

The mask



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Title: The mask

Story Number: -

Rating: NC-17

Pairing: Draco/Hermione

Summary: Draco's wife has disappeared.

Author's Notes: Written for the LJ **dmficexchange**.

Disclaimers: This story is rated **NC-17 for violence and sexual scenes**. Please do not read any further if you are not of legal age.

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.

Effrego totalum ... 'Break all wards'
Protego maritus ... 'Protect husband'
Obfirmo infinitum ... 'Lock forever'

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An angry storm tumbles across the Wiltshire landscape, seeking a place to unleash its fury.

It finds an ancient manor, hidden from Muggle eyes by charms of Disillusionment, and spits its jagged venom upon the building's tallest tower.

Spears of white fire snake down the decorative ironwork, find a leaded window, and invade a sealed chamber.

Inside the house, a locked door creaks open...

...

"*Shit!*"

Ears still ringing, Hermione rushes to the bay window, pulls the curtain aside, and peers out into the driving rain, scanning the Manor's elegant roofline for any signs of damage.

The thunder and lightning had been simultaneous, showing that the storm was *directly* overhead—

Another flash, closely followed by a peal of thunder, illuminates the West Wing and Hermione *thinks* she sees a plume of smoke rising from the White Tower.

Bugger.

Draco's away on business, and Lucius and Narcissa are visiting friends, so it's left to *her* to save the place. She feels for her wand—finds it safely stowed in her pocket—grabs a candelabra, and hurries out into the corridor.

The West Wing is Lucius's territory.

In her ten years as a Malfoy, Hermione has visited it five times—maybe—and she's never, ever, been allowed to climb the White Tower.

I'll need help.

"*Twinky,*" she cries, and a house-elf appears with a loud *crack*. "I'm sorry to bother you so late, Twinky, but I need you to take me into the West Wing..."

...

The door to the White Tower's standing ajar.

Hermione hesitates. She knows it's foolish to imagine that anyone might have penetrated the Malfoy wards, and entered the Manor's darkest depths, but *something* doesn't feel right. "Does Mr Malfoy usually leave this open?" she whispers.

"No, Mrs Draco." The little elf is clearly worried. "Mr Malfoy does not."

Hermione draws her wand.

She wishes that Draco were beside her.

There'd been angry words when he'd left, five days ago—over something and nothing—which seemed to be happening more and more, recently—but they've faced many dangers during their time together, dismantling wards and breaking curses, and there's no one Hermione would rather have watching her back.

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Draco makes her feel strong.

And safe.

"Stay behind me, Twinky," she says, "but keep close."

She steps through the open door and—feeling a strange chill fall upon her—she climbs, with the house-elf at her heels, swiftly up the stairs, past several locked and warded doors, until she reaches the topmost chamber.

To her relief, there's no sign of the fire she'd feared—the wooden ceiling's intact—but the air's filled with a thick dust, swirling round the room as though something—some *magic*—were stirring it.

What's happening?

The chamber's lined with glass-fronted cabinets. Hermione approaches the nearest and, raising the candelabra, peers inside. In the flickering light, she can make out several objects which, with some persistence, she manages to identify as a human finger—skeletal but still articulated—a cloth splashed with blackish stains, and several heavy rings...

Dark artefacts, she thinks.

Does Draco know that these are here?

She turns and, at the centre of the room, she spots a wooden box, sitting upon a table.

The dust is moving towards it!

"No, Mrs Draco," warns Twinky.

But Hermione's already there, lifting the carved lid.

"Oh," she gasps.

Sitting inside, upon a lining of dark green velvet, is the most exquisite—and, at the same time, the most terrifying—thing she's ever seen—a *face*, wrought in silver. It's engraved with branching curls that spread across its surface like veins of Darkness; its eye sockets are empty, and its open mouth is barred with a row of fangs...

It's horrible.

And yet...

It's beautiful.

Hermione reaches down and—ignoring Twinky's squeak—she touches the silver forehead.

"Oh..." she whispers. The metal feels warm, seems to move beneath her fingers like flesh, and stroking it evokes the strangest feelings in her—of fear, yes, and intense anger, but also of *power*...

* * * * *

Two days later

"Your wife's absconded."

Oblivious to his father's cordial greeting, Draco sets down his valise with a weary sigh, and

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glances around the Entrance Hall. He's just returned from a week of gruelling business meetings, and he's been looking forward to kissing and making up with Hermione. "Where is she?"

"I've told you," says Lucius. "She's gone."

"It's true, darling," says Narcissa, nervously. "She's not here."

Draco shakes his head. He's flown non-stop from Marseilles, he's tired and hungry, and he wants his wife. "What are you talking about?"

"Oh, darling..." His mother takes his arm. "Come into the Morning Room, and—"

"No, Mother!" Draco shakes himself free. "*Where's Hermione?*"

"She's *gone*, darling," says Narcissa. "Your father and I were only away for one night, and..."

Draco stares at her foolishly. Then he turns to Lucius.

His father nods. "I *will* say this for her: she's taken nothing with her—apart, that is, from a house-elf."

Draco runs a hand through his long hair. "So you're telling me that both Hermione *and* a house-elf disappeared on the same night?"

"Yes, darling. I'm so sorry."

"And it happened when you were away, and Hermione was alone in the Manor?"

"Yes."

Draco closes his eyes.

He knows she hasn't left him.

For one thing—aside from the odd tiff—they're happy together—*surprisingly* happy—she fits him better than his wand.

For another, if Hermione *were* to leave him, she wouldn't sneak away when he and his parents were out, she'd announce it over breakfast, enumerate her reasons, and storm down the Manor steps like a force of nature.

And she wouldn't take *one* house-elf, she'd liberate the whole bloody lot.

Which means, he thinks, that either someone has broken into the Manor and taken her, or that some ward or curse inside the Manor has caught her—some Dark fucking shit—

"Draco, darling," says Narcissa, "I know you're upset, but *please* don't use such uncouth language."

She takes his arm again, and herds him towards the Morning Room and, this time, he doesn't resist, but, "Father," he calls over his shoulder. "I need to know everything you've done to find her. Absolutely *everything*."

...

Half an hour—and an untouched cup of tea and plate of biscuits—later, Draco's in full possession of the facts.

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There aren't many.

Lucius and Narcissa had returned home early the previous morning to find the Manor strangely quiet. Narcissa had knocked on the door to Draco and Hermione's bedchamber and, when there'd been no answer, she'd gone inside. "I was afraid she might be ill, darling."

She could see that the bed hadn't been slept in, so she'd tried the adjoining sitting room, and had found the curtains closed and the candles still burning. She'd alerted Lucius, and he had cast various Locating and ward-testing charms but had found no sign of Hermione, nor evidence that anyone else had entered or left the house.

Some hours later, they'd discovered that Twinky was also missing. "The house-elves say that your wife summoned him around midnight," says Lucius, "and he did not return."

"Right," says Draco, rising to his feet.

"You should get some rest, darling," says his mother.

Draco can't think of any way to express his frustration at his parents' attitude without using the language his mother abhors, so he says nothing.

...

A thorough search of their chambers confirms that Hermione has not left him a note, and the tiny, weaselly fear that had somehow worked its way into his chest is banished forever.

His wife hasn't abandoned him.

But where is she?

And how is he going to find her?

Draco approaches the fireplace, takes a handful of Floo powder, and calls in professional help.

...

Potter and Weasley, in their Auror robes, seem to fill the entire room.

Draco persuades them to sit, and—pacing up and down in front of them—he gives them a full account of Hermione's disappearance. "The only thing I can add," he says, "is that a candelabra also seems to be missing—look." He points to an empty space on one of the sideboards. "She *hasn't* left me—you can take my word for that—and she hasn't gone out of the grounds—wards are a Malfoy speciality, and we'd know if anyone had been in or out."

He runs a hand through his hair. "I'm convinced that she's still somewhere inside the Manor. Obviously, I could search for her by myself, but..." His voice suddenly cracks, and he's forced to swallow hard before he can continue. "My father will oppose it, but I need your expertise. This house can be aggressive, and we have to be quick—please Merlin we're not already too late."

"Malfoy," growls Weasley, with an authority that's both unexpected and reassuring, "we'll find her."

Draco nods. "Thank you," he whispers.

...

He procures a plan of the Manor for Potter and Weasley and—whilst they're casting various charms upon it—out of courtesy, he approaches his father for permission to search the West

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Wing.

"No," says Lucius.

A tiny part of Draco had considered this possibility, but the refusal's still devastating. "*Why, Father?*" he cries. "*Why?*" He rises to his feet and, standing toe-to-toe with Lucius, he suddenly realises that *he's* the taller man. "What could possibly be more important than finding my *wife?*"

"You have no proof that that foolish... *woman* is still in the house, much less in the West Wing!"

"*Proof?* Since when have I needed proof to search my own home? This is Hermione we're talking about, Father; this is,"—he bites his lip—"this is the mother of my son."

Lucius's eyes narrow. "Are you saying—"

Draco nods. "We think she's pregnant." He can see that Lucius doesn't believe him. Hermione's failure to give him an heir has been a bone of contention between him and his parents since the early days of his marriage. "Look, I don't know what you're hiding," he hisses, "and I really don't *care* any more. I'm taking Potter into the West Wing."

He turns to leave.

"*No you are not.*" Lucius follows him. "I will *not* have that... that half-blood meddler trampling over *my* property! I will *not*—"

Draco swings round, roaring: "PETRIFICUS TOTALUS!"

The curse carries the entire weight of his love, and fear, and anger.

Lucius's eyes stare out of a frozen body.

"I'm sorry, Father," says Draco. "I'll release you as soon as I've found Hermione."

And I'll face my punishment like a man, he thinks.

...

"Good," says Potter, when Draco returns to the sitting room. "We've just finished."

The plan of the Manor's spread out upon the table. Various sigils hover above it, glowing in diagnostic colours—Draco recognises Auror magic, and cannot help but be impressed. "What do they tell you?"

"Around midnight, two days ago—"

"When Hermione disappeared," says Draco.

"—yes—a large magical disturbance took place, *here.*" Potter taps the plan with his wand.

"The White Tower."

"The magic was certainly Dark but, beyond that, we can't tell you much. Except,"—Potter sighs—"it involved *death.*" He points to one of the sigils.

Draco swallows hard. "Well," he says, "I've just discovered that my father's hiding something up there—Dark artefacts, I suspect—so there could easily be blood magic, maybe even death magic, and—"

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"Recent death," says Potter, gently.

"No." Draco pulls away, edging backwards, shaking his head. "No." It's almost a sob.

"Malfoy," says Weasley and, again, his manner's unexpectedly kind, "we'll *find* her. Alive."

...

The door to the White Tower's physically locked and magically sealed.

Draco curses.

His Malfoy blood gives him a head start, but it could still take days to unpick his father's magic and, even then, there's no guarantee he'd get all of it. "My father won't cooperate," he admits, and wonders whether he should confess what he's done to Lucius.

"All right," says Potter, "stand back." He levels his wand at the slab of oak. *Effrego totalum!*" The door falls off its hinges. "Auror magic," he explains.

"Merlin's balls," mutters Draco.

Weasley grins. "It's all about having the confidence," he says. "Most of us can handle a handful of wards, but Harry can open just about anything."

"Let's go up," says Potter, modestly.

...

As they climb the stairs, Draco's heart's threatening to burst from his chest. "Why would she come up here?"

"And how did she get in?" says Weasley.

"The house-elf must have Apparated her here," says Potter.

They reach the top. "We'll go first," says Weasley, firmly.

Draco's not used to being ordered around—and certainly not by a childhood enemy—but he wants Hermione found, so he stands back, and watches the Aurors enter the tower room, waiting until their silence becomes unbearable. "Is she there?" he grates out.

"No..." says Potter.

Draco scrambles through the door.

The first thing he notices is a thick layer of dust—undisturbed, apart from Potter and Weasley's footprints. Then his eyes are drawn to the centre of the chamber, and he sees the missing candelabra—its candles burned out—lying beside an ornate wooden chest, about the size of a hatbox, and—next to that—a dead house-elf.

"*Twinky.*" Draco rushes to the little body.

"Don't touch him," warns Potter.

"He was her favourite," says Draco. He looks around anxiously, but—thank Merlin—there's no sign of Hermione. "There are no footprints," he mutters.

"No," says Potter. He's passing his wand back and forth over the tiny victim. "He was killed by some sort of Dark curse," he concludes, "which isn't surprising, given what's in these cabinets."

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He turns to the open box. "What's this?"

"I don't know."

"It looks like something's usually kept inside it—something valuable." Potter scans the room again.

Draco tries to pull himself together. "It could be anything," he says, reaching into the velvet hollow. "This is sort of *head-shaped*..."

He frowns.

His fingers are *tingling*.

He strokes the fabric, and the sensation grows stronger, spreading up his arm, and down into his vitals, reviving memories of the war and, with them, feelings of anger and aggression—

"*What the...?*" cries Weasley, suddenly.

"*Shit*," hisses Potter, flinching as though someone's shoved him aside.

"*Ow!*" The box flies from under Draco's hand, and crashes into one of the cabinets. He sucks his bloodied fingers. "*What just happened?*"

"Someone pushed me," says Potter. "What did you feel, Ron?"

"The same... It felt like a hand." Weasley casts a disclosing charm. "But there's nothing..."

"Hermione," cries Draco, getting to his feet, "*Hermione*, is that you? Please, Bookworm, if you're there, come to me." He holds out his arms. "Please..."

Nothing happens.

"Please?"

Potter, meanwhile, is casting another spell. "There's no one here."

Draco runs a hand through his hair. "There's something *wrong* with this," he says, prodding the box with his foot. "It's all about this..."

"Be careful," says Potter, coming up behind him.

"Why don't you ask your father what it is?" asks Weasley, joining them.

Draco sighs.

...

"You're *sure* you want to do this on you own?"

Draco can see that Potter's almost as anxious to find Hermione as *he* is, but he has to insist: "It's my only chance."

Weasley grasps his shoulder supportively. "Good luck, Malfoy. We'll be waiting to hear—if you need us, just Floo."

"I will." He watches them prepare to leave. Then, "Potter," he says, "what will happen about my father's—you know—*things*?"

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"I'll send him an Official Notice in a couple of days. Provided he disposes of everything within a fortnight, and uses a licensed Dark Artefacts Destroyer, the matter'll go no further."

Draco knows that Potter's sticking his neck out for Hermione's sake. "He'll face no charges?"

"No."

"Thanks. That'll help."

Potter nods. "Keep us informed," he says, and the pair Apparate away.

...

Lucius is—of course—still standing where Draco had left him.

Wearily, Draco raises his wand—"Finite Incantatem,"—and prepares himself for the fireworks.

To his surprise, Lucius simply slumps into a chair. "Did you find her?"

"I..." It's too hard to explain. "No."

His father sighs. "I realise now that I've always underestimated you, Draco—underestimated your feelings for your—for *Hermione*—and, it seems, underestimated your strength of character. The son supersedes the father. You are an adult, at last."

"I never wanted to hurt you, Father. But—the thing is,"—Draco shrugs, sadly—"I love her..."

Lucius sighs again. "I assume that Potter found my collection?"

Draco waves a hand. "He did. But that's all dealt with. There'll be no repercussions, provided you do as he says. What I need to know,"—he pulls up a chair and sits before his father, leaning forward—"is: what was in that box?"

"What box?"

Draco describes the chest, and its velvet lining. "What was in it?"

"You're saying it's *empty*?"

"Yes."

"How can it be?"

"What do you mean, Father? *What was in it?*"

Lucius shakes his head.

"Look," says Draco, "I think that Hermione took whatever it is,"—he remembers how *something* had ripped the ensorcelled box from his hands—"and that she's somehow *fighting* it. What in Merlin's name is it, Father?"

Lucius sinks further into his chair—suddenly, he's looking old, and frail. "It's your Death Eater mask, Draco," he says.

And he tells his son the story of the Dark Lord's gift—how Voldemort had presented it to Lucius; how *he*—suspecting a trap—had ensured that Draco never wore it, inventing more and more bizarre excuses to keep the boy safe; and how, after the war, he'd locked it in the White Tower, behind wards designed to preserve and protect his new collection of Dark artefacts.

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"Why Father?" Draco's at his wits' end. "Why do we keep on making the *same* mistakes? *Fuck!*" He's touched, of course, by this further proof of his father's love for him but, at the same time—so help him—he could beat the man's fucking brains out. He forces himself to calm down. "Look—just tell me everything you know."

...

It's late.

The White Tower's in darkness.

Draco retrieves the lost candelabra and, setting it upright beside the box, he conjures fresh candles and lights them with his wand. Then he sits down in the pool of light and, leaning back against one of the cabinets, he waits.

It's torture.

The Dark magic Voldemort had prepared for *him* has ensnared Hermione. He doesn't know what it's done to her; he doesn't know if it can be reversed. Earlier, it had seemed to him that she was resisting it—and protecting *him* from its influence.

But she clearly can't *escape* it.

Should he summon Potter, and tell him what he's learned?

Who better than Potter to deal with Voldemort's magic?

But, when Potter had tried, he couldn't *find* Hermione.

The curse has made her invisible, to the eye and to magic, thinks Draco. But she'll come to me. If it's at all possible, she will come to me...

...

He wakes with a start.

The candles have gone out—the chamber's pitch black—and a weight's pressing down upon his chest.

He grasps it—it's a hand, fingers splayed.

His heart races. "*Hermione?*"

She doesn't answer, but he feels her leg slide over him, feels her lower herself upon him, and pin him to the floor.

"Bookworm?" He'd hoped she'd make contact, but he'd never expected it to be like *this*. He reaches up, finds her arms, runs his hands upwards, over her shoulders, her neck, touches her face...

And it's there—cool and hard, with sneering lips and jagged teeth.

She's wearing the mask!

"*Hermione?*"

She grasps his wrists, and moves his hands to her breasts. They're bare.

"*No, Bookworm...*"

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But her insistence is a powerful love charm, and he can't stop himself shifting his hips and pushing the hard ridge of his erection up against her.

She rises and, when he tries to pull her back, she gently deflects his hands, and then he feels her unbuttoning his fly, and he gives in to her completely—could he possibly do otherwise?—until she's freed him. Then, grasping her waist, and lifting her, he helps her impale herself upon him. "Ah..."

She knows his body, knows what he likes, and she gives it to him, riding him like it's the last time they'll ever be together.

Oh, please Merlin, no...

He wants it to last forever—he *tries* to make it last—but his climax is building fast, and he can't hold it back—he can't—oh fuck, he *can't*—and he sobs her name as his body betrays him, exploding inside her with spasms so powerful he blacks out from their intensity.

...

When he comes round, he can't find her.

"Hermione, *please!*" he cries, but she doesn't respond. "I don't *want* this," he shouts. "It's *my* mask—taking the Mark was *my* mistake—I should be the one to pay the price, not you!"

He knows what she's doing.

She's protecting him.

He's never properly held the mask—never felt the full force of the curse that dwells upon it—but he'd felt an echo of it, when he'd examined the box, and he knows something of the horrors Hermione's experiencing now. She must have tried—again and again—to take the thing off; she must have used every form of magic she knows and failed; she must have resigned herself to being trapped forever.

The sex had been her farewell.

Merlin, he thinks, she must be terrified.

"Hermione," he pleads into empty space, "let me help you—let me get Potter and Weasley back." He makes no attempt to hide the emotion in his voice. "I can't lose you, Bookworm. I love you."

He sees nothing, hears nothing, but somehow he *senses* that she's come to him, that she's kneeling beside him, and he finds her hand and raises it to his lips, whispering her name as he kisses it. Her flesh is invisible, but it's also strangely insubstantial, and he wonders whether the effect's progressive—whether she can feel herself fading away, and if that's what's made her despair.

"Listen," he says. "The mask was meant for me. I'm sure that, if I pull it, it'll come off." He feels her move—a flurry in the air beside him—and he knows that she's protesting. "No, listen," he insists. "All we have to do is stop it attaching itself to me."

Her wispy fingers squeeze his hand—*How?* he imagines she's asking.

"I'm not sure..."

He clasps her hand to his breast and, bowing his head and pressing a kiss to it, he thinks hard.

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He can feel her other hand stroking his hair, and he longs to surrender himself into her arms, longs to feel again the way she holds him when he's tired, or anxious, or after they've made love.

They argue sometimes—yes, they can fight like cat and dog—but that means nothing.

Their marriage is forever.

He's *not* going to lose her.

Suddenly, he has an idea: *Who can protect me from the mask? The person who protected me before.*

He gently releases her, and scrambles to his feet. "Wait here, Bookworm. Don't move—and don't worry. I'll be back as quick as I can."

...

Lucius is still sitting in his study.

"I've found her," says Draco.

"And?"

"She's wearing the mask."

"And I was right—it's cursed?"

"It's eating her away. But I have a plan, Father." He explains it, such as it is. "We must be quick."

Lucius hesitates. "If it fails—"

"Then *I'll* be cursed," Draco admits. "Listen to me, Father. All my life, I've been a coward; all my life, I've let people down—you and Mother; Snape; Potter; Dumbledore... But this is my wife—this is the only woman I,"—he sighs—"this is my *wife*, Father. If I don't do this..." He shakes his head. "I wouldn't want to live without her—I wouldn't know *how*. I want you to promise that, if anything should happen to me, you'll make sure she's all right—she probably won't let you, but—well—just watch over her. For *me*, Father."

Lucius eyes him, sadly. "You were lying about the grandson, weren't you?"

"Yes."

"I wish—"

"So do I, Father, but we haven't time for that now. *Please*—will you let me use it?"

Lucius nods. "I have no choice..."

He rises stiffly, and crosses to the fireplace, where—with a curt acknowledgement of its inhabitant—he pulls aside a portrait of Abraxas Malfoy and—to Draco's astonishment—reveals a Muggle 'safe'. He turns its circular lock this way and that, casting counter-charms between turns, then wrenches open the heavy door, and draws out a large velvet bag.

"I'm coming with you," he says.

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The White Tower feels empty.

"Hermione?" Draco tries to sense her presence. "Hermione, please don't back out of this. *Look.*" He takes his father's Death Eater mask from the velvet bag and puts it on. "See, Bookworm, if I'm wearing this, my father's magic will come between me and the curse."

He feels her fragile hand touch his arm, and his heart leaps into his throat. "It's going to work, Bookworm," he assures her, softly. "I'm going to save you..."

He reaches out, blindly.

"*Wait,*" says Lucius. He's picked up the wooden box, and he sets it, upright and open, on the table. "Once you have the mask," he explains, "put it in here, and I'll seal it in."

"Right," says Draco.

His heart's pounding, and he's finding it hard to get enough air into his lungs, but he's determined—no lurking cowardice nor instinct for self-preservation is going to stop him this time. "Are you ready, Bookworm?"

There's no reply, but he trusts that she is, and he reaches up, and finds her hair, as thin as a cloud, and—instinctively closing his eyes to focus better on his sense of touch—he searches with his fingertips until he discovers the edges of the mask.

That, alone, is solid; he curls his fingers around its metal rim.

Magic rushes into his arms, filling his body with a sense of power, and his head with dreams of violent domination, but he turns from them, and pulls—

And the mask comes away so easily, he almost falls over backwards!

He catches a glimpse of his wife in her pussycat pyjamas, her face red and swollen, before he's fighting the mask, struggling to keep it at arm's length as *it* tries to fly up to his face, and seal itself to his flesh.

"Draco!" croaks Hermione, grabbing it and pulling and, together, they wrestle with the accursed thing—him pushing and her pulling, him shoving and her dragging—and his father moves the box beneath their joined hands...

But it's a losing battle. He feels the mask attach itself to his father's mask, feels a dozen points of silver graze his skin as the curse invades the protective layer of metal...

Then he feels Hermione lose her grip, and his heart sinks.

Everything's lost.

He's been beaten—

"PROTEGO *MARITUS!*" bellows his wife.

And, suddenly, Draco feels the mask's power falter—and, at the same time, his own magic soar—and, with a surge of confidence, he wrenches it off, and rams it down into the box and slams the lid shut.

Lucius drops the box on the table, and draws out his wand.

"*Obfirmo infinitum,*" he declares, and imprisons the mask in its casket, forever.

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Later

Draco sighs.

They're still sitting where they'd collapsed when the fight was over—him leaning against one of the glass-fronted cabinets, Hermione in his arms—and he's just noticed how perfectly she fits on his lap—how her head lies, just so, upon his shoulder; how her hand rests over his heart; how the soft yet firm curve of her hip presses him in *exactly* the right place...

Mmm.

And—as he gently shifts her, so that he can burrow inside her pyjama top and tease her delicate skin—he realises that he'd almost stopped noticing how wonderful his wife is—how bright, and beautiful, and *right* for him—that he'd got so used to having her there, whenever he wanted her, he'd started taking her for granted—

"I am *never* staying behind again," she says, interrupting his foreplay.

He lifts his head, and looks at her.

"From now on, Draco, when you go on your business trips, *I'm* coming too."

He smiles. "They're very boring, Bookworm."

"I don't care."

"You'll have to fly."

"I'll manage."

"And you'll have to give up your job at the Ministry."

"So? *You'll* have to employ me," she says, cheekily.

He presses his lips to the top of her bushy head. "Sounds like a plan," he says and, because she tastes of dust, he adds, "now let's go and have a bath." And he grins, because it's been a while since they've splashed around together, and that's given him another idea: "Then we'll spend at least a week in bed."

"Hmm," she says, yawning theatrically, "I *could* sleep for a week."

"Well," he replies, nuzzling her neck and making her giggle, "if you're lucky—very, very lucky—you may get the odd nap, when I need a rest."

THE END

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Coda: nine months later

"Scorpius," says Draco, watching the tiny hand curl around his finger—

"*Hyperion*," says his wife.

She sounds exhausted; he decides to compromise. "Scorpius Hyperion Malfoy," he declares, kissing his son's forehead, "you have your mother's hair..."