

The Runaways

Von viv-heart

Hermione curses. Loud. Years of dealing with corruption, idiocy and greed have made her rather short-tempered and crude at times.

Her flight has been cancelled and the next one doesn't leave until midnight. Seven hours in a damned airport with nowhere to go as she is just changing planes and has nothing to do. She is furious and so, so tired. But there is not much she can do about that damned storm raging outside.

She's flying back from an international congress in New York, had stopped for two days in London to sort some things out with the Ministry and just wants to go back to Kenya, but of course she is now stranded in Amsterdam.

Why didn't she just use a portkey? Ah, right. She had to go and work with a muggle organization, which insisted on picking her up from the airport. And the British Ministry is currently not organizing any portkeys to Kenya because of the situation in the country.

Hermione buys herself some overpriced coffee, knowing that she won't be able to sleep anyway and turns around, eager to find a place to sit down.

She collides with somebody, her coffee spilling all over their coat.

When she looks up, an apology on her lips, Hermione's eyes widen in surprise.

"Granger," Draco Malfoy mutters with annoyance, looking down on his ruined clothes.

"Fancy meeting you here."

"I am so, so sorry!" Hermione doesn't know what else to do so she puts down the paper cup with the remains of her coffee and sets to clean his coat with a napkin she had been holding.

"Don't worry about it." Draco sounds rather uncomfortable. "You know I can clean in up quickly. Just, not here."

Hermione freezes and let's her arms fall to her side. "Right. Sorry. I am just working with muggles a lot and...", she trails off, running a hand through her wild locks. She had cut them off in the years since the war ended and they don't even reach her shoulders now, but that didn't make them any tamer.

"That explains a lot," Draco says without looking at her. He is staring at something over her shoulder and Hermione feels like a fool. She had run into him on accident and he doesn't want to chat and even if curiosity is killing her and she doesn't have anything to do, it's clear that Draco feels uncomfortable with the encounter.

"I should be going then." Hermione doesn't even finish her sentence when a hand wraps around her wrist and she looks at him in surprise.

"When does your flight go?"

Hermione frowns at him. "Does it matter?"

Draco bites his lip, still not meeting her eyes. "I would like to buy you coffee, if you don't mind."

At that, Hermione can't help herself and she lets out a low, bitter laugh. She doesn't even know where it comes from. It doesn't matter. "Buy me coffee? When you can't even look me into the eyes properly? Malfoy, you didn't like me and I didn't like you. Why on earth would you want to buy me coffee?"

Draco sighs and finally looks at her. "I don't know if you have noticed, but I practically fled Britain after the war. I haven't had much contact with anyone who stayed since and I sure as hell refuse to read the Prophet. When I saw you here I hoped you could tell me how things are going. But I see now, that the idea has been rather foolish."

He turns to leave and this time, it is Hermione who stops him, even though she would always say she had no idea why she did so when he asked her about it years later.

"One sugar, no milk." At that Draco changes his way from the exit to the counter.

"I am not the best choice to ask about Britain," Hermione says when he places their drinks between them. "I haven't been living there since the war myself, so no, I hadn't noticed that you were gone."

Draco looks rather surprised at that. "Where did you go?"

"Med-school in Germany and then I went with Doctors without Borders to Africa. It was easier to get into a foreign muggle university as the chances of running into one of my supposed classmates from school were really slim. I wanted to get away from England and help people, so this is what I do now."

"But what about Weasley?" Draco blurts out before he can stop himself and Hermione grimaces. She has expected the question as everybody asked it, even years after their little kiss, but that didn't mean she has to like it.

"Nothing. What should be there? We never dated."

Draco isn't looking at her again, paying way too much attention to his coffee, obviously aware that he has upset her.

"I am sorry. I imagine you get that question a lot," he says.

A sour smile appears on Hermione's face. "You could say that. But enough of me. What happened to you? Why are you here?"

Draco is moving his coffee from one hand into the other, his eyes never leaving his cup as he answers. "I did the one thing I am good at. I ran. I fled with my family to France, where we own several properties. From there, I set to travel with first Blaise and Theo and later with other companions. Somewhere along the way, I lost them all, exchanging their company for a camera." He motions to a small bag Hermione hadn't noticed before.

"Where are you going now?"

Draco shrugs. "I don't know." At Hermione's confused look he sighs and sets to explain further. "I come to the airport and choose my flight at random. At first, we did it for fun and distraction but that was a long time ago. Now I want to see and get to know as much as possible. I know that I have been a prejudiced, narrow-minded child and I want to change that. I want to learn."

Without thinking, Hermione puts her hand on his, effectively stopping him from his annoying game with the cup and startling him into looking up at her.

"You have already changed if you think that."

Draco grimaces and pulls his hand away. "You are the most forgiving person on this damned planet, Granger. It's easy for you to say that."

Hermione, who was about to drink from her coffee, slams the cup onto the table and some of the coffee splashes out, but they don't pay it any attention.

"If I were that forgiving, I wouldn't be here," she says, her voice shaking with fury.

"If you weren't forgiving, I wouldn't be here either," Draco replies, holding her gaze.

"If it were Weasley who I ran into on this damned airport, I would be spending the night in the hospital."

"If I had forgiven Ronald, I would be spending the night in a warm bed with him and possibly a child or two. But I am sitting here with you of all people. Tell me again how forgiving I am."

They fall silent after her admission, not sure how to deal with so much honesty from someone they considered an enemy for the majority of their lives.

"So where exactly are you going?" Draco asks finally as nonchalantly as he can manage, pretending to check his phone.

"Kenya."

Draco nods, shifting in his seat. "Granger," he says finally and she looks at him, not sure what to expect. "Would you mind if I tagged along?"

Hermione blinks a few times, not sure if she had fallen asleep and was dreaming the whole strange encounter.

"You want to come with me? To Kenya?"

Draco scratches the back of his neck sheepishly. "If you would have me?"

"Why?"

A strange little smile appears on his face and Hermione doesn't know what to feel in that moment. For the first time since she ran into him in this damned airport she asks herself who the man in front of her has become in the eight years she hadn't seen him. She has to admit that the small glimpses she has gotten of his personality so far intrigue her.

"I haven't been there yet," he says, and hesitates, obviously unsure if he should continue but when Hermione tilts her head, indicating that she is listening he sighs and continues. "And I think I am sick of travelling alone. It feels like this little encounter," he motions between them, "means something. I don't believe in god or fate or anything, but this is different. To be honest I couldn't care less what is going on in England. I approached you because I wanted to talk to you."

She mulls over his admission for what feels like eternity before she finally agrees.

"But you have to listen to everything I say. I don't want to have your blood on my hands."

Draco nods and Hermione smiles at him, the first real smile of the afternoon, which catches Draco off-guard.

"You've gotten really pretty," he says and she raises an eyebrow.

"I know, thank you."

He laughs at her cool words, his cheeks turning a slight pink. "I didn't mean it like that. You looked great the night of the Yule Ball, you know."

"I don't like to remember that," she cuts him off and it's Draco's turn to rise an eyebrow.

"Care to elaborate?"

When she shakes her head, a strand of her short hair getting caught on her nose, he reaches out and tucks it away. She doesn't comment.

They sit there in silence, each occupied with their own thoughts until the bartender comes to their table and asks if they want something else.

A short glance at her wristwatch tells Hermione that only two hours have passed and she orders a cup of tea and a blueberry muffin while Draco excuses himself to buy a ticket.

She is surprised to see him come back two hours later.

"You thought I wouldn't come back." It isn't a question and she nods mutely and Draco runs both his hands through his short hair.

"Why did you agree for me to come with you if you don't want me there?"

"I don't know," Hermione replies truthfully and Draco stands up to order something else for himself.

"What do you want from life?" he asks when he sits down again, a tomato mozzarella sandwich and a Cafe Latte in his hands, and the question catches Hermione off-guard. She stares at her muffin before finally looking up to Draco. "Happiness."

The answer is so simple and he laughs. "Don't we all, Granger? Don't we all?"

She shrugs. "What do *you* want from life, Malfoy?"

"Redemption."

Hermione's hand holding a piece she had plucked from her muffin freezes on the way to her mouth. "What do you mean by that?" she asks carefully as she puts it down again, her appetite gone for now.

He shrugs and doesn't want to answer but Hermione reaches out to him again.

"Malfoy. Draco. Talk to me."

"I don't want to wake up screaming in the middle of the night anymore. I don't want parents to shield their children at the sight of me. I want to stop hating myself."

Hermione stares at him in horror when he finishes speaking. "Parents shield their children from you?"

"You can recognize the British tourists that way," he says without a trace of humour in his voice.

Hermione gulps, asking herself if she really should do it, but the look on his face makes her want to show him that he isn't alone. "I became a doctor because I feel guilty. I survived a war that killed so many and I know that some of them died so I could live." She takes a deep breath, not looking at him, trying to suppress the tears that threaten to spill every time she as much as thinks about it. "I couldn't save them and I hate myself for it. They call me the brightest witch of our age and I still failed. That's why I try to save everyone else."

Hermione is surprised when hands wrap around her. She hadn't noticed that Draco got up and she doesn't know what to do and settles to return the awkward hug.

His cheeks are pink when he pulls away and she can't help herself and smiles.

"Thanks," she says and he grimaces.

"Don't mention it. Ever again."

At that, she bursts into laughter and thinks that it might not be that bad to have Draco Malfoy in Kenya with her.

The little smile he tries to hide behind his cup, makes her laugh even more.

"This is weird," Hermione says when she calms down and at Draco's questioning look she elaborates. "Us. Talking like this. It's unexpected."

"Is it unwelcome?" He doesn't look at her when he asks it, but his voice betrays him. He has either lost the perfect self-control he had trained into him as a child or he simply doesn't care – Hermione can't tell, but what she can tell is that he fears the answer.

"No. Not at all."

They sip their drinks in comfortable silence and leave the cafe only when their cups are empty. Draco takes Hermione's bag and they find a mostly empty corner for themselves where they sit down on the ugly airport plastic chairs.

Soon enough, Hermione has her head on Draco's shoulder and he is running circles on

her arm with his thumb absent-mindedly.

She is half asleep when their flight is announced and he has to practically drag her to the plane, as she refuses to stand up because she has just gotten comfortable.

"So you think I am comfortable?" Draco laughs when he pulls Hermione with him by her hand and she nods, a little pout still on her face.

"If you want to you can sleep with me when we arrive in Kenya." Draco freezes when he realizes what he just said and looks at Hermione anxiously, expecting her to pull her hand away and to tell him to get lost.

"Maybe we will be able to finally sleep though a night," she says instead and tugs him along.

When they finally exit the plane in Kenya, they do so hand-in-hand and Hermione is sure, that Draco is right and their meeting means something, even though she wouldn't be caught dead admitting that.