

OWL Save You!

by Meladara

When Hermione discovers that the On-line Wizarding Library is going to shut down, she jumps in to save the day. Severus and her friends help.

Chapter One

Chapter 1 of 4

When Hermione discovers that the On-line Wizarding Library is going to shut down, she jumps in to save the day. Severus and her friends help.

The characters and canon situations in the following story belong solely to JK Rowling, Scholastic and WB. I am not making any money from the publishing or writing of this story.

A/N: This is a gift for the lovely Sentimentalist and all the other ladies over at sshgow/project over at yahoo, who selflessly put many hours of work to preserve the fics that would have otherwise been lost when the Online Wizarding Library went offline. Thank you for all your work!

Also, my sincerest thanks to Madam Ader and Sixpence Jones, who despite the sshgexchange, were generous enough to help me out by betaing and Britpicking, respectively.

Meladara

Hermione Granger stormed into the Department of Research and Development laboratory at Aspen Potions. As the door slammed behind her, her lab partner looked up from the cauldron before him and watched her fume in silence, a clearly amused look upon his face.

He loved when she got worked into such a fit. The air around her would become charged with magic, causing her robes to billow and her hair to frizz. She was always at her most beautiful when she was incensed. Of course, that may have had something to do with the flushed cheeks and heaving bosom that also accompanied such fits, but if that was true, Severus Snape wasn't telling.

As he turned his attention back to his potion and began a slow, steady stir, he heard her begin to sputter out words angrily.

"I can't believe this happening, Severus! It is an outrage! How can you stand by and let all that work go to waste?" Hermione moved to his side, throwing a Ministry of Magic memo down onto the table next to him.

Ministry of Magic

General Memo

To: All Departments

From: Department of MIT

Date: April 9, 2012

Re: OWL/On-line Wizarding Library

It has come to the attention of the Ministry that due to a magical computer virus (magivirus), the digital archive known as the On-line Wizarding Library (OWL) will be no longer be available after April 30, 2012. If you have any questions or concerns in regards to the closing of OWL, please direct all questions to Bristol Harper in the Department of Magical Information Technologies. We are sorry for the inconvenience.

He'd known this was coming. Honestly, they all had. It had been months, maybe even years since OWL had been working properly, and of course, as things always went with technology, magical and otherwise, it had to fail at some point.

"Now, Hermione, I don't see what you are so worked up about," he drawled calmly. *I* am not letting anything go to waste. Also, you know as well as I, OWL has been on a downward spiral for some time now. This latest magivirus was just the final nail in the coffin," he said as he motioned to the memo. Before turning his attention back to his cauldron, he sighed quietly, and then, in a voice that was tinted with slight irritation, he said, "Now, please stifle your Gyffindor indignation and quiet yourself."

"Damn it, Severus!" her rant continued. "They are going to let it all go. All of it!" She huffed out the words with exasperation. Making no effort to keep her raging emotions from showing in her movements, she sloppily flopped onto the stool next to him. Resting her chin on her hand, she watched in a daze as her lab partner tended to his bubbling potion. His hands worked in smooth, swift stirs that served both to mesmerise and sooth her. Before she registered it happening, she felt her anger slip away. In its place grew a helpless sadness.

He almost always had that effect on her. She could sputter and rant to him at times, from across the room usually, but as soon as she got close to him, all anger would simply evaporate. His fluid movements, purring voice, and exotic scent had worked an unknown magic on her for years. It was down right irritating at times that simply his presence could calm her so. Sometimes she needed to have a good rail at him, and this odd reaction to him really made it very difficult to accomplish.

When she could see he had completed his task at the cauldron and that his attention was safe to draw to her, she placed her hand on his arm.

Severus looked up from his cauldron and took in her face. After years of working with Hermione, he knew instinctively that she would be calmer now, but he was surprised to find that the anger had been replaced with sadness.

"Hermione, what is it?" he questioned quietly.

Taking in a shaky breath, she spoke in a calm, but sad, voice. "They are going to just let it die with no attempt to back up the data. It will be gone. Forever, all that knowledge, just gone! My graduate work is all stored there, yours as well, if I remember correctly. They finished digitizing all the graduate work from the last twenty years several years ago."

"True, but Hermione do consider, there isn't much we can do," he told her seriously. "Be comforted that we have our own copies of our research to fall back on, and as for the others, it isn't as if we can go in and save all those documents ourselves. The magivirus will destroy the OWL database in a matter of days for certain. Even if we were to try to do something Gryffindor, such as go in and save what we could, there are only two of us. Not to mention, the Ministry is unlikely to give us permission to host any of that data. Honestly, it is none of our business."

Hermione looked up at him surprised, her eye alight. "That's it!" she crowed. Severus grimaced as he watched her jump enthusiastically from her stool and run to turn on the laboratory computer. The former sadness, which had marred her beautiful face, was suspiciously missing.

"What is it, Hermione? Don't you dare involve me in one of your schemes," he warned menacingly, his voice falling very close to the one she remembered from her youth. After their years of working together, he was no stranger to the rapid mood swings or the sudden pet projects of one Hermione Granger. "I will have none of it, Hermione!" he warned, again.

Hermione laughed teasingly. "Now, now Severus, you know you've never succeeded in telling me no. You always make a valiant effort of course; however, in the end you always do whatever it is that I want. You might as well give in now. Besides, it will be fun to work with my girls again. We haven't had a get-together for ages!"

Remembering the last time she'd invited those biddies into his lab, Severus shuddered. "If I recall," he muttered in irritation, "there is a very good reason for that." His eyes bored into her, his displeasure clear at the memories he was currently recalling.

Hermione smirked at him, full of mischief.

Recognizing the look in her eyes, he froze. This was not good. "Oh, no. I don't know what you are planning to do, but please, Hermione, I beg you! I will do anything you ask, just do not make me work with them."

She sparkled at the agitated man; it had been so long since she had been able to indulge in one of her favorite pastimes: throwing Severus off balance. It was nice to finally feel comfortable enough around him to behave so freely. Smirking knowingly, she smiled and sang out, "I told you," earning herself a scathing glare and quiet growl from the man. Then, with a much kinder smile on her face, she continued. "Now, would you please go and visit this Bristol Harper?" Her hand absently tapped on the name on the memo. "She is the one currently in charge of OWL. Put that scowl of yours to good use. Go and get us permission to archive the data on OWL, and in return, I will promise to not let a single one of my friends into our lab, this time."

With a sigh, he nodded. It was rather appalling how easily he bent to the petite woman's demands, but it was worth it to restore the balance of their relationship. At least he would be spared the company of the tittering Potions biddies that Hermione called friends.

"I don't know why you think those friends of yours even qualify as colleagues. Potions masters never deal in cosmetics," he sputtered.

Hermione rolled her eyes and sighed with aggravation at the return of the long since exhausted argument. He just couldn't let it go. With a deep breath she began the response she'd repeated many times in the past, "You know very well that Pansy is the only *Potions* mistress among them and really, what did you expect her to do with it? It's Pansy! And as I've told you numerous times, Hannah is a Transfiguration mistress, with a focus on the consumer marketing, and Luna, with her joint Herbology and Magical Creatures masteries, is in charge of managing the raw ingredients side of the business. They all share quality control and Draco takes care of finance and employee management. How difficult is it to understand?"

"Know-it-all," he bristled.

"Yes, yes. I know. Now, scoot," she told him, as if she were shooing a young child. "I can't get anything else done until we've got that permission. I'll tell you the plan when you return."

And with that, her lab partner was gone, with a billow of robes and a slam of the door.

From: Ms. Granger: PotionsKIA@aspenpotions.com

To: group: 'My Girls': magicalmaiden@affodell.com; pippa@affodell.com; queeny21@affodell.com>

Sent: 10 April, 2012 10:52 AM

Subject: Rescue Mission

Hi Ladies.

So, anyone up for a last ditch effort to save the files at OWL? The MoM is going to let it all die and I just can't let that happen. Please tell me you are in. I've sent Sev to get permission to archive it all ourselves. I need you, girls!

In other words I'm calling in all favors. You ALL owe me, or do I need to remind you what happened in Lisbon? And don't you dare try to weasel your way out of this one, Pippa. I have a scar on my wrist to show for your shenanigans.

Be obscure clearly. EB White

From: Hannah: pippa@affodell.com

To: Group: 'Potions Biddies': magicalmaiden@affodell.com; PotionsKIA@aspenpotions.com; queeny21@affodell.com

Sent: 10 April, 2012, 11:12 AM

Subject: RE: Rescue Mission

Calling in favors, huh? This must be serious. Kia-Mia never used her favors unless...

Mia? Does a certain brooding Potions master happen to have something you want stored at OWL?

Really, you need to just fess up to the fact that you fancy the pants off the man.

(Of course we'll help. Just let us know what you need us to do.)

From: Ms. Granger: PotionsKIA@aspenpotions.com

To: group: 'My Girls': magicalmaiden@affodell.com; pippa@affodell.com; queeny21@affodell.com

Sent: 10 April, 2012 11:22 AM

Subject: RE: RE: Rescue Mission

Pippa, Pippa, Pippa. Are you sure you want to go there? You, my dear friend, are skating on thin ice! I still haven't forgiven you for abandoning me with that... that... WHAT was he? I still have nightmares, Ms. Abbott! And you will be held responsible. Shagging random strangers...

It is possible for trolls to breed with humans, I wonder?

Well, yes he does have stuff there. We ALL do. That is where the brilliant MoM has been storing all the graduate level research, despite the fact that it is obvious, to anyone who has used actually used it, that it hasn't functioned properly for years. Do you know how much ground-breaking research is done at that level? I can't let that resource disappear! The archives go back more than 20 years now and they are just going to let it all disappear.

I hurt.

Physically.

The thought of all that knowledge lost. I mean, sure there are hard copies... somewhere. But please, you know as well as I that they were probably thrown into boxes, shrunk, and then promptly lost.

I'll let you know the plan as soon as I know it. Oh! And no, I don't! (I don't know how many times I've told you we are just FRIENDS!)

H~

Be obscure clearly. EB White

From: Pansy: queeny21@affodell.com

To: Mia: PotionsKIA@aspenpotions.com; Luna: magicalmaiden@affodell.com; Hannah: pippa@affodell.com

Sent: 10 April, 2012, 12:02 PM

Subject: RE: RE: RE: Rescue Mission

Oh please, Granger! Did you not even realize that you said you sent 'Sev' off. No one, and I mean no one, calls Severus Snape 'Sev'! Except you! Not to mention, all you have to do is snap your little fingers and off he trots to do your bidding. You need to just Gryffindor the fuck up and get it over with. You fancy him. He fancies you. How long have you been working together now? What is it, SEVEN years?!

You are hopeless. Do you realize that you turned down a twenty percent ownership, in what is now a multi-million galleon cosmetic company, to work with our old teacher! If that isn't love, then I don't know what is.

I'll contact Draco and see if he's okay with us picking this up as a project. Since we've just completed a big project, all three of us are entitled to a day or two of playtime.

Potions Biddies Hannah? Whaaa?

Queeny

From: magicalmaiden@affodell.com

To: pippa@affodell.com; queeny21@affodell.com; PotionsKIA@aspenpotions.com

Sent: 10 April, 2012 12:12 PM

Subject: RE: RE: RE: RE: Rescue Mission

Now. Now. Ladies. Play nice.

Hannah: It was rather dreadful, you know. By the time I found Mia, she'd been cornered by that beast. He'd actually drooled in her hair and her wrist was bleeding, from what could only be called claws. I'm sure she was seconds away from vomiting, either that or AK'ing him on the spot. I haven't seen her look that green since we set her up on that date with Draco. (HAHA!) I would not be surprised if she never wants to go on holiday with us again. Although, part of me can't blame you. That hunk of meat you caught was rather delish, but not as nice as mine.

Pansy: Language, dear. We wouldn't want to appear uncivilized to our dear companions. And you know, Mia may have turned down 20% in our little venture, but she did manage to keep a tidy 5% ownership, while neatly conning her way out of any work. I've always thought that move was rather Slytherin worthy of her. Though, Hermione's Hair Tamer is still one of our best-selling products. Plus, Queeny, you forget that she also owns what I suspect is a large percentage of Aspen Potions. I'd say she got the better deal, but then again, she has to work with Mr. Snape, so it could be questionable.

Hermione: And there it is. You got a good deal, true. But you had to work with Mr. Snape to get it. You may deny it to yourself, you may deny it to us, but we know the truth. Me thinks the lady doth protest too much! ;)

Draco says, 'Have at it.' So, we are at your disposal for the next three work days. He also said he'd talk to the Affodell IT department and have them set up a dedicated server for us to use. It should be up by morning at the latest.

From: Hannah: pippa@affodell.com

To: Group: 'Potions Biddies': magicalmaiden@affodell.com; PotionsKIA@aspenpotions.com; queeny21@affodell.com

Sent: 10 April, 2012, 12:15 PM

Subject: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: Rescue Mission

Oh Come ON! It's funny, Pans.

Sure, Snape was completely livid when he gave us that name, but then again we had just blown up his lab. ****snicker****

I was just messing with my email groups and it came to me. LOL! If he only knew...

Ohhh, I've got it. I'm making us T-shirts! It'll drive him nuts, especially since we all know how well I brew potions! I can't wait to talk to Cissy!

From: Ms. Granger: PotionsKIA@aspenpotions.com

To: group: 'My Girls': magicalmaiden@affodell.com; pippa@affodell.com; queeny21@affodell.com

Sent: 10 April, 2012 12:32 PM

Subject: Oh Please!

Why do our emails always dissolve into this? You need to just give it up for a lost cause, please ladies! It's not going to happen. Not now. Not ever.

And yes! You are correct. I will NEVER go on holiday with you three again. Why would I want to travel somewhere, only to end up watching my three friends go off and shag delicious men, while I play interference with the troll man? He smelled like rotting cabbage. Nightmares, I tell you. Still, a full 9 months later!

Not to mention that I never got to see Palacia de Quinta de Regaleria! That was the whole reason I agreed to go on the trip in the first place! It is rumored to have at one time been a magical palace, even by Muggles!

Poor Draco. That was the worst date ever. Remind me again why I'm friends with you lot!?

I've never regretted taking the 5%. You got a golden startup product and I got a tidy profit that keeps on growing. Although, it still irks Sev(erus) that you all (we all) went in with Draco and started a cosmetics company instead of opening a 'respectable' Potions firm. Really, I'm not sure why though, you'd only be more competition for us. It is one of his favorite arguments though.

I really loved the newest launch, btw. Very tasteful. Is Cissy still designing those?

As far as my interest in Aspen, you know Severus, I'm spell bound to secrecy. But I can say I am doing just fine for myself.

He's back and he hates when I email in his royal Slytherin presence. I'll get back to you with the plan in a while.

H~

PS: Pippa! Put me down for a Medium! You're right, it will drive him nuts!

Be obscure clearly. EB White

"You're back, I see," Hermione said as she spun in her chair to look at Severus. She clicked her tongue and then bit her lip, speculatively. He simply raised an eyebrow at her clearly unnecessary statement.

Ignoring his irritation she continued, "How'd it go?"

"As expected. They groused at first; however, in the end, we've been given permission to archive whatever we can, with the caveat that we will contact the either the uploading institution or the author within six months. At which time they will be given the option to take their research, ask for us to delete it, or provide us permission to keep it archived."

"Excellent! It's all arranged then!" Hermione said as she rushed toward Severus, who was now standing at the rough pine table that was used, mostly, for ingredient preparation. He watched as her quick steps brought her to stand next to him. She was still bubbling with excitement, as she always did at the prospect of a new project. "The girls just finished a launch at Affodell. They always take a few play days after a launch. So, we are all going to save all the files. Draco is setting up a server for us to use, and the best part is that it can all done without a single...umm...Affodell girl setting foot into your precious lab. Now, my only concern is how to save the files. You know

how OWL is; it doesn't have a great platform for downloading or sharing documents."

Severus glared in irritation at the chattering woman, causing her to fall silent. "Now, first, I must say that you are wrong. There is an Affodell girl in our lab every day," he grumbled with mild disgust.

"Oh! You git, you know what I meant," she chided. Knowing that his disgust was an act, she took no offense and instead, she strove to make her voice as syrupy sweet as possible. If he wanted to play the role of grump, she could not but help. "Besides, I'm not a real Affodell girl. I'm just honorary."

"As you say." He rolled his eyes and in a slightly more awkward tone, he continued. "Secondly, I have obtained a rather delectable lunch for us, and it is currently getting cold. So, if you would be so kind as to shut that pretty little mouth of yours, and then strive to contain your excitement long enough for you to propel yourself into a seated position, I will see to lunch."

Hermione clamped her mouth shut, stifling a laugh. Even after seven years working with Severus, it still embarrassed him when she got carried away. He was always so calm, calculating, cool, and he just didn't know how to react to her enthusiasm. Of course, she found his awkwardness endearingly amusing, but she would never tell him that.

Severus opened the Styrofoam container he'd placed before Hermione. Letting out a gasp of delight, she cried, "You got us Vrisaki!" Hermione jumped up and quickly wrapped her arms around him. She didn't care that he just stood there, as if frozen in place. He had bought her Greek food for lunch! The sly man knew it was her favorite. "Thank you!" she told him with a shy grin as she released him. Somewhat more self-conscious now, she turned back to the table of food, a blush clearly visible on her face.

The girls were right, she had it bad for him, but what was the point? He'd made it clear four months ago that he was not interested. Since then, they'd been struggling to return to their former state of friendship, and today she was finally feeling as if things were returning what they'd enjoyed before: a comfortable friendship. He was, of course, still uncomfortable when she hugged him, or touched him in any way for that matter, but he'd always been that way. Regardless, it was clear to her that he too was trying to heal their friendship; the lunch before her was a clear example of his efforts.

Hermione sighed and sat down to eat, motioning for Severus to join her. Over their lunch of the best Greek food ever, Hermione explained to him how they would save OWL.

"As you know, OWL is organized into sections of study: Potions, Transfiguration, Charms, Herbology, Arithmancy, Ancient Runes, Divination and Astronomy." She ticked off each one on her fingers. "Each section contains hundreds of files of graduate and master level research. So, my thought is that each person working on the project will take one section, and after creating a complete list of all the files in each category, they will begin saving the documents. However, since OWL was not created to share the actual files, only to archive, we really have a problem as to how to get to the files saved. I was thinking there would be a way to download whole file directories without getting access to the OWL server itself, but now that I think about it, that is something the MoM would have to approve."

"Indeed. It is unlikely they will approve that kind of access. I was lucky to get them to agree to the limited archiving, period," he told her honestly.

"Well, it can't hurt to try. Do you think a Patronus sufficient?"

Severus nodded and Hermione sent a sparkling otter on its way. Moments later, they received a haughty reply of, "*Unfortunately, due to new security measures established in light of the ongoing situation, all direct access, whether physically or virtual, to the OWL server, has been limited to personnel with the Level 2 security clearance...*"

Hermione sputtered as she'd listened to the line she was being fed and then stalked away from still talking patronus. Well, now she had an answer; there would be no downloading directly from the server. As the patronus faded, she paced the room, stamping her irritation into the floor with each step.

"As if physically limiting contact with the server was going to save it from the magivirus. Honestly!" she muttered. "Too little, too late, I swear... I'm thankful everyday that you saved me from working with the pea-sized intellects that inhabit our beloved Ministry."

Severus snorted at her indignation, loving how riled she got at stupidity.

Hermione stood up and placed her crumpled napkin on her plate. "Thank you for lunch, Severus," she said, sliding her wand from her sleeve and quickly banishing the dishes to the kitchen. "I think, if you don't mind, I am going to work on organizing what needs to be done for the project. Do you mind attending dinner with everyone tonight? I promise the girls will be on their best behavior."

"Hermione, you promised!" he complained, quite uncharacteristically.

She smiled, then with a laugh, told him, "If you'll recall, I promised that I would keep them out of our lab, nothing more. I never said that you wouldn't have to see them. Besides, I am going to need your help. You don't often admit to it, but you are great at using the computer, and we will need those skills if we are going to save everything. I'll make reservations at Padma's," she offered.

Severus' eyes narrowed as he studied the woman before him. He wasn't sure if going there was a good idea. Finally, he sighed and grumbled out, "If you must. But, I warn you, I won't be pleasant."

"Honestly, Severus. Are you ever pleasant with them?" she retorted as she walked to the computer to get started on her work.

From: Ms. Granger: PotionsKIA@aspenspotions.com

To: group: 'My Girls': magicalmaiden@affodell.com; pippa@affodell.com; queeny21@affodell.com

Sent: 10 April, 2012 3:06 PM

Subject: All Set

So, the MoM, in its infinite wisdom, has decided that we are a security risk and cannot have direct access to the server, whether physically or virtually, blah, blah, blah... So, we are left with the wonderful option of copying and pasting each document, and then saving it to our own server. We should all be able to work remotely, so you can set yourselves up to work from home if you want. This is will be long and tedious... so be forewarned!

Are you all available for dinner tonight? I want to walk everyone through what exactly we are going to do and assign sections to everyone.

Also, can one of you confirm with Draco that we will have online access to the server?

Let me know and I'll make reservations. Does Padma's sound fine?

H~

PS: Sev has said he "won't be pleasant" to you tonight. You have been warned! Please behave! Please...

Be obscure clearly. EB White

Chapter Two

Chapter 2 of 4

When Hermione discovers that the On-line Wizarding Library is going to shut down, she jumps in to save the day. Severus and her friends help.

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Also, my sincerest thanks to Laralee88 for the beta.

"Hermione!" Padma greeted as she entered.

"Hi, Padma! How are things?" Hermione asked as she drew her friend into a hug.

"Oh, you know. It goes. Running a restaurant is a lot of work, but I love what I do and wouldn't change a thing," Padma told her. Then she turned and led Hermione through the restaurant. It was a cosy establishment with small tables and walls draped in heavy fabric. Exotic music played quietly in the background, and the smells coming from the kitchen spoke of worlds and cultures far away.

Stopping at the familiar door, which was tucked behind a deep maroon curtain, Hermione told her, "I understand. It really helps that we get to do the work we love. I hope it was not too much trouble to accommodate us tonight. We always seem to do that to you, don't we?"

"It's not a problem at all," Padma quipped with a smile as they went through the now-open door. "Anything for you guys. Let me know when you are ready to order. I'm sure you remember: just tap your wand to the blue square in the middle of the table, and I'll come right away. Who are you expecting tonight?" she asked.

"Umm... I think there will be five of us: the girls, Severus and me, but I don't know. Draco might stop by as well."

"Oh! Alright. Sounds good. Shall I send in some wine for you?"

"That would be lovely! You might as well send in a couple of bottles. You know what we like, and the girls won't be happy without it," Hermione told her with a wry smile.

Padma nodded, but before she could turn to leave the room, something made her freeze in place. Hermione's smile had melted off her face; in its place was a mask of seriousness. Padma watched for a second, surprised by the sudden change and then called, "Hermione, are you okay?"

"What?" Hermione yelled, startled.

"I asked if you were okay," her friend repeated. "You drifted off on me there."

"Sorry about that. I'm fine. Really. I was just..." she said trailing off with a sigh. Then shaking her head, she tried to clear out whatever was troubling her. "Sorry, I was just suddenly flooded with what happened the last time we came here, Severus and me." Looking down, she closed her eyes as her hand ran over face and then through her hair.

"I'm really sorry about that night, Padma. I was mortified that we caused such a scene; we should have apologized months ago. Merlin, it was Christmas, and we had a full blown argument in the middle of your restaurant during the dinner rush! We were lucky that it didn't end up in the *Daily Prophet*." Again, she sighed and shook her head. Then, with a regretful smile on her face, she said, "I really am sorry."

"Oh! Hermione! It was forgotten long ago. Moreover, for the record, I never blamed either of you. Those things happen. Not to mention that this is good old Professor Snape that we are talking about here; it is a miracle that you two lasted as long as you did without an argument," she explained with true compassion.

Hermione hugged her friend. "You are a saint, my dear! I mean that!"

"Don't be ridiculous, Hermione," Padma demurred as her friend released her from the embrace.

"Now, why don't you tell me what you've done to *The Room*? I love it!" Hermione said, turning her attention to the much-changed room.

"Thanks. I was finally able to convince Parvati to come over and do the transfigurations for me. It looks much better now. I had better get back out there. I'll be back in a bit to check on you." Padma gave Hermione one last smile and then, with a nod, headed out of the room.

It was nice to see Padma again. It had been a bad idea to stay away for so long; she had truly missed her kind friend.

The Room, as it was known in their group of friends, was a private meeting area that they had used often in the past. Shortly after the war, it had become obvious to Hermione and many of her friends that going out in public was a nightmare and privacy was non-existent. When Padma had opened her restaurant six years ago, she had been gracious enough to set up a room for them to use at their convenience. From then on, it had been their haven. For years *The Room* had remained simple and plain, filled with cast off furniture of many different styles. Gradually, Padma had added more and more appropriate décor. However, that was nothing compared to it now. Now, it was magnificent.

Hermione stepped back to take in the new look. As in the main portion of the restaurant, the walls were draped with rich fabrics of deep jewel tones. The lighting was warm and at just right level to provide for an intimate meal with friends. Four low, square tables of a thick dark wood were arranged in the centre of the space, and each table was surrounded with large pillows upon which to sit.

Suddenly, Hermione's laughter rang out through the room. Severus was going to have to sit on the ground! On pillows! She couldn't wait.

Selecting a spot at the table furthest from the door, Hermione positioned herself so that to her left was the deepest, darkest corner of the room, a perfect place in which Severus could retreat. Then she settled down onto the deep pillow to relax while she waited for her wine to be delivered and friends to arrive.

It was her habit when gathering the more difficult of her friends together to arrive at least thirty minutes in advance. During this time, Hermione would be sure to drink a glass of wine and mentally prepare herself for the battle ahead.

Hermione knew from experience that she would be expected to play the role of mediator tonight. It hurt her that her friends argued so fiercely, even if it was mostly good natured, though she was thankful that Severus wasn't outright nasty any longer.

Well, most of the time he isn't, she thought.

However, her friends definitely enjoyed making things uncomfortable for him and did so as often as they possibly could. Yes, she knew that they would be counting on her to run interference throughout the evening. Hopefully, the girls would be distracted by the bottles of fine wine, and Severus by Padma's exquisite food. That would allow her to talk quickly and Severus to make an escape as early as possible, thus minimizing everyone's stress.

"A girl can hope," she mumbled into the empty room with a sigh.

Pulling herself from her mental preparations, she checked the time. Severus would be here in ten minutes, and the girls in as little as fifteen minutes. Staggering their arrival times was another way she minimized her stress. By having Severus arrive before the girls, he was able to acclimatise himself to his surroundings and feel less on edge. Additionally, it restricted the girls' plotting time, and the less time available for them to band together, the better it would be of keeping her sanity. However, they had been known to prepare in advance specific topics for teasing and methods for irritation.

Hermione slid her wand from her sleeve and lightly tapped the blue square in the centre of the table. Moments later, Padma glided into the room, a tray of wine and glasses floating behind her.

"You called, Mia?" she asked grandly.

With a smile, Hermione chuckled at her friend. "Yes. I was just thinking that maybe I should order some starters before they get here. You know how they love to have a go at Severus. I'm hoping the food and wine will act as a deterrent."

"Good luck with that!" Padma said with a laugh. "How about some veg samosa and onion bhaji? Oh! Some lamb kebabs to keep Mr. Potions Master happy. I'll also send in some naan and chutneys."

"That sounds lovely. You always know just what we need. I can always count on you," Hermione said gratefully.

Padma smiled. "That's my job. When will everyone be here?"

"Severus will be here in just about ten minutes. The girls five minutes after that."

"Sounds good." Padma calculated for a second and then added, "I'll have the lamb and naan delivered just after he arrives. Everything else will come in just after the girls' arrival. That way they will be too busy eating and won't be able to bicker too enthusiastically. I'll fetch some water for the tables now, and the wine and glasses are already here. So, for now that should do it. When you are ready for dinner, just call me. Actually, do you want to order tonight, or do you want me to do send in everyone's favourites?"

"You are welcome to send in the favourites, but perhaps you should consult Severus when he comes in, you know how he is about his food," Hermione said as she took a sip of her wine. It was like silk as it slid over her tongue, the rich flavour soothing her. She let out a sigh and felt herself relax slightly. Getting her friends together really was too stressful.

"I'll do that. Enjoy your evening, Hermione," Padma said.

"I'll do my best," she replied, watching Padma go.

Hermione reached into her bag and took out the papers she had prepared earlier. If they were going to get this done before OWL died, then they would have to work fast. It was important that they work together. She had taken the time to draw up a set of colour-coded procedures for everyone to follow and made sure that there were enough copies for everyone. This was her typical *modus operandi*, and to her friends, it was a given that she would organize everything. That was just how she worked.

When all of her papers were arranged, she settled into the pillows and took another sip of her wine. Her thoughts fell back, once again, to the last time she had been here. That night had ended with both her and Severus upset and had caused a rift in their friendship that had taken months to mend. She hoped that coming back to the place of their falling out would not dig up old demons for them.

Lost in the thought, Hermione missed Severus' arrival.

~~*

If he was surprised about the change in the atmosphere of *The Room* he did not let it show. His eyes simply swept over the space accepting it for what it was and then locked onto the woman sitting at the table near the back of the room. Noting that she was completely oblivious to his presence, his eyes fixed on her hand as it delicately toyed with a wine glass. He wondered what thoughts weighed on her so heavily that she had lost her usual attentiveness.

Noting her position in the room, he once was again reminded how much she did, needlessly and selflessly, for him. It surprised him that she still thought of his needs first. Even after he had railed against her for such treatment, she treated him with such considerate care.

He wondered if she even realised that she was still trying to protect him from her friends. Bitterly, he reminded himself that, had he let her, she would have also shielded him from the world. However, he had ensured that that door had closed forever. It had not taken long for him to regret his words that night. He wished that he had reacted with a bit more care toward her, but at the time, all he had been able to think of was that fact that she had interfered in his personal life. After so many years of being manipulated, he could not see her actions for what they truly were. It had never crossed his mind that she might care for him as more than a friend, and by the time that thought had occurred to him, he had already done too much damage. She had been wounded deeply all those months ago, and he regretted it.

It had taken them months to get back to the comfortable state of friendship they were currently enjoying. Months of seeing each day how much she truly cared for him, months of being reminded that there had been a potential of more between them and that, in his haste to protect his pride, he had ruined it.

"Good evening, Hermione," he said as her surprised eyes looked up to him with delight.

Letting out a small gasp, Hermione smiled and sat her glass of wine down. "Hello. Have a seat, Sev," she said, gesturing to the table before her.

Severus made his way across the room, looking at the large number of pillows with open distaste. As he reached the spot she had reserved for him, he looked at her with a raised eyebrow before elegantly settling himself on the large purple cushion.

Hermione let out a soft laugh. "Come now, it isn't that bad."

"Truly? What part of this isn't completely emasculating, Hermione? Perhaps the shade of the pillow, or maybe the fact that I am seated at a table that would be appropriate for a four-year-old girl's tea party," he drawled, pouring himself a glass of wine.

She flashed him an amused smile, eyes suddenly sparkling. "Oh, I don't know. I think that the shade suits you just fine. I could always charm you to match, if you'd like."

"You wouldn't dare," he growled petulantly, though his smirk never faltered as the woman next to him watched with impish eyes.

"Are you really so sure?" she asked, lifting her wand in challenge.

"Hermione," he warned.

In a flash, she mischievously swished her wand and muttered a short incantation. Severus, who truly did trust that she would never hurt him physically, nevertheless, blanched at her daring move.

"There. That's better," she said triumphantly. Hermione stifled her chortle as she watched Severus check himself for damages.

He was relieved to find his clothes intact and the pillow he was resting on was a lovely shade of black. "You tread on dangerous ground, girl. There are only a few people in this world that I would trust to aim a wand at me."

"Ah... well, luckily I am one of them," she said sweetly, giggles starting to break free. Her eyes turned at the movement of the curtain over the door, as trays of food were floated in.

He watched as the trays settled down to rest on the table in front of them; the smell of the lamb wafted up to entice them. The familiar scent reached into his mind; before he could repress it, he was reliving the memory of the last time they had spent an evening at Padma's.

Severus sighed quietly. "The last time we were here..." he mumbled before falling silent. Hermione's eyes searched his face, questioning his intent. "I spoke hastily," he began again, "and harshly. I have, since that day, sincerely regretted my words."

"I know that, Severus," Hermione admitted quietly. "It's okay, and I was wrong to interfere in your affairs in such a way." She felt a sudden anxiety begin to build in the pit of her stomach as she looked down to her hands, which were now toying with the fabric of her skirt.

"No, it's not that. Maybe you were out of line..." Taking in a quick deep breath, he let out another sigh before continuing. "I don't know, maybe you weren't, but that really doesn't matter now. What does matter, however, is the fact that I certainly was out of line. I had no right to treat you so harshly and with such disrespect. No one should ever treat you that way. And what's worse, I've let four months pass without offering an apology to you, my best friend." His voice was soft and full of a remarkable amount of emotion for the usually aloof man.

Hermione reached over, placed her hand on his wrist and gave it a gentle squeeze. "It really is okay. We're alright, Sev. I forgive you. I forgave you a long time ago," she told him sincerely.

He let out a shaky breath and shook his head. "I am very sorry for hurting you, Hermione. You are..."

His voice fell suddenly silent as the sound of the enthusiastic voices of her friends pervaded the room, and the emotion that had before been so clear on his face melted away into the stoicism that would see him through the evening.

Hermione took a deep breath and put on her happiest smile as she rose from her seat to meet her friends.

She did not know why Severus had chosen today to speak after four months of silence. Maybe it was being back here again, but whatever it was, she appreciated the sentiments he had expressed. Still, she knew that for him there could never be anything more than a friendship between them, and it was that fact that hurt her more than he could possibly ever know.

~~*

Hermione sat alone in the silent room, surrounded by the detritus of their meal, and toyed with a button on her blouse absent-mindedly, thinking back to the evening that had passed.

Dinner had gone better than she had expected, and for that, she was profoundly relieved. The girls, when they had first arrived, had been rather loud and boisterous, much to Severus' chagrin, though they had behaved for the most part. Sure, they had still teased Severus, but it had all been rather mild. And with the arrival of Draco halfway through dinner, Severus' usual ire had been rather tame as well.

All told, she was satisfied with how things had turned out. Assignments had been given, and she had managed to hold everyone together for one more evening. Severus had left with Draco about thirty minutes earlier to go obtain some obscure whiskey that was kept hidden away at the Manor. The girls had made their exit not long after that. Hermione, however, had remained behind to enjoy the quiet and peace that the successfully navigated evening afforded.

Times like this brought Hermione great joy. She felt a calming satisfaction in knowing that she had successfully steered yet another meeting of those she loved to a conclusion without a single disaster. Suddenly, it struck her that dinner was not the exact source of her satisfaction. The true source of her contentment lay in the short exchange that had happened earlier. Thinking back to the few minutes they had shared before everyone had arrived, she was comforted that he was willing and able to put their fight firmly behind them. If only he could feel more toward her.

The attraction to Severus Snape had been there almost from the start of their professional acquaintance. He had been her Potions mastery mentor during her fifth and final year of university. It was traditional for an acting Potions master to advise and mentor the Potions mastery candidates during their final year of school. In fact, the final year was mostly made up of practical experience that one could only obtain outside of the academic environment. Severus Snape had rarely taken on the role of mentor and it surprised many people, from both inside and outside the Potions community, when he had readily agreed to act as such for Hermione.

Hermione's fellow Potions students and friends had thought her crazy for even petitioning him, but she had not been deterred. Then, when a friendship had formed almost immediately between them, she had found herself irrevocably captivated by the taciturn man. He was everything she could ever want in a life partner: witty and hard working, dynamic in his personal life while never boastful or foolhardy. What had started as easy, if unlikely, friendship, evolved into a closeness that was viewed by those on the outside as mutual affection. Both parties in the relationship could acknowledge, to themselves at least, the fondness they held for the other; however, neither believed their feelings were returned to a similar degree. Thus, they had spent seven years in a seemingly never-ending dance of requited, yet unrequited, love.

Hermione sighed and quickly ran her fingers through her hair. She had established long ago that it would do her no good to pine for him and was loathe to start doing so now. He was her best friend, and she was lucky enough to share nearly every day with him. If that was all she could have, then it would simply have to be enough.

Shaking herself out of her dazed thoughts, she quickly gathered her tresses and coiffed them into a loose chignon at her neck. With a whispered incantation and a quick twist of her free hand that bespoke the frequency with which it was performed, she secured the hair magically in place and then began gathering her things in a businesslike manner. Tucking her papers into her bag, she stood and threw her jacket over her arm and left the restaurant.

From: Ms. Granger: PotionsKIA@aspenpotions.com

To: group: 'OWL Saviours': magicalmaiden@affodell.com; pippa@affodell.com; queeny21@affodell.com; mastermalfoy@affodell.com; PotionsMaster@aspenpotions.com

Sent: 11 April, 2012, 6:52 AM

Subject: Get to work!

Rise and shine, ladies and gentlemen, it is time to get to work! Please, just keep to your schedules, and we should be able to save everything on OWL over the next few

days. Remember, please create a master list of archived documents for each subject before starting on it. Also, send me regular updates on your progress throughout the day so I can make sure we are staying on target.

Thank you so much for helping out!

H~

Be obscure clearly. EB White

From: Hannah: pippa@affodell.com

To: Ms. Granger: PotionsKIA@aspenspotions.com

Sent: 11 April, 2012, 8:35AM

Subject: RE: Get to work!

You have to be kidding me! Honestly, Hermione! Did you really think that we'd be ready to work before 8am!? Mia? Tsk, tsk! Do you not remember what we were like at university? You are lucky that I'm up and ready to work. I'm sure that Luna is up working too because she is a good friend... But don't expect to see Pansy for at least two or three more hours! Draco as well! Merlin knows he's never in the office until 10am anyway.

I'm starting with Transfiguration now. I'll update you on my progress this afternoon.

Your humble house-elf,

Pippa

From: Ms. Granger: PotionsKIA@aspenspotions.com

To: Hannah: pippa@affodell.com

Sent: 11 April, 2012, 9:02 AM

Subject: RE: RE: Get to work!

Ha! Bloody! Ha! House-elf... (I am NOT amused!) ;)

Yes, Luna sent me a text this morning. She's been hard at work since 7am on Arithmancy. It is a smaller section, and she is trying to get her work done early. She said something about wanting to be free to see the annual migration of the Grindylow Hoppers tomorrow. I don't know... You know Luna, still marching to the beat of her own drum. :) Gotta love her!

Damn Pansy and Draco! I'm going to start sending them texts every fifteen minutes until they respond!

Grrr....

H~

Be obscure clearly. EB White

From: Pansy: queeny21@affodell.com

To: magicalmaiden@affodell.com; pippa@affodell.com; PotionsKIA@aspenspotions.com; mastermalfoy@affodell.com; PotionsMaster@aspenspotions.com

Sent: 11 April, 2012, 10:52 AM

Subject: RE: Get to work!

Stop already! I'm getting to work! Damn bitchy know-it-all!

And a Howler, Granger!? Really?

See if I ever sign up to help you again.

(I'm starting my work now. Astronomy here I come! Booring!)

Queeny

From: mastermalfoy@affodell.com

To: magicalmaiden@affodell.com; pippa@affodell.com; PotionsKIA@aspenspotions.com; queeny21@affodell.com; PotionsMaster@aspenspotions.com

Sent: 11 April, 2012, 11:12 AM

Subject: RE: RE: Get to work!

That was low, Granger. Calling my mum!?

I hate you.

From: Ms. Granger: PotionsKIA@aspenspotions.com

To: magicalmaiden@affodell.com; pippa@affodell.com; queeny21@affodell.com; mastermalfoy@affodell.com; PotionsMaster@aspenspotions.com

Sent: 11 April, 2012, 11:34 AM

Subject: RE: RE: RE: Get to work!

Oh, my poor babies can't handle a little Howler or a talking to from Mum! What do you expect, you dunderheads!?

Honestly, Draco! What self-respecting 30-year-old lives with his parents? If you can't put some of that Malfoy fortune you're so proud of to use and move out of your parents' house, then I will most certainly use it against you every chance I get.

Now, Pansy and Draco, you said you'd help me out! But what you are doing? Sleeping off hangovers or shagging the flavour of the week is my guess! Do it on your own time. Now get to work!

Please!

H~

Be obscure clearly. EB White

From: magicalmaiden@affodell.com

To: PotionsKIA@aspenspotions.com; pippa@affodell.com; queeny21@affodell.com; mastermalfoy@affodell.com; PotionsMaster@aspenspotions.com

Sent: 11 April, 2012, 3:12 PM

Subject: RE: RE: RE: RE: Get to work!

My friends fight so dynamically! ;)

Hermione: I've completed the Arithmancy section through R today.

I'm off now to track Grindylow Hoppers. I'm so excited!

Luna

From: PotionsMaster@aspenspotions.com

To: PotionsKIA@aspenspotions.com; magicalmaiden@affodell.com; pippa@affodell.com; queeny21@affodell.com; mastermalfoy@affodell.com;

Sent: 11 April, 2012, 4:38 PM

Subject: Dunderheaded Fools!

Please stop flooding my inbox with this ridiculous drive! I realise that it was rather optimistic of me to think that, as a group, you would understand the value of 'Reply to Sender' as opposed to 'Reply to ALL'! If you insist on sending these asinine emails back and forth to one another, please at least exercise enough courtesy to refrain from including me!

Hermione: I have progressed through K in Potions. There were several very interesting papers that I found which could be extremely useful for us, especially given the results of the last session of testing.

Severus Snape, Potions master, Aspen Potions

From: Hermione: PotionsKIA@aspenspotions.com

To: Hannah: pippa@affodell.com

Sent: 11 April, 2012, 5:45 PM

Subject: Done for the night!

I'm done for the night, Mia. I got through K in Transfiguration. The section is massive and full of some truly mind-numbing shit! I mean, honestly, what would the value of transfiguring the toenail clippings of a Hinkypunk into grapes be? It isn't like you'd want to eat grapes that were once toenails. Not to mention that Hinkypunk toenails clippings are far too valuable! Those things cost 30 Galleons an ounce! Why didn't the idiot just buy some bloody grapes?

Anyway, I'm off. I'll be back tomorrow.

Oh! I got an email from Cissy with some prototypes for the T-shirts. She really loved the idea, especially since it isn't something that has been done in the Wizarding world before. I need some good slogans though. So far I've only got:

Potions Biddies

Dunderheads

What's in your cauldron?

Have you shagged your Potions master today?

Slytherin Me

Got any other ideas?

From: Hermione: PotionsKIA@aspenspotions.com

To: Hannah: pippa@affodell.com

Sent: 11 April, 2012 7:32 PM

Subject: RE: Done for the night!

Haha! Are you trying to get him to kill me? You know that he is going to think these shirts were my idea.

How about:

Insufferable Know-It-All

Potions Princess

Princess of Potions

Mistress of Potions

Can I stir your rod? (with a picture of a cauldron and stirring rod)

Get a little brew in you.

Let me brew you.

I :heart: Potions.

I :heart: Potions masters.

I :heart: Potions mistresses.

Need I go on? These are just off the top of my head. Give me more time and I'll come up with more. Do you want to branch out beyond Potions? The possibilities are endless, really.

Please note that in exchange for slogans, I want one of each T-shirt in the colour of my choice. ;) I haven't worked with a Slytherin for the past seven years for nothing!

H~

Be obscure clearly. EB White

A/N: The lovely image of Severus and Hermione, entitled 'Cushions', was done by Sentstarr/Sentimentalist. Thank you, dear, for letting me embed it! It is truly lovely!

Chapter Three

Chapter 3 of 4

When Hermione discovers that the On-line Wizarding Library is going to shut down, she jumps in to save the day. Severus and her friends help.

The characters and canon situations in the following story belong solely to JK Rowling, Scholastic and WB. I am not making any money from the publishing or writing of this story.

A/N: This is chapter three of my gift for the lovely Sentimentalist and all the other ladies over at sshgowlproject over at yahoo, who selflessly put many hours of work to preserve the fics that would have otherwise been lost when the Online Wizarding Library went offline. Thank you for all your work!

Also, my sincerest thanks to Laralee88 for the beta.

Severus stepped into the lab, and as was his habit, he quietly watched Hermione as she worked.

Amazingly, the girl had done it. She and her irritating friends, along with him and his godson, had managed to save every file on the OWL server. It had been a good thing that she had pushed them to work so hard, too. OWL was expected to go down permanently any day now, far ahead of schedule. However, Hermione, despite the fact that she should be enjoying a much needed break, was frantically double checking everything to be sure no information or file had been missed, much to Severus' irritation.

"Hermione," Severus said sternly, "you should not be working. You have been at that computer for nearly a week straight."

Hermione looked up from the computer. Her eyes were shadowed by dark circles, and her hair was frizzy and wild from neglect. Stubbornly, she rolled her eyes and turned back to the screen. Comments of this sort were nothing new, and he was being unreasonable, as usual.

Severus sighed and stalked across the room to where she sat. Watching from over her shoulder, he quickly assessed that she was not working on an urgent matter, and then, he reached up and pressed the button which turned off the monitor.

"Hey! I was...," she began to protest before letting out a loud shriek as she was roughly spun around in her computer chair.

Ignoring her cries, he grabbed her hands and pulled her to her feet. Glaring down at the petite woman, he repeated, "Hermione, you should not be working." His eyes glinted at her sternly. "The work will keep, and you need a break."

Hermione huffed in irritation. "Severus, I need to get this done," she said as her voice took on a slight whine. "What if we've missed something? OWL could go down at any moment! I simply want to be sure that we've done our best."

She was so exhausted that it took her several moments to recognize that she had made a vital mistake. Breathing in a deep breath, the knowledge suddenly washed over her. He was very close to her, too close. As if awaking from a deep sleep, she was all of a sudden aware that her hands were encapsulated by his and that each breath she was taking in was filled with a rich scent, his scent. It was so strong she could almost taste him. Weak kneed and dizzy from the overload of sensory material and fatigue, Hermione startled at the rumbling of his voice in her ear.

"Hermione," he purred, locking her in an almost hypnotic state, "you have done an admirable job of saving the knowledge that was stored on OWL. However, I will not stand idly by while you make yourself ill. The task is done. Now, you will *not* touch that or any other computer for the rest of the week. Do you understand me?"

His voice was quiet and calm, and it rolled over her in waves that caused her mind to go blank. Unable to form words or shake herself awake, she mutely nodded her head. Her brow furrowed in confusion as she looked up at him with questioning eyes.

Reading the confusion on her face, Severus smirked. "Good, now I think we are getting somewhere." Then, in a voice that was quickly turning stern and scolding, he continued on. "I have sat by and watched you work yourself sick far too many times. I shall not do so again, Hermione." Gently, he shook her shoulders, desperate to get his point across any way possible.

~~*

It was the shaking and scolding tone of his final words that brought back her voice. Sighing loudly, her words were quiet and subdued, while still somehow remaining stubborn, when she spoke. "This isn't fair. I know that you are very much aware of the effect your presence has on me. It is unkind of you to manipulate me in such a manner."

As she felt her head clear of the hazy fog of fatigue and attraction, anger stirred within her.

"In fact," she said, her voice growing stronger, "why do you even care, Severus? I know that we are friends again, but you've made it abundantly clear that you are unable to care for me as anything more than that, and as such, it isn't your place to take care of my like this. I am a grown woman, I don't need coddling."

Tears began to pick at her eyes, and Hermione knew if she were to continue to speak, her voice would betray the depth of her hurt completely. However, she could not force herself to care any longer. Not after succumbing to the months of bottled-up hurt and despair that, despite his apology, was still weighing on her daily. As her control finally broken under the tension surrounding her, with true pain in her heart and voice, she cried, "Furthermore, I do not appreciate your using the knowledge of my feelings for you in order to get me to do what you want. It is unworthy of you and disrespectful to me! I am not some student that you can terrorize into a cowering state, Severus!"

With that, she pulled herself from his grasp and turned back to her chair. Sitting, she spun around and went back to work, fuming silently at the screen that was flickering back to life before her and trying to ignore the growing weight of the grief building behind her last bit of resolve.

~~*

Severus was stunned silent as he watched her rip herself from his touch and stubbornly go back to work. Although his eyes saw that she was once again typing away, in direct defiance of his orders, his mind knew nothing but frantic thoughts of confusion.

He couldn't possibly understand where her outburst had come from. *What did she mean by saying that my presence affects her and that I know how she feels about me?* he contemplated silently.

Slowly, as understanding dawned, horror began to grow within him.

Bloody hell, what have I done? he thought.

Taking a calming breath, he quieted his mind, falling back on the skills he'd learn in his years as a spy. Then, when his thoughts and emotions had settled to a more manageable level, he carefully reviewed her words again.

It was immediately clear to him that he had misjudged her. In fact, it seemed that they had misjudged each other entirely. She clearly had feelings for him and was under the impression that he did not return them. He would have to rectify that at once.

~~*

Once again, she heard his stern voice growl, "Hermione, you should not be working."

As her hands were suddenly torn from the keyboard and her chair was spun around for a second time, she spat out in frustration, "Damn it, Severus. What do you want from me? Shall I prostrate myself before you and bow to your every whim? You bastard! Do not expect me to bend to your every request, especially through manhandling and manipulation. After all, it was you who made it so clear, all those months ago, that you have no use for me. How can you find this treatment of me acceptable? You do not want or need me in that way, and as such, I would appreciate if you would do me the honour of leaving me at least what small amount of dignity I have left."

Tears filled her eyes as her words were cried out in desperation, frantic pleas that tumbled and shook in her chest and on her lips. With blurred vision, she dashed away the traitorous tears which were now beginning to run down her face, no long held back by stubborn resolve. As she sat before him, her true fear exploded in her heart. She couldn't lose him now. She could live without his love, but she couldn't live without his friendship. They'd been so close to repairing it, but now, after such an outburst, surely she would lose him forever. Sobs began to shake her body as she hid her face in her hands and curled up in the chair.

"Hermione," he whispered, once again brought up short by her uncharacteristically emotional outburst. Gracelessly, he fell to his knees and reached up to her face. After gently prying away her hands, he ran his fingers over the soft curve of her damp cheeks, wiping away each tear.

When he had finished, he earnestly called to her again, his voice barely a whisper. "Hermione."

Slowly, the sobs quieted, and as she opened her eyes, she found him kneeling before her.

"I'm sorry, Hermione," he pleaded, fighting the emotions which were spilling into his voice. "It was never my intent to manipulate your feelings. I fear that we have both grossly misjudged the whole situation."

Hermione let out a shaky breath before scoffing in scepticism. As she turned her head away from him, he could see the hurt painted across her face.

"Hermione, please, look at me," he begged.

Frustrated and saddened beyond belief, she rolled her eyes at his perverse persistence. Why had he not simply left and allowed her some dignity? She was overtired, and he knew it. The control needed to navigate this sticky situation was simply beyond her abilities right now. It was too much to ask of her fatigued mind, and with his body so close to her, taunting and entrancing her, it became a nearly impossible task.

Hermione closed her eyes again, centring herself as best she could. When she felt control once again within her grasp, she allowed her eyes to flutter open. They were swollen and red but perfectly able to take in the man who was still kneeling before her. She was completely shocked to see that, in his haste to fall before her, he had dropped every last one of his emotional walls. The concern on his face and in his eyes was raw and open, and it touched something deep inside her.

~~*

Severus watched on silently as Hermione took deep breaths and fought back the tears that were no doubt percolating just below the surface. He did not know what to do or

how to explain things to her. He feared that she was too upset and too angry to see the reality of their situation. However, as he saw her finally open her eyes and truly look at him, he was struck by the fact that although explaining in this moment would have proven difficult, showing her was perfectly within his reach. In a swift movement that happened before he had time to contemplate the consequence of it, he pulled his young business partner down onto the floor with him. Then, wrapping her in his arms, his lips descended onto hers. He pressed his lips to hers roughly, as if desperate to burn the taste and feel of himself into her skin.

Hermione froze in shock and confusion.

He was kissing her. Desperately so.

Part of her mind curtly reminded her that this could be another attempt at manipulation, but something in her knew that it was not. Severus would never do that to her.

As Hermione sat on the floor of their lab, raw and emotionally torn, she felt Severus' lips suddenly softened against hers. Leaning into him, she felt his hand tentatively come up and cup her cheek. Finding she could do nothing but respond, Hermione slid her arms around his neck and smoothly plastered her body against his. Then opening her mouth, she slipped her tongue out and ran it along his bottom lip. A thrill ran through her, causing her knees to weaken as she tasted, for the first time, the man she loved. Hermione whimpered audibly at the delicious sensation.

Through their joined lips, Severus chuckled. "Do not worry, my love, we have all the time in the world," he told her before moving his lips to kiss a trail down her jaw.

"Love?" she gasped out, breathless, as she felt his lips and tongue began to work down her neck.

"Merlin, yes. I love you, Hermione," he whispered into her ear in a warm puff that caused her skin to come alive with electricity. "As I said before," he continued between hot kisses, "I believe we both rather misjudged the situation. It wasn't until you accused me of using my knowledge of your feelings to manipulate you that I realised that I'd made a miscalculation, that we both had made the same miscalculation."

Hermione's brain, thick with lust-addled fog, struggled to process his words. It grasped wildly to understand these new developments that were, in this very moment, flipping her understanding of the world on end. Then, appalled that she was no longer paying proper attention to the wondrous acts of the man who was still attacking her body with his heated mouth, Hermione decided that there would always be a time for analysing things later. Closing her eyes, and relaxing her head to the side in response to his playful mouth, which was currently nipping at her shoulder, Hermione gave herself over to the touch and feel and taste of Severus.

Chapter Four

Chapter 4 of 4

When Hermione discovers that the On-line Wizarding Library is going to shut down, she jumps in to save the day. Severus and her friends help.

The characters and canon situations in the following story belong solely to JK Rowling, Scholastic, and WB. I am not making any money from the publishing or writing of this story.

A/N: This is the final chapter, ladies. Thanks for reading! Sentimentalist, you are a dear. I hope you enjoy the end. And please, forgive me my silly smut. This is the first I've ever written, and I would be lying if I said I'm not terrified to post it!

Also, my sincerest thanks to Laralee. Thank you for putting up with me and my many mistakes. You are an angel! Truly you are, my dear.

Hermione sat at an ancient pine kitchen table with a small laptop before her, dressed in a blue sundress. The sun, which shone through the opened kitchen windows, filled the large room with warmth and added to the already growing glow on her skin. Hermione absently took a sip of her coffee while watching the clock on the wall.

What was taking him so long?

With a small smile, she turned back to her computer and began to read. Suddenly, her smile grew as she let out a small chuckle. She'd completely forgotten about that email. It had been sent in the midst of the project, and she had been so tired by that point that she had barely been functioning.

From: mastermalfoy@affodell.com

To: PotionsKIA@aspenpotions.com

Sent: 14 April, 2012 4:34 PM

Subject: Unacceptable!

Oh, Dearest KIA-of-the-Asinine-Projects,

As I said when we began this... this... task (*note the disdain in my words*): I thought, foolishly, that the materials we would be preserving for posterity would at the very least be of some value to the thinking world, but I found myself today preserving a file entitled *The Digging Patterns of Flobberworms*.

I ask: How is this of ANY value, Granger?

However, it was not until said file was followed by *Flobberworms: Potions or Pets* that I simply had to draw the line.

Granger, this is unacceptable! Why are you so set on saving this utter shite!?

D.M.

The email itself was nothing special. In fact, Draco had complained constantly throughout the beginning of the project. Of course, it hadn't occurred to him that Hermione expected him to actually participate in the recovery of the files, and as such, he had made sure that his displeasure was heard often. However, this had been his final

complaint, and it was what followed the receipt of the email that made it so memorable. She could still remember Severus, after hearing her groan at his godson's latest complaint, rushing to read the offending email from over her shoulder. His eyes had glinted with irritation as he nodded curtly to her and wordlessly stalked back to his desk. With practised precision that bespoke his years of experience berating imbecilic students, he had grabbed a quill, a long-unused bottle of blood-red ink and a scrap of parchment. Then, in the sharp letters that were so characteristically his, he penned a note to his godson. It had read:

Unworthy Malfoy Progeny,

It has long been my belief that you had been taught the best of manners; however, I must thank you for delivering me from this misapprehension. From this point on, I find it necessary to reconsider your placement in Slytherin; for truly, no self-respecting Slytherin would complain like a newborn babe deprived of his breast. Now, stop whinging like a fucking Hufflepuff, and get to work, you lazy arse of trollson!

Your Godfather

Hermione remembered watching him scratch the note out furiously and then hand it to her for her approval. She was amused that he was willing to reprise the role of *Obat of the Dungeon* and shocked that he would use it against Draco solely for her own benefit. Snorting in amusement, she had handed the note back and watched the owl he had Summoned take it to Draco. Much to the delight of everyone involved, Draco had suspiciously kept quiet for the rest of the project.

Hermione looked up from the computer as the sound of a door closing in the distance reached her ears. "He's back," she said under her breath. Jumping from her chair, she quickly closed the laptop and went to rinse out her coffee cup in the kitchen's overly large sink. As she stood at the counter drying the cup, she felt him slide into position behind her. Shivers rippled through Hermione as his arms wrapped around her. Instinctively, she leaned into him, tilting her head to the side to give him perfect access to the sensitive skin of her neck.

"Hmm," she hummed as his lips made their way from the nape of her neck to the sweet spot behind her ear. His warm breath ghosted over her ear, causing her skin to erupt in gooseflesh and her knees to begin to buckle.

"You make this far too easy, *Wife*," he teased as he drew back and turned her around to face him.

With playful eyes, Hermione pressed herself against him, moulding her body to his. "I've always thought, *Husband*, that this was rather the point of a honeymoon."

"Indeed," he smirked, pulling his wife from the kitchen and down a long, ornate corridor. "I do wonder: What you were doing in the kitchen, seeing to your own dishes? We've got this whole palace to ourselves for the rest of the month and a whole army of house-elves to wait on you hand and foot."

Hermione snorted. "I'm puzzled, Severus. Do you or do you not know me?"

"Ah, would it help to know that the clan of house-elves that live in this region are rather more forward in thinking than the house-elves at home. As such, they are paid wages and treated with respect," he told her matter-of-factly. He loved surprising her.

"Wow! That's wonderful. I would very much love to speak to them and hear their history. Do you think that I could arrange..."

"Hermione," Severus interrupted, "you have all month. Do remember that we've been married for all of four hours, two of which I spent dealing with your ridiculous task."

"It was not ridiculous. It was necessary," she retorted.

"If you say so," he drawled, rolling his eyes. "Nevertheless, for the time being, you belong to me, and any house-elf interviews will have to wait. You are strictly forbidden from starting any new projects, especially if they do not involve me and our bedchambers for at least the next two weeks. After that, then perhaps you can talk to the house-elves." Despite the rough tone of his voice, he looked at her with a bemused expression as he pushed open a pair of ornate doors and then pulled his bride into a luxurious bedroom.

The doors closed quickly behind the couple, and Hermione was left no time to pout at his restrictions as she was pulled directly into the arms of her husband. One hand buried itself in her hair while the other grasped the curve of her waist, pulling her even closer. His lips began to devour her mouth, his tongue first plunging and then caressing, stealing away her breath and causing her to go slightly faint. Slowly, his hands began to run down her body. Carefully, he slid the fabric of her dress up, the silk rustling against her smooth, flush skin. Breathless, he pulled back from her lips and pulled the garment up and over her head.

Leading her to the bed, his eyes hungrily appreciated the matching set of black bra and tiny knickers she had adorned for the occasion while Hermione couldn't help but be distracted, once again, by the amazing room. The walls were covered in what she was sure were masterpiece paintings. The furniture was made of a dark almost black wood and each was intricately carved. The massive bed, which dominated the space, was delicately draped in pure white silk.

"Severus," she gasped as he pushed her onto the silk coverlet, "I still cannot believe you were able get them to let us stay at Palacio Da Quinta Da Regaleira. We tried to visit it, you know, when the girls and I were here last."

Huffing at his wife, he drawled, "Well, you will find I am rather more resourceful than your 'girls', as you call them." Climbing onto the bed and lying down next to her, his eyes raked over her scantily clad form.

"Beautiful," he murmured. Then, moving forward, he lay chaste kisses down her neck as she turned to face him.

His hands, resuming their exploration of her body, ran along her side, dipping slowly into each of her curves. Hermione's eyes fluttered; she was content to let her husband take charge.

"Although, actually," he confessed in a husky breath that brushed across her and caused her to shiver, "securing this palace was much simpler than you'd think."

"Really?" she asked, confused. For a moment, their eyes met, deep black to cinnamon brown, and all movement froze.

The heat and fire of desire flared in each of their eyes as they gazed upon each other, silently sharing each want and long-hidden, repressed desire. Hermione shuddered and broke the stare, a flush spreading across her cheeks and down to her décolletage as Severus chuckled at her demure. His fingers slid down her torso and along her waist, where he drew small circles with the tips of his fingers, leaving heated trails in their wake.

"You see," he said, his tone husky and eyes intent on his exploration, "the palace was originally built by a member of the Prince family, and its magical enchantments are tied to a member of the family being in residence here."

She gasped, whether from the revelation or his touch, he did not know. "Really?" Her voice was wane and breathless, and her eyes fluttered closed as she felt him move himself up and over her.

Severus brought his mouth to her shoulder and gently began nipping at her flesh, moving methodically down her arm. His fingers gently fluttered down her body to her legs, and then they renewed their task of engraving small fiery circles up and down her body. His tongue ran trails up and down her arm, carefully soothing each bite mark before moving on to press kisses into her wrist and palm.

Looking up at his now gasping wife with a wicked smile, his eyes glinted mischievously. Quickly, he waved his hand over her body, and her bra shimmered before disappearing, freeing a path for him. Then he was there, sucking and teasing at the bud of her breast, his mouth and tongue hot against her sensitive nipple.

For a time, she was lost to the haze of passion as Severus continued to work his wife to a frenzied peak, enjoying each mew that he coaxed from her. Lapping and nipping

at each breast, he allowed his fingers to gently brush over her covered centre, causing her to press herself into him.

Not wanting her to reach completion just yet, he pulled back from her, his teeth playfully nipping at her breasts before fully breaking bodily contact.

Hermione lie in a daze, flush with arousal and mourning the loss of his mouth and hands upon her body. From her foggy haze, she heard him continue his story.

"It passed out of my family's hands about forty years ago; my grandfather sold it to a friend. I suspect he did it to spite my mother. However, my grandfather failed to inform his friend of the magical enchantments that were placed upon the estate and when, about twenty years ago, the enchantments fully failed and the Prince family magic left the property. It was pure coincidence that the enchantment failed just as my story was being splashed across the pages of the *Daily Prophet* at the end of the war. They managed to track me down about fifteen years ago and have been asking me to visit since, in hopes that my visit would restore the magic. I've never had a good enough reason to take them up on the offer until now. You are quite delectable, Wife, and more reason than I could ever hope for."

Bringing her hand up to his cheek, Hermione whispered, "I love you too, Severus," hearing in his soft words the unspoken truth.

As he leaned into her touch, she gently brushed the locks of his black hair from his face and then leaned up to press her lips to his. Entwining her legs in his, she ran her hands through his hair and down his neck before settling on the buttons of his shirt, where they nimbly began to unfasten them.

Submitting to her nimble movement and obvious desires, he continued his story whilst she worked. Her head fell back onto the pillow beneath her, so as to more easily track her progress down the many buttons, as he whispered huskily. "The current owner jumped at the opportunity to accommodate us. Indeed, they were so pleased to have us visit that they've set aside this wing of the Palace for our personal use and have invited us to use it anytime we desire."

Hermione, had she been occupied with any other task, would have gasped with delight; however, that was not the case today. She processed the words and filed them in the back of her mind to be addressed later, for today she had far more important things to attend to than Prince family palaces.

He finally fell silent as she reverently pushed open his shirt, as if she were unwrapping the most precious gift ever imagined. In a tantalizing and almost timid movement, Hermione's fingers pushed the shirt over his shoulders and down his arms. As they ran down his chest for the first time, Hermione eyes sparkled with mischief, and she scrambled to her knees. Startled by her sudden movement, Severus found himself being pressed back onto the pillows, her hands trailing down his chest enthusiastically until they reached his still-covered member.

Hermione smirked as a groan rose from Severus. Deftly, her fingers moved to the placket of his trousers and worked it unfastened. Tugging them down to his knees, she quickly abandoned them in favour of paying attention to his straining boxers. Playfully, she ran her fingers along the flesh just at the waistband, teasingly dipping her fingers under and then drawing them out.

With an excited chuckle, Hermione moved to straddled Severus, her sex pressing hotly into his. Her movement quickly became shaky as she ground out her pleasure against him.

Severus watched in awe the wanton picture she painted.

Up and down she moved, her breath growing ragged and her face flushing further. Then, she let out a raw whimper and shuddered as she gasped out his name and collapsed onto him.

"You've run away without me, love," he said as he stroked her flush cheek, pushing back the wild locks of hair the shielded her face from view, "but 'tis no matter; I suspect that was the first of many, many..." A deep chuckle rumbled in his chest and vibrated against her. Gently, he rolled the still keening woman off of him and freed himself of the trousers and boxers that were still resting in various states of undress from his body. Climbing above her, he pulled her from the bliss of her orgasm by the weight of his body suddenly pressing atop her. Lying motionless in the bed, she revelled in the feel of his presence. This was something that she would never tire of; with him here atop her like this, the fact that she belonged to him finally felt real.

Slowly, he resumed placing kisses upon her, this time moving down her stomach, encircling her navel.

Hermione twined her fingers in his hair, running her nails against his scalp, instinctively pressing him downward. As she felt him nuzzle against her still-clad mound, she began to press against him.

It was then that his previous words on the acquisition of access to the palace leapt forward and was fully processed in her sex-addled brain. "Wow," she breathed out in awe. "That was not what I was expecting. I had assumed you called in a debt or something. Not... Well, not that!"

Severus chuckled at her odd circling back to the topic he'd long since forgotten in favour of other pursuits. "You truly have a unique mind, my love," he drawled as he hooked his fingers through the sides of her knickers and pulled them off. Making his way back up her body, he placed each hand just over her shoulders and towered possessively over her. Situating a leg between hers, he felt her legs fall apart, and his cock rubbed deliciously against her wet core.

Moving himself against the heat of her core slowly, he looked directly into her eyes. "You are pleased, no?" he inquired.

"Of course, how could I not be? It is amazing!" her eyes sparkled with amusement. Lifting her head up to his, she took his lip in her teeth gently and nibbled while she purposefully slid herself along his cock. His lip slipped from her mouth as her tongue darted out to caress and taste. She lifted her hips to move against him, in search of the pleasurable release that was once again building inside.

Again, her lust-filled brain sparked to life, this time reminding her of his earlier task. Hermione pulled back from his mouth and stilled her movements as she peered at her dazed husband. "You got the gift arranged, right?"

Severus struggled for understanding for a moment before rasping out in frustration, "Merlin, Hermione! You are going to kill me. I would not have returned until it was done. Your gift should arrive about the same time as the morning owl post tomorrow." Then, kissing her deeply, he whispered to her seriously, "Now, focus. You are hurting my ego. My cock is standing rigid and poised to plunge into your heat, and you ask me insipid questions."

Hermione let out a throaty laugh, her eyes lighting with amusement. "Alright, Romeo," she said, her eyes rolling, "pierce me with your rigid cock." And with that, she obligingly spread her legs slightly further apart and angled her hips to help guide him. All it took was a single thrust, and he was home.

All laughter slipped away from them and heavy silence fell across the room. The heat of their joining burst into flames within them, and they both gasped, breathless.

Relishing in the sensation of finally being with the one he had loved and desired for years, Severus stilled himself and took a deep, controlled breath. Then, when he felt her begin to move beneath him, he slowly lifted his hips, allowing himself to slide smoothly out.

His eyes locked on hers, and with a sly smirk, he angled his hips sharply and crashed down. Hermione let out a sudden wail that steadily grew into a shriek as he pounded into her. With each stroke, he expertly hit the sensitive spot within her.

In mere moments, his wife was writhing beneath him, all thought, knowledge, and questions gone. She was a slave to him, to his passion and love.

Hermione grinned madly at the delicious man pounding into her. Lifting her legs to wrap tightly around him, she pressed him deeper as he continued to move in her. Then, when their movements turned frantic and jerky, he felt her shudder and tighten around him as she came for a second time. The tightening of her around him and her dulcet tones pushed him over the final precipice, and letting out a cry, Severus came. But still, they rocked and moved, determined to ride out the bliss of the moment, drawing out every last flutter of pleasure.

When the last tremors had settled, he allowed himself to settle at her side. In loving benediction, he pressed gentle kisses onto her body, worshipping her. Kissing each

breast and then the valley between them, in reverence for the gift she was to him, he then reached and pressed a final kiss to her glistening forehead. As he let out a long breath, Hermione smiled and placed a small, quick kiss on his nose. Drawing his arms around her, she angled away from him and allowed him to curl his body around hers. His arms slid under her neck and along her waist, pulling her tight against him, his one hand under her neck instinctively moving down to palm the nearby breast. Hermione closed her eyes and sighed with contentment as peace enveloped them.

They lay in silence until Hermione's wistful voice broke through with a small sigh. "I wish I could be there to see their faces."

Severus chuckled quietly into her hair, pressing kisses into the tangled mess. "Indeed. However, I am slightly appalled that you are still thinking about your friends. It is disturbing. Seriously, Hermione, you need to focus."

Hermione's laughter joined his in the room for a time, and then, as the peace settled once more around them, the pair drifted off for a lovely mid-morning nap.

~~*

Hannah Abbot, Pansy Parkinson, and Luna Lovegood were sitting at the table in the tearoom at Affodell, Inc. and chatting over their morning tea and scones when there was a tap at the door, indicating the arrival of the morning post. Absently, Hannah picked up her wand and flicked it at the door, causing it to swing open. The sound of fluttering wings flooded the room as the morning post arrived. The girls watched the owls drift in and out of the room, dropping letters in the company post boxes, as they did each morning. Suddenly, an odd look passed over Pansy's face.

"Do you smell something?" she asked as her face screwed up in disgust.

Hannah looked about the room for a moment and was just about to respond in the negative when it hit her. As she took a breath, she began to choke and cough. "What is that smell?" she gasped out.

Luna smiled knowingly. "I believe we may have a visitor."

The trio turned to the door, and there, before their eyes, stood the ugliest, smelliest troll of a man they had ever seen.

As his large feet clomped into the room, Pansy stifled a wretch, her hand covering her mouth and nose in a futile attempt to filter out the stench wafting off him.

Luna, seemingly immune to his scent, laughed lightly as Hannah's eyes grew to saucer size.

Dully, the ghastly beast-of-a-man spoke, "I bring you this." Digging into his pockets, he drew out a crushed and slightly damp letter which he extended toward the group of women.

Pansy and Hannah both drew back in their chairs, moving themselves as far away from the creature and his letter as they could without leaving their chairs.

Rolling her eyes, Luna stood and smiled politely as she retrieved the letter. "Thank you. Would you care to join us," she said sweetly indicating the pastries at the table as her friend gaped in horror.

"Well, ladies, I do believe we have a letter to read," Luna chirped.

Hannah and Pansy jumped from their chairs and moved to the far side of the room as the troll man sat himself at the table and began to devour a plate of scones.

Opening the letter, Luna's laughter began to ring through the room. With a twinkle in her eyes she turned to her two friends. "My dear friends, I do believe we've just received a gift."

Luna grinned as she began to read:

Pippa, Queeny and Luna,

I believe it is time for a little payback. I did warn you that I would repay the favour, and when I found myself with the means to do so, I simply couldn't resist.

Meet Georgio. He is a 6' 5" hunk of a man. His best features are his stunning vocabulary, razor sharp claws, intoxicating scent, and drop-dead looks. And he is your to share! Enjoy!

Dearest Regards,

Hermione Snape

PS: Oh! Did I mention that Severus and I realized that we were being utter idiots yesterday and eloped? We were married in the chapel at the Palacia de Quinta de Regaleria in Lisbon just this morning! I don't know how he arranged it, but he did. Yes, yes, you were right; I fancy the pants off the man. Now, be good, and enjoy troll man Georgio whilst I shag my delicious husband.

PPS: Don't worry, he has a Portkey on him, and he'll be returning to Lisbon shortly. He is rather fragrant, isn't he? I still shudder at the memories. Love you! ~H.

~~*

The Palacia de Quinta de Regaleria is a real palace in Lisbon, and it is beautiful. Need I say more? <http://www.lisbonlux.com/sintra/quinta-da-regaleira.html>