

# Heartstrings

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As the end of potions neared, Hermione cleaned up her desk and emptied out the cauldron that had contained the love potion assigned in class. At the end of the lesson, many students were taking turns bottling up part of their potion in secret. Draco Malfoy was no exception. Hermione, on the other hand, looked around heatedly, disgusted at them all for such ridiculous behavior. Love potions just got people in trouble. As everyone left hurriedly with their smuggled vials of potion hugged tightly against their robes, unnoticed by the teacher who was putting all his efforts into praising one particular boy whose parents last year had come into some money, Hermione couldn't help but wonder just exactly who all the people in her class intended to use their potions on.

Harry was thinking that maybe he could use it on Cho Chang- it couldn't hurt, even if it was just to get her to stop hating him. Ron, on the other hand, fumbled the small vial he had concocted through his fingers, thinking gloomily about his startling lack of prospects for the thing. But, well, it wouldn't hurt to keep the thing, just in case he could use it on Malfoy to make him fall in love with a Mrs. Norris, or something of the like. As Hermione walked importantly out of the classroom right by Draco and his cronies, Harry saw Draco turn and gaze in the direction of the fastly disappearing bushy brown hair that was the only thing left of Hermione. Harry studied Malfoy's face as he watched her leave, and for a moment he could have sworn that in place of it's usual contempt for all and every "mud-blood", especially that one in particular, there was longing. Then it disappeared, and Harry shook it off as stress. He told Ron, jokingly, and they even had a good laugh, but the thought of it just wouldn't go away. He had never seen Malfoy look at any girl like that before... However, it wasn't long before Ron noticed it too. During dinner as Ron looked over at Draco to see what he might be sneering or laughing at, made his heart skip a beat. Draco was not sneering or laughing. In fact, he seemed oblivious to anything going on around him. His eyes were fixed on Hermione, unaware that every move of her fork and sip of her pumpkin juice was being... goggled, memorized. Ron nudged Harry in the arm, accidentally making him spill potato soup on his robes, but Harry soon over came his vexation at being disturbed in mid-bite when Ron showed him the horrid display. "That's just sick!" Ron exclaimed, trying to keep his voice from being overheard. "It's not bad enough that he has to make her life miserable whenever he can, now he's resorted to, well, stalking or something."

Later that night in the Common Room while they were all sitting around the fire doing homework, both Ron and Harry decided it was time to make Hermione aware that she was a fish in Draco's fishbowl. The two decided to tell her, but not exactly how. As they talked through the night, their conversation grew generally louder as they forgot about the almost stone-still Hermione pouring over her arithmancy book. Finally, just as Harry stood up to emphasize that it would not be a good idea to use polyjuice potion in this instance, Hermione stood up, quite vexed, letting her books fall heavily to the floor. "What ARE you two

talking about? And how can you think that Draco, Draco MALFOY, could POSSIBLY have a, well, an obsession, of all things, with ME! You two are just trying to play a joke on me! Well, I won't stand for this, I have WORK to do, so if you two slacker don't mind, I'll just take my studies elsewhere!" she said as she left in a huff of quills, ink, and parchment. As Hermione left, dropping various things on her way up the stairs to her room, Ron looked at Harry and shrugged. "Told you we should have just used the polyjuice," he said. Harry gave an exasperated sigh, flung his hands into the air and pronounced Ron a lost cause. As he left to go up to his own room, Romilda Vane crossed the room and stood in front of Harry and the stairway. "Oh, Harry, are you alright? You look down, is there anything I can do?" "No, not really Romilda," said Harry politely. "Well," said Romilda, "I bought this chocolate box for you- it's very expensive. Only the best for you Harry, I hope you enjoy them. Why don't you have one right now?" "No, thank you," Harry said, trying to get past, but he wound up with the chocolates anyway. Grumpily he trudged up the stairs to his room, dumping the chocolates and most of his books at the foot of his bed.

The next day was Saturday, and Harry fully intended to enjoy the day off from Quiddich practice. As he walked into the Great Hall for breakfast with Ron and Hermione, he noticed Draco pacing nervously next to the Slytherin table. As the three friends sat down to eat, Draco walked over and bumped into Harry. "Hey Potty, try to get your big back out of my way," he scowled. And as the three glared venom at Draco's back, Goyle, who had come up on the other side of the Gryffindor table unseen, poured a dark pink liquid into Hermione's drink. The affect wasn't instant, but rather a few hours later, during a breezy walk around the grounds with Ron and Harry, it happened. As they were walking on the grounds on that windy, but beautiful spring day, Hermione caught something in the corner of her eye and turned in the path to stand there, gazing at the most beautiful man she had ever seen in all her life. Draco Malfoy sat under a white blossoming tree on an intricately carved stone bench, wearing a white blouse, unbuttoned at the top to show his chest, with sleeves rolled up to right under his elbows, and nicely fitted black pants. His dark boots came up knee-high, and she looked at him, the wind blew softly, ruffling his hair and blowing through his shirt. He felt her longing gaze and turned warmly, knowingly, towards his love. Hermione, feeling like a lump of jelly in the presence of a god smiled awkwardly, trying her best at a smile that she thought implied intrigue. Harry and Ron walked on past, happily discussing the best tactics to beating Hufflepuff's new seeker, never noticing Hermione's absence. Suddenly Hermione realized that she was not dressed for proper introductions to this hunk. She sized up the situation and said in a shrieked voice "What am I doing? I should be doing homework! Bye Harry, Ron, I'll be in the library!" and ran off at top speed. "She's mental she is," said Ron after she left, "never takes a break." But, she had no intention whatsoever of going to the library.

Hermione flew back up to her room and quickly performed the spells she thought would make her look just right for the occasion. As she walked back out to find that gorgeous man- she thought she knew him from before, although she had never really remembered where, she tried her best to practice what she might say as an introduction. As she neared the tree, Draco stood to kiss her hand, and all thought left her with a fleeting, wistful sigh. She looked at him, and practically melted on the spot. "You looked kind of lonely, and well, I think you are the handsomest guy I've ever met," she said before she could stop herself. As she said this, she blushed crimson red, and had to look away. Draco reached forward, putting his hand under her chin, to pull her up to meet his starry-eyed gaze, and kissed her. It was the most wonderful feeling in the world- for both of them. As they pulled apart, neither could quite believe what had happened. After a minute or two or ten, Draco asked, "Hermione," blushing as he said her name, "would you like to go out with me?" She was so speechless all she could do was nod, as she lay her head on his shoulder. He put his arms around her waist as she leaned on him, and held her quietly

in his arms.

Meanwhile, Harry and Ron had decided to go back to the common room, but as they entered, Lavender Brown ran up to Ron and dragged him away for a "private conversation." Harry went up to his bed, hungry after all that planning. Then he remembered Rodmila's chocolates. "Well, it's not like they're poisoned anyway," he said to himself as he opened the box and took a handful of the rich dark chocolate. As he polished off the last crumb, Harry started thinking about Rodmila herself. And couldn't stop thinking about her. Her beautiful hair, her passionate eyes, the way her laugh sounded, even the cute way she stuck her tongue out and furrowed her eyebrows when she was concentrating on something- it all seemed new and fresh and wonderful to Harry. And as he couldn't stop thinking about her, he left the room to go find her, and thank her for the chocolates, and perhaps ask her to go out with him, if she'd agree. When he got down to the common room, he saw one of her friends and went to ask her if she could possibly get Romilda. As soon as Romilda heard that Harry wanted to see her, she knew that her love chocolates had worked. She was so excited that she ran down the stairs to meet him. As she walked towards him, he could scarcely talk at all. All he managed to say was, "Th-thank you for the chocolates." As she took him by the hand and led him to sit by her on the couch with a dazzling smile on her face he said, "You know, you are perhaps the most beautiful girl in the entire world...and well, would you like to go out with me? I mean, to Slughorn's party?" "Why, that is so sweet of you- of course I would love to go!" Harry couldn't believe that he had just accomplished asking Romilda to the party. As he escorted her out to the school grounds, he decided to take her for a walk by the lake, since it was such a nice spring day. As they were walking, Harry saw two figures under a tree on a bench engaged in a hard-core lip-lock, but thought nothing of it. He was quite enjoying being with Romilda- it was wonderful, and he thought of kissing her once or twice, but was too embarrassed to try.

Once Ron had gotten Lavender off of his back, he realized that Harry had left, and Hermione hadn't gotten back. He decided to go and find them to complain about Lavender, and as he walked outside he saw Hermione kissing Draco, and Harry nervously holding Romilda Vane's hand as they stood entranced by each other's presence by the lake. At first he thought he had gone mad, and blinked a few times to make sure. Then he exploded. Draco fell over, motionless and helplessly contorted. His eyes were closed and his lips were frozen half-parted. Ron felt proud of himself that he could perform *petrificus totalus* without speaking it, and turned his attention to the wide-eyed Hermione. Before she could bat an eye she found herself hanging upside-down, unarmed, and floating back towards the common room. Ron was yelling loudly at Hermione, but she could barely make out a word he said. His face was purple with fury. People had stopped to watch the display, some jeering, some laughing, and some yelling at Ron to put her down.

As Harry ran up to the pair holding Romilda's hand in his, even he had to admit- it was pretty funny seeing Hermione hanging in mid-air, trying frantically to hold her robes up with one hand and make gestures at Ron with the other. When the crowd of people following the pair arrived at the common room, they encircled the two with curiosity. Ron let Hermione drop with a heavy thud onto the couch. Ginny squeezed through the crowd looking horrified and demanded, "What in the world did she do to you to receive such treatment?!?" Ron looked up at her and shot back, "She was kissing Draco Malfoy!!! What did you expect me to do?? I rescued her, that's what I did!!" As Hermione tried to roll off the couch, she looked over at Ron with a glare that would have melted the very rocks of the earth. She wasted no time in answering questions, thinking only of her poor, helpless Draco-Waky lying all helpless in the grass. Rushing back out to the grounds, she found her love and gently unfroze his body "I'm so sorry, I really am, I didn't mean for that to happen! Oh my gosh, I am really, really sorry! I feel terrible, I

bet you don't want to go out with me anymore, I understand, I- I'll just leave!" she stammered, running away in mortification. She ran right by Hagrid's hut, bawling her eyes out and half stumbling for the tears. As she slumped helplessly onto a log at the edge of the dark forest, she heard a voice say "The stars bade me come and help thee today, what is thy problem?" She jumped and looked around to find a centaur standing not two feet from her in the forest. "Well, you see, I like this guy at school, but he is on another team, and my friends don't like him at all, but I was sitting by him, and talking to him, and being with him, and he is actually quite sincere and kind- and gentle. But, one of my friends saw us, and got so jealous that he froze Draco and carried me back to our common room just to separate us. And, I feel terrible for my friend having done that to him, and I can't get over the fact that if I had been more perceptive, Ron might not have gotten the chance to do such a thing..." He looked at her piteously, and answered back, "You should do what your heart desires. If your love is true, your friends, if they are real friends, will understand and love you for who you are, not for the people you are with." Hermione looked at the centaur, and thanked him immensely for his advice; she promised she would try to do anything to help him in the future if he needed her. As she walked back toward school drying her tears Draco suddenly appeared, running towards her, his face worry stricken. As he wrapped her in his arms, he asked her again and again if she was alright, and Hermione broke into a new fit of sobs, saying how glad she was that he had not decided to stop seeing her for what Ron did. Ron, in the meantime, was fuming in the common room. After the crowd realized that he wasn't going to dash after Hermione a second time, they didn't much feel like hanging around a moody Ron, even if Harry did take his wand away from him. Lavender floated over to the chair Ron was sitting in and put her arms around him comfortingly as she rested her head on his shoulder. "There, there Ron. If she wants to make an idiot of herself with Draco, you should just let her. She deserves anything she gets." He did not remove her once he saw that she had just come over to talk, and even felt a little better knowing that a girl was crooning over him. "Thank you," he whispered, as he kissed her forehead. "That's just what I'll do. Leave them to their misery. I hope they rot together." Harry also had a girl attached to his hip. Romilda was milking Harry for every last detail of his past adventures, even writing some of the less-known information down. And, of course, Harry was more than happy to oblige the eager Romilda. She, after all, was his girlfriend now, and she must know certain things about him.

Over the next few months, Hermione and Draco spent all their waking moments with each other, as did Harry and Romilda. It was really quite a scene- with Goyle hanging around the Gryffindor table more than usual of late, and Harry constantly having a box of chocolates in his bag from Romilda. Ron, however, never really got over the fact that his two best friends had abandoned him. He talked about it constantly, jeering at Malfoy whenever he got the chance and otherwise pretending Harry and Hermione didn't exist. He had finally asked Lavender out- she hung around him at least as much as Hermione hung around Draco anyway- and now mostly spent his free time in abandoned corridors with her.

Harry didn't have much time to spend with other friends now that Romilda had become his girlfriend, but he didn't mind- she was the only person he really cared about much anymore. Occasionally he'd see Hermione and Draco- he really had come a long way, what with spending all his time with Hermione, or "darling", as he called her, and even being exceptionally nice to Harry, even if Harry knew it WAS just for Hermione's sake. Some weeks later, Draco could be found pacing in the gloomy Slytherin common room. "I just can't take it any more..." he muttered darkly to himself, "I can't keep getting Goyle to slip her that potion... I can't! She should love me without it now, now that she has had a chance to see what I'm really like- how I feel about her... she's got to decide for herself!" And with that, Draco rushed out of the room to find Goyle before he went to breakfast. The plan was that, after breakfast that foggy Saturday morning, he would take Hermione for a walk around the grounds. If the effects of the potion

from yesterday were completely worn off, she might do something rash, in which case Draco had a vial of the love potion in the inside pockets of his robes, just in case. In the fog, no one would see him cast a spell to make her fall asleep, much less see him pour the potion down her throat. This was, of course, his last resort. If it could be avoided at all, he would do everything in his powers to make sure that Hermione was safe and unharmed- he loved her- but couldn't bare to loose her just because they used to be enemies. As Draco walked, arm in arm with his girlfriend, he began to see the signs of the potion wearing off. All of a sudden, to Draco's horror, Hermione stopped in her tracks, unhooked her arm from his, and looked him over quizzically. Suddenly, her eyes widened at the realization of what had transpired these last few, sweet, months of their lives. "Draco- Draco, how could you- how DARE you- I can't, I can't believe you- you you-" "Now, just wait darling, just calm down- I, I can explain, I- well," "Don't you call me "darling"- you've had me under a love potion for THREE MONTHS!" Hermione exclaimed, her face turning redder by the minute. Draco realized that to avoid the love potion the second time he would have to tell her the truth. "I- I love you Hermione, and- well, don't be upset with me, but I didn't see any other way to get you to like me, so I told Goyle to put some of the love potion we made in class into your drink. I told him not to this morning because, well, I wanted to see if you felt the same way..." Hermione considered Draco. He really had been the best boyfriend she had ever had- he was so sweet to her and nice- not at all like the old Draco. "Well, your methods are definitely questionable, but, now I do see- I, I forgive you, Draco, and, and I love you too!"

As the pair walked side by side down the misty paths that encircle Hoggwarts, they discussed how Harry and Ron had reacted the first day they fell in love. Draco was willing to be friends with Harry, and even Ron, if he would behave. Hermione didn't think Ron would ever be friends with Draco, but they both agreed to try their bests. Meanwhile, Draco wanted Hermione to meet some of his friends from Slytherin. "They are a little rough around the edges, but Pansy will get over herself one day, and Crabbe and Goyle are the loyalist friends I've ever had," Draco explained. Hermione smiled and said she'd try to befriend them if they would behave around her. Draco knew it would be a lot easier to convince his friends that Hermione wasn't just a "filthy little mud-blood"- he shuddered to think he might have once called his precious new best friend and girlfriend something that vulgar- than to convince his family of the same. When Hermione asked, he simply said, "Well, I'm an adult now and I can make my own decisions. They'll just have to live with it. I'd rather be thrown out of the family than forced into letting you go," he said and stopped to kiss her gently. She smiled back up at him, and slowly put her arms around his neck and tilted her head up to meet his eyes. "I love you, Draco Malfoy," she said.

Diana Bell Harry's short story