

The Coffee Shop

by Ugly Kitten

Straddling the line between friendly and friendlier, Kingsley offers her a way to forget her troubles... HG/KS

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Just to let ya'll know, this is the very first prompt I have ever accepted anywhere. I'm rather proud of it. It was originally written for gelsey on LJ, who prompted me with: Kingsley/Hermione, friendship and coffee. I do so love to stretch my writing muscles!

Disclaimer: I do not own Harry Potter or Starbucks.

Hermione Granger believed, in her heart of hearts, that days like this only came around once in a lifetime. She sniffled quietly in the back of the Ministry of Magic's atrium, glad for once that she was a very plain girl. Just to be safe, though, she cast a quick Notice-Me-Not Charm and a Silencing Charm on its heels. Then she turned around and began to openly bawl against the white-washed walls. Her nose curled into the corner exactly as a teacher had once made her do instead of recess, before she knew she was a witch.

The day had just been awful. She wanted nothing more than to Apparate from the spot, but her intelligent mind railed against the idea immediately. Just when she was about to buck up the courage to turn round and head for the nearest public Floo, a heavy hand rested on her shoulder.

War instincts that hadn't quite faded kicked rudely into action. Her wand was out of its holster and pressed to the man's jugular before even she could blink. A deep, rolling chuckle reverberated down the wood into her hand.

"The war was over five years ago, Hermione."

Hermione stared, wide-eyed, up into black walnut-colored eyes. "Kingsley. I-I'm..."

He raised a hand to cut her gently off. "I deserved it, sneaking up on you as I did." He hesitated or paused, she couldn't really tell. "Would you care to accompany me to the auction this evening?"

Hermione had no idea what made him offer. She probably looked a fright she'd been kicked out of her home that very morning, after all. For some reason, that thought led to her answer. "Certainly. I'd love to."

A few well-placed spells later, Kingsley offered his arm courteously. Hermione felt completely at ease in spite of his silence. She knew him well enough to know that his silence was just him being Kingsley. The tall man and *damn* was he tall, at least two heads taller than her only spoke when he truly had something worth saying. His arm was thick with rippling muscles, and for a moment she pondered whether that was why his Patronus was a lynx.

"May I ask why such a powerful young woman was crying in my atrium?" he asked, his low drawl so disarming that Hermione found herself telling the truth.

"I've had a pretty awful day."

"How so?"

"Ron kicked me out. I lost my job. Take your pick," she said bitterly. Hermione sighed softly and straightened out her spine in an effort not to dissolve into tears again.

"You deserved better anyway," Kingsley said, the softness of the words making his ordinarily deeper voice lose its resonance. Hermione frowned. He shouldn't whisper it just wasn't the Kingsley she was used to. Not that she'd seen much of him outside of a professional situation since the war.

Hermione and Kingsley stepped into a large auditorium. She smiled up at him and then took a seat at the front of the room. It wasn't very full. Not until now, separated from the man who'd invited her in the first place, did she wonder what was on the auction block today.

The auditorium reminded Hermione of a church long wooden benches, a glass podium behind which Kingsley now stood, and plain white walls. Hermione had never attended a wizarding auction before. The novelty of the experience chased away her troubles, if only for a moment. That had probably been Kingsley's intention, she mused wryly.

"I now commence the auction of the first property on the list for this evening, the property once belonging to Madam Shrew in Ottery St. Catchpole. The lot begins at fifty galleons." The sonic boom of Kingsley's voice now was in direct opposition to the whisper he'd spoken only moments ago. Hermione smirked to herself that was Kingsley for you.

A large blackboard appeared behind the Minister, listing the various items that would come with the deceased woman's home. It also told what the property was worth. If someone got it for anything less than five thousand galleons, they'd make a killing.

A wand rose in the air somewhere to Hermione's right. Red sparks fluttered down from it, surrounding brilliant red numbers fifty. Kingsley acknowledged it with a nod. As the wands rose, and with them the galleons, Hermione began to think.

She had enough money in the bank from her parent's deaths, the divorce proceedings, and her final check to probably start up a business. Living with self-employed dentists had taught her much in the way of economic business. She needed a place to live.

The third lot of the night shocked her with its perfection. Madam Puddifoot had apparently kicked the bucket at long last, leaving a highly-desired three-bedroom flat over her tea shop. Before she could think it through a totally un-Hermione moment if there ever was one her wand was in the air.

"Fifty galleons to Miss Granger."

Someone else offered sixty. Another offered seventy before Hermione could offer for it again. Blood began pumping in her ears, a shot of adrenaline the likes of which she hadn't felt since the night Harry Potter defeated Lord Voldemort.

At four hundred galleons, it was down to her and some obscure old man she didn't immediately recognize. Hermione raised her wand over and over, combating the man in a silent duel for the property. The other auctioneers watched as the two fought it out, their heads flipping back and forth as though they were watching an intense racquetball game.

Five hundred galleons passed, and Hermione did a quick calculation to be sure she could feasibly continue the fight. But the old man glanced, his chest heaving slightly, at his wife beside him. The glare she fixed him with was enough to melt even the most cunning and sly of Slytherins. Even before Kingsley began the count, Hermione knew she'd won.

"Five hundred once. Five hundred twice. Sold, to Miss Granger in front."

Well. At least she had a place to stay now. Giddy on an adrenalin rush, she pushed the fretting little girl who worried what she was going to do with the shop into the back of her mind. Hermione settled into her seat again, smiling softly.

She had her own shop.

Now what?

Hermione stood in her shop the next morning, glaring at the petite little tables and odd little chairs with a vengeance. Her Transfiguration was a little rusty, but her Charms were still top-notch. She shrank down each item in the shop, including the counter and the ancient cash drawer. The curly-haired witch had just finished doing that when a barn owl fluttered into the shop.

Hermione

I'm sorry, but I really can't give you a hand. Ron has the whole family against you, even my wife. I sent out a note to all the old gang to see if they can come, though, so hopefully someone will show. Sorry, love.

Harry

Hermione sighed. Typical Weasley behavior, of course. She should have known that Harry would get roped into it, too. She was just glad that he didn't believe whatever Ron was saying about her. Or, if he did, he didn't care enough to stop being friends with her. Not yet, anyway.

The second letter, right on the heels of the first, wasn't as nice.

It was from her ex-mother-in-law.

It was a Howler.

"I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU'D HAVE THE GALL TO ASK MY SONS TO HELP YOU AFTER WHAT YOU DID TO RON!"

There was more, but Hermione didn't hear it. She's conjured up a mallet and started breaking down the walls separating the dining rooms. Ah, sweet noise and distortion, sweet destruction. Half one wall was completely demolished when she took a break, panting angrily over the mallet's handle.

"If I'd known we were doing this the Muggle way, I would have asked my father along."

Hermione spun around for the second time in two days to look into his black walnut-colored eyes. "I wasn't expecting anyone."

"Apparently," he said, gesturing to the tattered remains of the unheard Howler. "The others are strangely busy today."

"Aren't you?" Hermione asked, weakly swinging the mallet at the wall again. A satisfying amount of white powder sprinkled on the floor, along with a tiny piece of sheetrock.

"Like you, I enjoy being ahead on my work," he said casually.

He conjured another mallet slightly larger than hers and shrugged out of black robes. Underneath, he wore an old, paint-spattered once-white t-shirt and a pair of jeans that hugged his thick thigh muscles. Hermione couldn't help but stare out of the corner of her eyes as he strode over to the other side of the wall. His arse filled the jeans nicely.

She shook her head hard, hefted the mallet, and began to finish what she'd started. Kingsley worked in silence on his portion. They met in the last third of the wall, a lot sooner than Hermione anticipated. They swung in tandem on the last stretch of sheetrock.

As it fell, Hermione gasped for breath. She leaned on her mallet, grinning for a reason she couldn't name. Kingsley chuckled after a minute.

"I haven't done anything like this in years. Let's clean up magically, though, yes?"

"You've knocked out walls before, Kingsley?"

"My father was a Muggle. Construction worker. I went with him to work sometimes during summer holidays."

"I didn't know you were half-blood," Hermione said, smiling. "Such humble beginnings you had, Mister Minister of Magic."

He smiled and nodded. "So what are your plans for this place?"

"I'm going to make it a coffee house," she said. "I'll still sell tea and such. I think coffee is more romantic than tea, but I want it to be more a hang-out than a spot for romance. I always did worry about our main hang-out being in what amounted to a bar."

"What're you going to call it?"

"I don't know quite yet."

"Come now, Hermione, surely you must have some ideas?"

"Crispiss's Cove?" Hermione said, wincing at herself. How many bloody people had read *Rape of the Lock* to know what she was talking about?

"A little too obscure for the crowd you're trying for," Kingsley said, laughing. Hermione liked his laugh. It was like a bass guitar in the background, but essential to the music.

"I think it's time for a little magic in this construction project," Hermione said, brandishing her wand at the other walls.

"Indeed it is," Kingsley said. He wandlessly summoned his wand from his robes.

When they were finished, the coffee shop only faintly resembled the tea shop it had once been. A long bar sat along one side, filled with coffee-makers and grinders and a small glass display case for snacks. The back room now held an industrial-sized oven, in which Hermione planned to bake biscuits. The rickety old tables were Transfigured into comfortable couches and armchairs.

"Looks sort of like a Starbucks, but most wizarding people won't know what one is, anyway," Hermione said, laughing. She turned to Kingsley. "Thank you for all your help. Would you like to come up? I was going to make some supper."

"I will have to take a rain check, I'm afraid," Kingsley said. "I'm expected at a conference this evening with the Hogwarts board of governors."

She smiled up at him. "Of course. I'll see you later, then, Kingsley."

"Good evening, Hermione."

At the last moment, before he stepped out her door, she spoke up. "I think I know what I'll call it. The shop."

"What is it?" he asked.

"Ebony."

"What a coincidence. That is my wand's wood."

Ebony and Vine Coffee opened a few weeks later with a handful of Hogwarts graduates working the bar. No one really knew how the coffee shop began to get so popular. Lucius Malfoy frequented the establishment as often as Neville Longbottom. In spite of the Weasley family's attitude, George and Lee could often be seen in the shop in fact, began to advertise for Hermione in their shop in Diagon Alley.

The popular artist Dean Thomas painted a portrait of the late Headmaster Snape for the dining room only a month after the shop opened. A new wall mysteriously appeared after the portrait was hanged, behind which Neville Longbottom could often be seen with his bride-to-be, Hannah.

Harry Potter himself was rumored to frequent the back room of Ebony and Vine, though reporters were disappointed to find that there was a Floo there.

Dennis Creevey and Luna Lovegood gave the shop one of the most flattering reviews ever by *Quibbler* magazine.

Mysteriously, however, the woman who began it all was rarely sighted in her own shop. Miss Hermione Granger spoke only to her employees. No reporter or photographer had yet seen her.

Hermione wasn't entirely certain what to do with herself, you see. The wizarding world wasn't entirely up-to-date with the Muggle world. She found herself wanting to ask Kingsley Shacklebolt on a date but not entirely sure how to go about it. Would he have any stigmas about her being younger? Would he even be willing to date while in office? She barely knew him at all.

She paced the kitchen one last time before making up her mind, only to have it made up for her in the form of a head in her fireplace.

"Kingsley!" she shrieked. "You frightened me."

"I apologize, that was not my intention," he said. The gold of his single hoop earring shimmered in the bright light of her kitchen Floo. "I was wondering if perhaps I could cash in that rain check, with a few changes, for this evening."

Hermione quashed the instinct to squeal. She cleared her throat and nodded. "Go on."

"There is a new coffee shop in Hogsmeade that I have been, admittedly, curious to visit. Care to join me for a cup in, oh, five minutes, Miss Granger?"

Hermione couldn't help it. She laughed. "Of course, Mr. Shacklebolt, I would be honored to visit this odd little hole-in-the-wall coffee shop with you."

The Floo closed down. Hermione stood straight and headed to her bedroom for a quick change of clothes. Whoever knew that this had all begun on the worse day of her

life?