let her finger run down the list of Mini Time-Turner purchasers, and stopped near the top. "Anthony Goldstein, say, I simply Floo him and explain that it's important, and I'm sure he'll be happy to help."

"And if they're not so obliging?" Did she think people were just going to hand over the wretched things?

"Then we have to acquire them by other means, of course. Between us, we should be able to organise a simple burglary successfully, don't you think?"

"You are mad. I wasn't quite certain before, so thanks for the confirmation." Draco was grateful they had agreed to meet at her apartment rather than in public – this way he wouldn't be associated with her. Unless they were caught in the act.

"As the last resort, obviously. Listen, if it were easy, I would have destroyed them already." Granger still seemed convinced she'd come up with an ingenious masterplan, and that Draco's presence was merely a formality. Except for footing the bill.

"You haven't considered other means, like –" Draco cast around for a way of convincing the recalcitrant to let go of their Time-Turners, "– pretending to be a repairman sent out to collect it, or something?"

"I did say it depends on the person. We'll simply have to place the ad and see who replies," she explained like he was six years old and a bit dim.

"We," Draco muttered. He was pretty sure he knew who'd be paying for a full-page ad in the *Prophet*. "'We' have to decide if we want to do a targeted ad, or a blanket one."

"What do you mean?" The know-it-all did have some gaps in her knowledge, and she didn't even seem embarrassed to admit it.

"When you're advertising in the *Daily Prophet*, you're offered a choice of your ad being visible to all readers, or a select group. Depending on the group and how fine-tuned it is, you pay less – or sometimes more."

"Interesting," Granger said, pondering. "Some of the people on the list mightn't be subscribers – is that a problem?"

Draco sighed. "It'll cost extra, but you can have a charm placed on the ad to be visible to certain people, rather than linking it to the actual copy of the paper."

"That sounds like the best option, then. How come you know so much about advertising?"

"My family was in a somewhat a precarious position just after the war. Our immediate difficulties were resolved by offloading some possessions to the right customer." Draco still remembered his mother crying as she handed him the diamond bracelet she had been given on her seventeenth birthday, to sell it to Horace Slughorn. His old teacher had made no secret of the profits he made on the back of former Death Eaters desperately selling anything of value to raise money quickly.

"It must have been very difficult for you," Granger said, so sweetly he sensed danger immediately.

"No more than we deserved," Draco replied, trying to steer the conversation back to business. "What shall we put in the ad? I assume we need to place it in tomorrow's edition."

"Assuming tomorrow happens, yes."

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*Got a Mini Time-Turner from Weasleys' Wizarding Wheezes?*

*YOU'RE IN LUCK!*

*A select collector is willing to pay THREE TIMES the original price to the first applicant. SEND YOUR OWL NOW to Fergal Hennessy, Bowling Green, Chipping Campden, Gloucestershire. DON'T LOOSE OUT!*

"There is only one 'o' in lose," Granger pointed out.

"Yeah, yeah." Draco tapped the parchment with his wand, and the unwanted 'o' disappeared. "Anything else?"

"It's very – breathless."



"It looks like it's been written by Rita Skeeter when she's three sheets to the wind and has let her pet hamster loose on the formatting, you mean."

"Yes," she admitted.

"For some reason, it works better than a more formal version would. People like thinking they're cleverer than you, so they can get a bargain." Horace Slughorn, with his mostly unblemished war record and ready cash, hadn't needed any extra advantages, but the setup had still worked on him.

"I'll take your word for it. Who is Fergal Hennessy?"

"My antique dealer. He'll let us borrow a back room in his shop and deal with the owls." Draco didn't mention the man smoked like a chimney and kept badly trained Crups. Some things are better as a surprise.

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It wasn't Granger the Crups bit. It was Draco.

"Look – I'm bleeding!" He inspected his ankle as soon as they had escaped the barking, snapping mess of beasts greeting them at the front of the shop. Once Draco slammed the door, the back room was blessedly free from Crups.

"Those dogs are a menace – someone should report them to the Ministry!"

"Well, you've got form for that, don't you? Remember Buckbeak?" Hermione didn't seem overly perturbed by his misfortune. "In this case, you will need to restrain yourself – we need Mr Hennessy's help."

"And I need all my limbs," Draco grumbled, dredging his memory for a decent healing charm. In the normal course of events, he made it through the day without having to heal any injuries, superficial or otherwise.

"Here, I'll do it." Hermione pulled her wand out, and suddenly the stinging pain disappeared. Left was only a faint scar, shrinking into nothing before his eyes. She was irritatingly good at a lot of things.

"Thanks," Draco muttered.

"We couldn't have you bleeding to death now, could we?" She looked around the bright but small room Hennessy had agreed to let to them (paid by Draco, naturally). "It's not so bad. A bit cramped, perhaps," she said as she proceeded to unload dozens of heavy-duty reference books from her deceptively small handbag.

"It will be, if you insist on bringing half the Hogwarts library with you. What do you think we're going to do, reference the Time-Turners to death?"

"It never hurts being prepared." Granger also pulled out a portable stove and a kettle from her bag, and proceeded to set them up as if she wasn't doing anything out of the ordinary.

"I didn't realise you were moving in." Draco gave up on the desk – Granger wasn't going to budge, so he pulled out a side table and set it up opposite her so they nearly filled up the room. "Isn't this cosy," he said surlily, pulling out a quill, his inkwell from home and a few pieces of parchments, which was all he had brought with him.

"Look!" Granger pointed at a brown cloud, approaching the window at alarming speed. "The owls are coming!"

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"... and this one can't quite remember where he put it, but he'll have a proper look as soon as he clears out the shed. What a waste of parchment."

"Who is he, then?" Granger was poised with her horrible Muggle ballpoint pen dangling above the list of Time-Turner owners, now with inches of notes added to it.

"Laurence Bagnold. Second cousin to the Minister," Draco added before she could ask. "Unlike the formidable Millicent, he couldn't organise a bonfire in a dragon reserve."

"Occupation, last known address?"

"Retired, lives in –" Draco scrambled to find the envelope. "Coventry. What a loser."

"We don't all inherit a mansion to live in, you know." Hermione scribbled furiously – Draco suspected she added some of his comments, but wasn't sure which.

"Which is why Apparition or Floo offers the witch or wizard of modest means the opportunity to live in any location of their choice, making Bagnold even more of an idiot."

"Floo powder can add up, you know."

He could tell when she was joking now – sometimes he even played along. It relieved the tedium of reading letter after letter from people who struggled to grasp there was little point in writing one unless you had something to say that would interest the recipient.

"He could make himself 7,500 Galleons if he bothered his arse clearing out his shed this week rather than putting it off. I rest my case."

"And he's sure it's in the shed?"

"As much as someone who couldn't find their own backside with both hands can be sure of anything, yes."

"Brace yourself then, Draco Malfoy – you may be going to Coventry."

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"Rupert Pickmore wants 9,000 Galleons for his." Draco vaguely remembered meeting him at some charity thing – if it was the bloke he was thinking about, Pickmore had talked incessantly about Quidditch without letting anyone else get a word in.

Granger just looked at him.

"Oh, all right then." Draco wrote another instruction to Gringotts with bad grace. "He has really bad breath, maybe he could use some of the money to buy a toothbrush."

"And thanks to your generosity, he can. Next," she demanded, and Draco wondered when he could get away with another tea break. She only agreed to one when she thought they deserved it – apparently, it was the perk that came with bringing the kettle. Draco would bring one over from the Manor and make tea whenever he wanted, only he wasn't quite sure how it worked. Did one put the tea leaves in before boiling the water and Banish them later, or the other way around?

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"Wayne Hopkins is happy to sell his, but he's away on business and wonders if it can wait until next week. I'll write back to him and ask if anyone else is at home. Maybe a house-elf could let us in." Correctly interpreting Granger's silence, he added: "I know, I know. Normal people don't have house-elves. I do occasionally visit my friends' houses."

"I thought your friends were exactly the type of people who have house-elves."

"Tracey Davis, remember her? I've been to her mum's ex-council house." Just once, right after the war, but he didn't need to tell Granger that. Or that he'd spent the whole visit waiting to be shown to the actual reception room. Draco had struggled to believe even the Muggle authorities expected a family of five to squeeze into an area smaller than his own bedroom.

"You do surprise me, sometimes."

"You too." It just slipped out of him, but fortunately she was too intent on her list to ask what he meant.

"Anthea Shackbolt – any reply yet?"

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Once he noticed it, it grated on him all day. When even Granger started flagging towards teatime, he suddenly cracked and asked her. "Why do you keep calling them 'Minis'? It sounds stupid."

"Because they're not real Time-Turners. The one I had was beautiful. Not just the actual instrument, but the idea behind it as well."

"What idea – turning back time?" Draco didn't see what was so amazing about that, other than the fact that you could.

"That if you're very, very careful, you can change history, for better." Granger looked wistful, like she was mourning a lost opportunity. It made her look softer, like the relentless energy propelling her forwards only was a tiny part of who she was. It was funny – you thought you had someone figured out, only to realise you barely had a clue. "Imagine if you could build one that allows you to go back further than an hour – the things you could do..."

Draco was suddenly incensed, his musings on Granger's character temporarily forgotten. "You mean, like going back to the Sixties and stop the Da – Voldemort before he got started."

"For example."

"Does it ever strike you that you might be completely wrong? Like now, for example." He threw out the last bit with extra venom. "If you had rewritten history, I would probably be plotting the rise of the next Dark Lord as we speak. Terrible things happen, but we learn from them. How do you think people would learn if you were to erase the consequences of their mistakes?"

"I – I guess I didn't think about it that way." Of course she didn't – she always got it right the first time, and didn't have to spend years slowly working herself up to realising she had been wrong about every single thing.

"No, because you're always fucking perfect. I was a complete idiot when I was sixteen, but at least I've got the chance to see where I went wrong."

"I don't think I'm perfect," Granger said, "and I wasn't half as clever as I thought when I was sixteen. I'd like to think I've learnt something since then, too."

"Good." Draco was still angry.

"And you're right – no matter how much I'd like to, trying to undo what has happened would probably cause more problems that it would solve."

"Good. Can I take a picture now, to commemorate the moment Hermione Granger admitted she was wrong? No one will believe me otherwise."

"Sod off." She turned away, but he saw she was hiding a smile.

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"Tiberius Ogden says thank you for the offer, but he is rather attached to his device. Why bother writing, then?" Draco squinted at the spindly handwriting, betraying Ogden's age. "He wishes us good luck in our search. How very courteous of him."

"Are you related to him?" Granger had started asking whenever she wasn't sure – it saved time. Draco still thought she'd been needlessly cross over Davy Gudgeon; if she'd let him get a word in edgewise he would have told her they were second cousins, but she had kept rabbiting on about Ginny Potter and Quidditch tickets. It was hardly his fault he was related to most of the wizarding world.

"Yes, but he doesn't speak to my side of the family." Draco didn't mind – he had enough fusty relatives anyway.

"I'd better take him, then – if I can get Minerva to write a letter of recommendation he'll probably agree to see me." Granger screwed up her nose and consulted her precious list again. "I think we can do the final count now – it's been a week. Anyone who was going to reply will have done so by now. Or what do you think?"

"Go ahead." Draco had to sit on his hands as she went through the list again, ticking the different columns she had devised. You had to hand it to Granger, she could organise the hell out of a list. They had already received some Time-Turners, but many more were due to be sent to 'Fergal Hennessy' as soon as the owners had been notified by Gringotts that their vaults had been credited. Draco thought they had done well, but there were so many letters and names that he'd lost track.

"... and Loretta Scrivenshaft will send hers tomorrow. That's it." She tapped her wand, and a number appeared at the bottom of each column.

Draco leaned over the table to read the totals. "Received: Thirteen, In transit: Eighty-two." He couldn't help the smile spreading over his face. "Turned down: two – Ogden and who else? No reply: twenty-eight." Thirty should be manageable. How hard could it be? He was a Malfoy and she was Hermione Granger – the average wizard wouldn't stand a chance.

"Ron's Auntie Muriel wrote to tell us that we have more money than sense and that she'll be keeping her great-nephews' 'trinket'. We'll send Ginny out to talk to her. Out of the others, we should be able to talk some of them around. Let's have a look." She replicated the list, removing all names except the no-replies.

Draco had an unwelcome realisation. "Hang on. How do we know they haven't passed on the thing to someone else, like Blaise did?"

"Because the original list is charmed to reflect the current owner – Ron and George use it for marketing. That's why they had a list in the first place."

"Handy," he admitted, making a mental note never to cross George Weasley who clearly was the brains of the operation.

"Terence Higgs – is he still sore over being booted out of the Quidditch team when your dad bought your way in?"

"Really, Granger. We were children – is there any need to harp on about it decades later?" Draco assumed a pained expression.

"I don't know. There might be, considering we want him to do us a favour." She always had an answer for everything.

"No. I've bumped into him once or twice, he seems to be over his early trauma."

Granger just looked at him, pen hovering expectantly.

"Fine, yes, I'll talk to him." At least caving in got him a brief smile, before she was off again.

"Septima Vector – no problem there, I'll Apparate to Hogwarts tomorrow, and talk to Minerva at the same time about that letter. Dedalus Diggle – I think you'd better leave him to me. Pansy Parkinson is all yours, though."

Draco sucked in some air between his teeth. He had forgotten about her. "That might be difficult."

"I thought Slytherins stuck together? She's your friend, surely she'll be happy to help you?"

"Yeah, well, apparently Pansy thinks the Time-Turner is the best thing since juiced leeches. She's unlikely to just hand it over because I ask."

"But surely she'll give it to you, if you explain that time might collapse if two of them are ever used at the same time?" Granger looked puzzled, and Draco sighed.

"It's not that she won't believe me. She'll probably just say 'fine', and demand that we destroy all the others so she can keep using hers." Pansy was eminently practical, you had to give her that.

"But that's not safe either!" Granger hadn't managed to quantify the risk of breaking the fabric of time every time a Time-Turner was used, but her Arithmantic calculations turned a menacing grey whenever she tested it.

"I know, I know, but Pansy won't care. I suggest we leave her until last, and focus on the easier ones. The low-hanging fruit, as it were." He knew he'd regret reading a Muggle business book, but Granger didn't seem to notice his lapse.

"Joey Jenkins – can you talk to him? Don't you own the Falmouth Falcons, or did I get that wrong?" Trust Granger not to know her Quidditch.

"Must I?" To call Jenkins a promising Quidditch player was like accusing Weasley of having brains.

"Excellent." She made another tick on her list, and Draco groaned.

"And it was looking so well for next season! I'll probably have to take him on, he's the worst Beater since Eamon

Donnelly was sent off drunk in 2010." Jenkins would stand out like a pus-filled pimple in his carefully composed team.

"At least there will be a next season." Granger briskly moved on to the next one, heedless of Draco's quashed dreams of league victory. "Heathcote Barbary, why do I recognise the name?"

"He's in The Weird Sisters. Or used to be, before they stopped playing."

"He? I thought they were women?"

"You've seen them live, Granger – did they look like women to you?"

She blushed, and Draco knew he'd struck gold. "It was a long time ago."

"Otherwise occupied, were you? What was his name again?" Draco was smiling broadly at her discomfort.

"Victor Krum, as you very well know. For the record, he was a perfect gentleman." Her mouth was as prim as if he'd brought a centaur into the drawing room.

"Always thought he was a boring fucker." Draco remembered the Yule Ball – Granger had turned heads even in Slytherin. That had been before most of them had turned into bigoted idiots who wouldn't be caught dead with Granger.

"I was fifteen!"

"So was I – I didn't let that hold me back." Draco had *very* fond memories of the ball.

Granger laughed out loud, and the soft afternoon sunlight creeping through the window tinged everything about her golden. Her eyes were soft and brown with flecks of gold, and Draco realised with a start that she wasn't bad-looking now either. You could see her age in the tiny creases around her eyes, but the years sat easy on her – you could tell she had been living well.

"Kevin Entwhistle?" She was relentless, though.

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That evening, they started the more unorthodox retrievals. Draco insisted they would start with Laurence Bagnold, who turned out to be as inept at warding as he was at everything else. Apparating to Coventry, locating his Time-Turner, and returning to Granger's apartment took less than twenty minutes.

"We could have this wrapped up in a few nights, Granger!" Draco was high on adrenaline and the thrill of doing something more exciting than writing bank drafts.

"Call me Hermione. Now that we've committed a crime together, I think we can use first names. Draco."

"Right. Hermione." He tried it out, trying not to sound like Weasley.

"Well done. Wilkie Twycross will be tougher – his wife used to be an Auror."

"What, in the Dark Ages?" Twycross had been ancient, even when they were at Hogwarts.

"Yes, during the first war, so we'd better watch out. No more plain sailing."

Draco realised he had better step up, as Granger couldn't be expected to have the basics drilled into her like he had. "This time, we're doing it properly. Alibis, lookouts, the lot."

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Draco wished he hadn't bothered Apparating home for dinner – Granger had used his absence to make sure they would fail ignobly.

"We do need a lookout, you said so yourself," she said when he complained.

"No. No, no, no, no way in hell, NO. You're not drafting in Longbottom to be our stakeout, do you want to end up in Azkaban? You probably wouldn't," Draco said bitterly, "but I would. The Wizengamot would just love a chance to send

me there to rot."

"I didn't think about that." She chewed on her revolting plastic pen. "Maybe it's best if Neville and I go in, and you stay outside."

"And put the future in Longbottom's pudgy hands? I think not."

"Who are you going to ask, then? Your mother?"

"Blaise. I'll ask Blaise." Thank Merlin he had someone to ask.

"He works for the Ministry, he'd get the sack if we're found out!" Granger always found a flaw, as long as it was someone else's plan.

"What about Longbottom, don't you care about him? What if he gets caught?" Draco tried guilt.

It didn't work. "Neville sells plants out of his grandmother's house, she'd even bail him out if it came to it. Neville or no one." Granger tried to stare him down, which would have been funny if she hadn't been better at it than him.

"Potter, then. Why isn't Potter here?" Draco was no more fond of the Saviour of the Wizarding World than Potter was of him, but he knew who his money would be on in a fight between him and Longbottom. Besides, they'd probably give Potter a medal if he was caught housebreaking – he was the Boy-Who-Lived-Twice, after all.

"Harry," Granger said bitterly, "is busy getting the splinters out of his arse from spending the last six months sitting on the fence, trying to appease both Ron and I. He agrees that something must be done, but he's too afraid of offending Ron to help."

"I always thought Potter was as much use as a chocolate wand." At least Draco had the satisfaction of being proven right.

"Apart from the numerous times he saved your life, you mean. At least he's agreed to provide me with an alibi if I'll need one."

"I assume the offer doesn't extend to me." Gryffindors had some cheek complaining about favouritism, when they always had each others' backs.

"I sent him an owl this morning, you're dining with him and Ginny as we speak. We'll be spending the night."

"Hm." Draco couldn't think of anything to say to that.

Granger sensed victory and pounced. "I'll send Neville an owl and ask him to meet us here at two. Don't be late."

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Longbottom looked bigger than Draco remembered, but he still melted into the shadows like he'd been bred to skulk. Draco tried not to look impressed, and nodded curtly to Hermione.

She raised her wand, and all the streetlights flickered and died. He could have sworn he heard her mutter "Bloody Ron," but apart from agreeing with the sentiment he didn't see why she'd dredge it up now. Fortunately, she seemed fully focused on their task as they made it across the garden wall without a sound. There was a momentary pause when Draco stepped into the pond, but he managed to extricate himself with only a drenched ankle.

Unfortunately, a Drying Charm was out of the question unless he wanted to set off the wards, so Draco had to put down his foot extremely carefully to avoid sloshing. He lagged behind Granger – Hermione – who made it to the French windows and got them open somehow before he'd even reached the patio.

She gesticulated into the dark, silent house with her wand, and he shrugged. They had to go in, or this whole malarkey was useless, so what did she want to tell him?

Her whisper was hot and urgent in his ear. "I think I can dismantle the ward with wandless magic – it would make things a lot easier."

He nodded – what was she waiting for?

Draco listened out for Longbottom's signal – an owl's hoot – and any noise from inside, but the garden remained quiet. He almost thought he could hear someone snoring, and was straining to figure out if it was only his imagination when she elbowed him.

"Let's go in – I've put up a Silencing Charm." She was still whispering, but no longer stretching up to reach his ear.

"Great." He used the opportunity to dry his foot, and sighed in relief before following her inside.

Did people really live like this? There were piles everywhere, of parchments and books and Muggle magazines – on tables, on chairs and on any available surface, including on top of lampshades. There were even piles on the floor, and the faint light from Hermione's Lumos showed a meandering path from the couch to the door. Draco stepped carefully between the piles, and joined her in the middle of the room.

"What do we do now, then?" They hadn't counted on being able to use magic, so Draco had spent the evening watching Muggle crime TV. He was even wearing gloves.

Hermione used her wand again – it looked like another ward. Then she simply said: "*Accio* Mini Time-Tuner!" Something rustled in the corner, and Draco narrowly avoided being hit in the head by the little disc spinning into Hermione's outstretched hand.

"Oh, for fuck's sake." Draco knew she was going to be unbearable afterwards – why hadn't he thought of doing an *Accio*?

Hermione interpreted his disgust correctly. "We still have to get out of here."

"Can't we Apparate?" Granger may crow about her superior wandwork later, but at least he wouldn't get his feet wet again.

"I didn't remove all the wards, just a few."

"You've been slacking off, then. Come on, let's get out of here." That was the moment Draco chose to step on something he later learnt was called a 'sensor'. Apparently, the Twycrosses dabbled in Muggle security – the high-pitched beeping sound was a bit of a giveaway. The sound was so loud that Draco couldn't think, never mind come up with a way of getting out of there.

"Move!" Granger forged a path directly the window by blowing the piles into confetti, and pushed Draco out in front of her. She only paused to cast a Shielding Charm behind them and then ran for her life, only catching up with Draco when he stumbled through the pond.

"Quick, Neville's over here!" she hissed.

"There's fish in here – I can feel them!" Draco almost fell over backwards when something large wound its way between his legs. How big were these things? He took one giant step to finally get out of the water, grabbing Hermione's outstretched hand. They scrambled up Longbottom's rope and landed on the other side, just as a beam of light hit the wall inside the garden.

"Let's get out of here," Draco panted. The others had already started spinning.

This mission thing was exhausting. Maybe Draco would be better in a supervisory capacity, rather than at the coalface. He might suggest it to Hermione later.

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"I don't believe this – another cancelled meeting!" Granger stuck her pen into her hair with vehemence. Draco wondered what it would feel like to stick his hands into it – it looked dense but very soft, like a solid cloud. He didn't notice he'd stretched his hand out until he almost was touching it – he snatched it back so quickly he was surprised she didn't comment on it.

"With whom?" he asked belatedly.

"Kingsley – something urgent has come up, and he can't see me today. Well, this is bloody urgent, too!"

Draco had almost forgotten the only reason they were painstakingly working their way through a stolen customer list was that the Ministry was displaying its usual efficacy and sense of urgency in the matter.

"Won't he feel stupid if the meeting doesn't happen because time is broken?" he asked.

"Yes. Only if time breaks down he'll never know, but still."

"Yeah. Why don't you tell him in a letter?"

She glared at him. "Why do you think I haven't? Unfortunately, Kingsley is a busy man. His secretary screens all his letters for him."

"So?" Draco was admittedly not employed by the Ministry, but he was fairly sure the impending collapse of time fell within the Minister's responsibilities.

"His secretary is Percy Weasley." She started writing her reply, pressing down her revolting pen so hard that Draco wouldn't be at all surprised to see "Dear Kingsley..." etched into the desk afterwards.

"Oh. So we're on our own, then?" He had almost forgotten about the Order of Merlin, but it must be a sure thing now. Weasley might succeed in holding Granger off temporarily, but if he knew her at all she would cut through him like melted butter. When she finally got to brief the Minister, she wouldn't mince her words. And for once, Draco would be recognised as part of the solution, rather than the problem.

"I almost want to finish it all off ourselves, just to prove we can do it." She tied her response to the Ministry owl's leg and let it out through the window, slamming it shut afterwards. "Who's left?"

Hermione had finally allowed Draco to update the list, too – although he suspected she hung back after he had left to check he had done it properly. It must be a welcome change for her to have competent co-conspirators.

"Tiberius Ogden, Sachin Singahal, James M. Walden and Pansy Parkinson."

"Four." Draco was impressed, despite having been there for one hundred and forty one of them. "Why the M? Is there a James N. Walden out there who didn't get one?"

"Maybe he's American. I've never heard about him, have you?" She leafed through *Notable Magical Names of Our Time*, more as a token than a real attempt to find him. Draco knew very well all remaining names on their list had been cross-referenced to kingdom come.

He really should have swallowed his pride and worked with Hermione at Hogwarts – imagine all the time he could have saved. Draco glanced down at the faded mark on his arm. It was hidden by his sleeve, but he knew exactly what it looked like. He might have avoided some rather costly mistakes, too.

"I'll go and see Ogden – he must have received Minerva's letter by now." Hermione had made up her mind while Draco was woolgathering. "You can look for Walden – don't you have all the back issues of the *Daily Prophet* at the Manor?"

Great. Now she was giving him assignments.

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Draco couldn't quite remember which of his ancestors had decided it was a good idea to archive all the scurrilous gossip printed in the *Daily Prophet*, in case it came in handy later. It had been one of the brighter ones, judging by the well-thumbed volumes dating back several centuries.

Working from home had its advantages, he decided as he devoured the cheese-and-ham toastie delivered by the house-elves. Hermione would probably rather self-combust than bring him lunch. It was very quiet here, though – no excited "Aha!"-s when she found something interesting, or badly withheld excitement with every owl arriving at the window. Several times, he read something interesting out loud, only to remember there was no one else there.

As the clock above the mantelpiece struck five, he gathered up his notes and Apparated to Bowling Green. Hermione walked through the door a few minutes later and collapsed in her chair, dropping her bag on the floor with a heavy clunk.

"Tough nut to crack?" Draco asked.



"I wouldn't say that." Hermione tried to smooth down her hair, but that ship had sailed hours ago.

"Why are you looking like you've gone a round against a Hippogriff, then?" Maybe she had decided to hunt down the mysterious Walden on her own. Draco felt disappointed for no good reason – he ought to welcome Granger doing the donkeywork.

"Tiberius Ogden," she said, curling her upper lip, "is a lecherous old man with hands like an octopus. It was all I could do to get out of there with my clothes on."

"Fuck."

"Yes, that would about sum it up."

"What did you do to him?" Draco reckoned Ogden deserved whatever he had got, but it would probably be better if the Department of Magical Law Enforcement didn't get involved. Especially as Hermione worked there when she wasn't on temporary leave, rounding up Time-Turners.

"I didn't do anything to him!" Her expression of wounded self-righteousness suggested it had been a close call, however. "Heaven help him if I ever run into him again, though. As it is, I got this." She smiled, Ogden temporarily forgotten, as Draco's eyes sought the little golden disc between her thumb and index finger.

"You got it!" They were fucking brilliant, that's what they were.

"The only reason Ogden isn't seeking urgent attention in St Mungo's is that he did agree to give it to me. Three left now."

"Not for long," Draco said, his mind racing ahead to what he'd say to Sachin Singahal in the morning.

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"Please take this cheque for 15,000 Galleons" turned out to be sufficient. Draco tried to beat him down to twelve thousand, but Singahal wasn't stupid. If someone was this keen on buying a Mini Time-Turner, he was going to make them pay.

"That couldn't have gone better," Hermione said once Singahal had left the anonymous Muggle pub he'd suggested as a rendez-vous, and she could join Draco at his table.

"Yes, it could. I could have bargained him down to ten thousand if you had given me a few days." He nodded to the Muggle behind the bar, who was bright enough to bring out a second gin and tonic to Hermione without being asked.

"You could have your bum pinched by Tiberius Ogden instead, if you prefer. That's free."

Draco groaned when Hermione reached for her battered notebook again. "Oh, give over, Granger – it wouldn't kill you to enjoy the moment for once."

"In this salubrious location?" She looked around at the slot machines and faded curtains, brightened up by the occasional poster – apparently, last night had been karaoke night – wrinkling her nose delicately at the smell of beer. It was a nice nose, Draco was surprised to notice. It suited her – a dainty one wouldn't have looked right.

It was funny how you got used to seeing someone's face every day, only to realise you hadn't really looked at it properly. There were only three names left – soon he wouldn't be seeing Hermione at all, unless they ran into each other at some Ministry function where she was the golden girl of the Ministry and he was invited on a sufferance, only because he still had money.

Hermione would probably say hello to him – even before he had got to know her properly, Draco did her the justice of recognising that she didn't use people only to toss them aside afterwards – but then she would stick to her own. Once they'd had their heads extracted from their respective arses, she would undoubtedly be welcomed back into the fold of Weasleys and Potters and other assorted Gryffindors.

Draco's brief sense of elation evaporated completely, and he drained the bottom of his bottle before putting it back on the table with a little too much force. "You're right. Let's get back."

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"James M. Walden." Mundungus Fletcher sucked on the name like it was a throat lozenge, and Draco itched to tell him to get on with it. He was under strict instructions to be quiet, however – even though he was Polyjuiced as a random Muggle. Hermione was determined nothing would go wrong retrieving the second last Time-Turner.

"Yes," Hermione said with uncharacteristic patience. Draco glanced down and saw her dig her nails into the table so hard they must be leaving grooves, but Fletcher was none the wiser.

"Never 'eard of 'im. What's 'e to you, left you up the spout or something?" He showed his yellow teeth in a half-smile, and Draco would have given a rather large amount of what was left in his Gringotts vault to be able to slap it out of him.

"No. So you have no idea who he is?" Hermione continued the interrogation, only Fletcher was probably still under the impression this was a normal conversation.

"No, told you. Listen, cheers for the pint and all, but I'd better be off." Before he had time to slide down from his barstool, Draco used his concealed wand to make sure he wouldn't be going anywhere soon.

"Not so quickly, Mr Fletcher." Hermione's smile was truly terrifying, in a good way. Draco decided to pick her side, should there be any future wizarding wars. "My tracking spells reveal any correspondence for the elusive Mr Walden is directed to you. Would you care to explain?"

Fletcher looked around, but none of the other patrons in the seedy pub on the wrong side of Knockturn Alley paid any attention to the little group in the corner. Draco's spells had seen to that. Next, the little weasel tried to pull out his wand, but Draco wordlessly dangled it in front of him.

"Don't worry, Mundungus – we won't hurt you," Hermione promised, changing tack a little. "Just tell me what I want to know, and you'll be free to go. Probably."

Her promise failed to reassure the layabout, but he realised he was outsmarted and outnumbered. Draco was quite sure either of them would have managed that feat on their own, but today merited a belt-and-braces approach – hence Draco's presence. There was also no way he was going to let Granger have all the fun – he had been determined to be there, even sworn to silence.

"It's me, all right? Sometimes a bloke needs a bit of an alias. Especially if 'e's a bit of a known character, if you know what I mean."

"But how did you manage to confound the We – rather complex magic?"

"I've got skills, innit?" His toothy smile returned, and Hermione recoiled. "Did you think it was a coincidence the only time I was sent to Azkaban was in the war?"

"Well done." Hermione's sarcasm clearly went over his head, as Fletcher nodded in agreement. "Seeing as you are in fact Mr Walden, I will cut this short. Give me your Mini Time-Turner."

"My what?"

"You know what I'm talking about. Give it to me."

"That's mine, tha' is – you can't just demand it like that, even if you are Miss Prim and Proper." Fletcher looked nettled, which was a mistake.

"*Accio* Mini Time-Turner," Hermione said, and it burrowed its way out of Fletcher's dirty tweed coat and zoomed into her hand. "I'm not demanding, I'm taking. Would you prefer to explain to the Improper Use of Magic Office what you've been doing with it?"

"Ain't no one's business but mine," Fletcher said sullenly, but his shoulders sagged in defeat.

"Tell you what," Draco said. Hermione turned towards him, incensed, but he stepped on her foot and she miraculously held her tongue. "Here's a cheque – no, hang on..." He dug into his pocket and found one of the bags of Galleons he had got out of Gringotts weeks ago, to be prepared for all eventualities during their search for Time-Turners. In his experience, abstract sums of money suddenly turned very tangible indeed if dangled in front of someone. Especially for people like Mundungus Fletcher, who shunned any hint of officialdom and wouldn't keep a vault at Gringotts even if

you paid him. Draco knew his kind.

He tossed the bag to Fletcher, who suddenly looked a lot more cheerful. "There's 7,500 Galleons in there. It's only fair that you'll get compensated for your trouble."

"Too right it is," Fletcher grumbled, but he didn't make any more complaints, and even gave them a half-hearted wave as he left.

"What did you do that for?" Hermione asked as soon as he was out of earshot. "I can guarantee you that the only reason he bought it through an alias in the first place, is that he's up to his usual tricks. We probably cut the crime rate for petty theft by at least five percent by taking it off him!"

"It's obvious you weren't in Slytherin. Never make an enemy if you can avoid it."

"What?" Her gin and tonic threatened to come out of her nostrils. "Since when is that your motto?"

"Since I ceased being a stuck-up brat who thought the fact my ancestors were wizards outweighed any character flaws of my own. Severus Snape was a Slytherin as well the Dark Lord, you know. We're not just about blood bigotry."

"I suppose." She drank up, uncharacteristically quiet until they returned to the office to destroy Fletcher's Time-Turner.

It had taken Draco an embarrassingly long time before he'd asked her what she actually did with them; he'd been content to simply hand them over and see her make a tick of her list.

It had occurred to him that Hermione had such a solid reputation as a goody two-shoes that she could get away with almost anything, simply because people wouldn't question her. Witness how she had handled Fletcher – he had almost certainly walked away thinking she had been acting for the Department of Magical Law Enforcement. Hermione Granger was unlikely to make the same mistakes as Tom Riddle – if she ever decided she wanted to run the world, Draco doubted she would leave herself open to be destroyed by a seventeen-year-old wizard.

Fortunately for all concerned, she was showing no such inclinations, and had in fact been destroying the Time-Turners with her father's Muggle sledgehammer. It made a satisfying clunking noise when it obliterated them into a hundred pieces; the only difficulty was finding all the little screws and cogwheels afterwards.

It was rather satisfying to lift the sledgehammer and let it fall on Weasley's handiwork – Draco had taken over the task by now, and was secretly a little disappointed there were only two left (Hermione had of course kept one Time-Turner back for emergencies – you wouldn't catch her letting go of something that could be useful).

Retrieving Pansy's Time-Turner would be the hardest task of them all, however. She had refused all of Draco's overtures, and neither he nor Hermione laboured under any delusions she would hand it over if they appealed to her better nature. She was already suspicious, and the Parkinson wards were legendary – Tracey Davis still told the story about when she'd tried to grab a pair of socks from Pansy's drawer.

Seeing Hermione's paraphernalia taking over both desks in their tiny room – including a blueprint of the Parkinson's residence, Merlin knew where she'd got that from – Draco felt slightly more optimistic.

"Was this what the Horcrux hunt was like?" he asked.

Hermione's laugh was hollow. "Imagine the worst camping trip in the world, with the added pressure of everything going to hell around you. The only way to stop it is if you and your friends figure out how, only you don't have a clue about what you're even doing there. This –" she gesticulated at her society column clippings about Pansy, next to a foot-high stack of books on wards from the Malfoy library – "This is fun."

"I was on the run with Severus for two months. 'Jolly' doesn't quite cover it," Draco offered.

Hermione looked like she was going to laugh but checked herself. "I thought he liked you?"

"I'm not sure he liked anyone. Just because he saved me didn't mean he thought I was less of a dunderhead than the rest of you, regardless of what he pretended in public." In later years, Draco had come to some sort of understanding with his old Head of House, even if it were only in his mind. Every time he had thought he'd figured Snape out, the Potions master had confounded him again. It was no coincidence Draco considered him the greatest member of Slytherin House he had ever met.

"I suppose that's true." Hermione looked pensive. "Anyway, reminiscing about the past won't help us get hold of that Time-Turner. Are we absolutely sure she can't be persuaded?"

"The only person I know who's more pigheaded than Pansy is Potter."

"Try Ron Weasley," Hermione mumbled, but then she returned to business. "Unconventional means it is, then – are you doing anything tonight?"

"I always leave some room in my calendar for impromptu breaking and entering on Saturday nights. Do I have to bring my own disguise?"

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"For the fifth time, I'm not pushing you away out of misplaced chivalry!" This was the second time Draco had been elbowed in the stomach for his troubles. Hermione was definitely a contender for The Most Pigheaded Witch after Pansy. "Most of those wards have extra protections against Muggle-borns, and I don't want you to set them off."

"This particular Muggle-born happens to be much better than you at disarming wards, so let me at it." Hermione was dressed top-to-toe in something Muggle and black, which (although fetching) would instantly tip Pansy off that something was wrong if she caught a glimpse of them.

Draco was sensibly dressed in his best robes, so he could claim he'd popped by to see if Pansy was home if they got caught. It might be a bit harder to explain why he'd brought Hermione with him, however.

"Well, get on with it then – we've been here for far too long." Despite his knowledge of Muggle burglary being somewhat lacking, Draco was quite sure you weren't meant to be waiting outside for more than a few minutes, at most. It had taken them twenty minutes just to get up on the front steps, never mind getting into the actual house.

"You're lucky hexing you in the back would attract too much attention," Hermione muttered, and Draco reflexively looked around. The nicest street in Upper Flagley was deserted on a Saturday night – anyone who was going in or out would use the Floo or Apparate.

Which was why they were creeping around the Parkinson's garden in the first place.

Finally, the enchantments inside the ornately carved front door caved in to Hermione's sustained assault. It opened slowly, only darkness showing inside.

"Yes!" Hermione hissed.

"Famous last words, Granger." When Draco's detection spell didn't reveal cause for concern, he advanced cautiously.

He was well aware Hermione's boot was itching to give him a nudge forwards, but he kept his glacial pace, satisfying himself the only booby trap awaiting the unwary intruder was Pansy's coat, thrown on the floor rather than put away. It didn't surprise him – to Pansy, housework happened to other people, and tonight her house-elves were out of action. Hermione had performed some undisclosed act for keeping them from interfering. Knowing her, they were probably locked into a closet, being force-fed tea and biscuits.

"Can we search the room now?" Hermione lit her wand on his signal, and the soft light revealed her impatience was getting the better of her.

"Search away – I told you, she sleeps with it under her pillow."

Unsurprisingly, no Time-Turner turned up when Hermione cast her Accio. "Has it occurred to you that Zabini might have been wrong?"

"Frequently. Not in this case, however – he's known Pansy since she was five. We know exactly what she's like when she gets a bee in her bonnet about something. I too have suffered over the years." Draco shuddered, remembering the time Daphne failed to return Pansy's favourite quill. The Slytherin common room had spent weeks dealing with the fallout.

"My heart bleeds," Hermione muttered, and he could see her eying up the staircase.

"Yes, I agree – no point wasting time down here."

Hermione looked surprised – she was of course used to having to lead Weasley and Potter by the hand, rather than having a partner who could think for himself.

Slowly, slowly they disarmed each trap set on the stairs. Draco wondered who Pansy's forbearer had pissed off, considering the trouble he had gone to protecting the house he had built. Then again, tact and finesse weren't exactly part of the Parkinson arsenal – perhaps he had merely shown remarkable foresight.

"Stop!" Hermione froze, and Draco followed her example. He'd ascertained that Pansy's parents were in the Caribbean, and like himself she was an only child. The shuffling upstairs could only be Pansy herself, or –

"Oh, for fuck's sake," Draco muttered. His freezing spell struck mid-shuffle, and he risked a Lumos to confirm he'd been right. "It's fine, it's just Rufus."

"And who is Rufus, if I may ask?"

"Her familiar. He's an anteater. You wouldn't catch Pansy picking a normal animal, like a cat – oh no, she had to be different. Never let him get within licking range, is my advice." Draco shuddered.

"I really have to introduce you to Crookshanks," Hermione mumbled. "So Rufus is harmless?"

"Now he is." Draco resumed his work. Bizarrely, despite the tediousness of casting the same detection spell for each step, this was fun. He would almost consider doing it professionally – working for the Department of Magical Law Enforcement came with the added bonus of acting within the law for a change. It would of course be useless to attempt to join. Potter had it all sewn up. Draco's surname virtually guaranteed any application from him would go straight into the bin.

He realised he didn't know exactly what Hermione did for a living, when she wasn't on unpaid leave trying to save the world. He must remember to ask her when they weren't breaking in somewhere.

"And that's it – the last one." Draco lowered his wand with a flourish, but as usual Hermione was too busy planning the next step to give credit where it was due.

"Where's her bedroom?" Hermione peered around at the Silenced portraits and giant Chinese vases decorating the upper landing. Amanthea Parkinson looked scandalised at the intrusion, but the blindfold Draco had placed over her eyes prevented her from identifying the source.

"Third on the right." They advanced together, only pausing to allow Hermione to avoid toppling over Rufus.

The door swung open without a sound. Inside, they could hear Pansy snoring. No streetlight slipped through the heavy curtains, so they entered the room completely blind. Draco almost slipped and had to steady himself on Hermione – when he kicked the offending material away, he realised it must be Pansy's clothes from last night.

Draco really hoped Pansy had started sleeping in pyjamas since school.

Hermione touched his wrist – it was the agreed signal for him to stop and wait for her to approach the bed. She had been quite insistent that it ought to be her, to lessen the intrusion somewhat. Draco had tried to tell her that from Pansy's point of view it had better be him, rather than a Muggle-born Gryffindor with whom she only shared the characteristic of being female. Hermione had won the argument, of course. Draco had revised his estimate of Potter's pigheadedness upwards lately; he must be a truly spectacular specimen to have withstood Hermione in full flight so many times.

Sometimes, despite his feelings on erasing the past, Draco wished he could have had a proper Time-Turner and send Hermione back to the early days of Tom Riddle's career just to see what would happen.

Hermione shuffled across the bedroom almost soundlessly, accompanied by Pansy's snores. Eventually, she came to a standstill, and the rustling of silk sheets betrayed that she was searching beneath Pansy's pillow. It went on forever – Draco's wand arm started aching from being stretched out for so long, and he wished he dared to shift his weight to a more comfortable position. If he happened to make the floorboards creak he knew Hermione would kill him, however, so he remained as he was, hoping his left leg wouldn't give out.

There was an extra long rustling – hopefully the sound of Hermione pulling her arm out from under the pillow, and then all hell broke loose.

"Thief! Intruder!" Pansy shrieked. A curse flashed past Draco, hitting the doorpost. There was an almighty scramble, with curses flying everywhere and muffled exclamations. Draco dodged the curses as best he could, hovering on the sidelines trying to see who was winning. Pansy was bigger than Hermione, but the latter had better fighting instincts (not to mention the fact that she was a considerably more powerful witch, no matter how heretic that statement would have seemed to his teenage self).

"Stop that!" Hermione screamed. "It's happening again!" The whole room shuddered – Pansy must have pressed the Time-Turner again. With Draco's luck, it would be this time everything went tits up.

"Stop it!" Hermione panted from the floor – she seemed to be losing the fight. Draco was going to have to step in and put a stop to it. Just then they rolled, and Draco misjudged the direction of the fighting pair. He was knocked down, got a kick in his stomach when he tried to get up again, and decided enough was enough.

"*Lumos Maxima!*"

Hermione and Pansy halted hostilities temporarily, blinking to get their vision back. Draco had closed his eyes before casting the spell, so temporarily had the advantage.

Draco finally remembered he was a wizard. "*Accio Pansy's Time-Turner!*" It sailed into his hand, and Hermione looked aggrieved.

"I had that already!" She was deafened by Pansy's outrage.

"Draco! What are you doing here with – *Granger?*"

"Not so fast, Parkinson!" Hermione was quicker and had Pansy immobilised on the floor before she had time to act.

"I'm here on a mission to save all of mankind," Draco announced. "I've always wanted to say that," he defended himself to Hermione, who was raising an eyebrow rather archly. "It's true!" he told Pansy, who couldn't have looked more incredulous if he had announced his intentions to move in with the Giant Squid at Hogwarts.

"It is," Hermione said. "Unfortunately, Parkinson, your little device can cause the whole fabric of time to tear apart."

"That would be bad," Draco explained helpfully.

"So it must be destroyed," Hermione resumed, ignoring his interruption. "You will receive compensation, of course, but as you were somewhat resistant to giving it up –"

"But I need it," Pansy wailed, and Draco recognised the signs. They could explain until they were blue in the face, but Pansy wasn't at home to Mr Logic when her desires were thwarted.

"That's a shame, but we're doing it anyway," he said firmly, bringing down the sledgehammer Hermione had the forethought to shrink and bring with them on the second last Mini Time-Turner in existence. Draco resolved to destroy Hermione's backup Time-Turner as soon as they got out of there.

"I'll get you for this, Granger!" Pansy struggled mightily, but she couldn't tear herself loose in time. "And you too, Draco," she added bitterly.

"We'll make it up to you," he said hastily, knowing only too well what Pansy was like when she was intent on revenge. "We'll –" Draco was struck by inspiration. "Hermione will make a spell for you, to guarantee your nail polish always is perfect."

"I will, will I?" Hermione asked, but she could see that Pansy had brightened up.

"In that case – I suppose I could overlook it. And you said I was going to be compensated, too?" The Parkinsons weren't wealthy, not since the crash of 1923. A very large bag of Galleons would certainly soothe Pansy's sensibilities, as long as Hermione could deliver the goods.

Draco groaned. At this rate, he'd be queuing up to buy Weasley's second-hand robes. It was only when he noticed Hermione's dazzling smile that he realised that they had finally made it – they'd achieved the impossible, without any help from the Ministry.

He wondered how he had ever thought she was average-looking, or believed she had somehow stolen her magic from

other wizards. The best thing about Hermione Granger wasn't her considerable magical powers – they were secondary to the fact that she shone like a diamond from the inside, if you knew how to look. She would spend all her savings and leave her job to save a world full of people who would never find out what they owed her, just because someone ought to do it.

Draco knew she would have found a way to do it all on her own, if she'd had to. Thankfully he had been there to help her – this way, no one was going to end up in Azkaban, and there may well be Orders of Merlin at the end.

Unfortunately, by now there was something else he wanted even more badly than an Order of Merlin.

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The cream of the Wizarding world was present at the ceremony; anyone who was anyone, from grizzled war heroes to pure-bloods with more money than sense, was there. Draco tried not to smirk about the fact that he would imminently be awarded an Order of Merlin, First Class, for acts of outstanding distinction – he didn't want to spoil his appearance on the first page of the *Prophet* with the medal pinned to his chest.

Hermione was standing next to him, occasionally smiling to an acquaintance in the crowd. That was how Draco spotted Potter, and then the Weasleys next to him. The sight of Ronald Weasley's face almost made him slip up.

"Weasley is looking like someone ate his dinner," he mumbled to Hermione.

"Well, this whole thing was his fault, after all." They both knew she'd forgive Weasley eventually – Potter wouldn't settle for less – but not yet.

Weasleys' loss was Draco's gain, however.

"I don't think that's why," Draco said, seizing the opportunity. For being the smartest witch of their generation, Hermione could be remarkably dense sometimes.

"Why is it then, since you seem to know everything?" Her whisper was a bit more annoyed this time.

"It's because he doesn't like me standing so close to you."

Hermione looked at Draco like he had explained they'd better go to bed at night, on account of the sun setting. "Ron has loathed you since you were both eleven years old. Of course he doesn't like it. He may have got past what happened in the war, but it doesn't mean you'll ever be friends."

Draco shuddered. "Merlin forbid. You still don't get it, though. Weasley doesn't like it because I might do something like this." He bent his head down and kissed her cheek. Her hair smelled of flowers, parchment and something earthy and strong, just like her. Draco tried his best to look confident for Weasley's benefit, but his knees were trembling as he waited for her reaction.

"I see," Hermione said. "Or something like this, perhaps?" She reached up on her toes and kissed him on the mouth, and Draco thought his heart was going to stop before it started beating at double speed. She didn't linger – Hermione Granger didn't snog in public – but she had made her intentions clear to most of the Wizarding World.

"Yes," he managed to squeeze out, just like his world hadn't been turned upside down. Again.

"Ladies and gentlemen, wizards and witches," the speaker began and Draco tried to recollect his wits. He was only partially successful – he got through the ceremony, but he was smiling like a loon on the front page of the *Daily Prophet* the following day.

**THE END**