

Traitor

by averygoodun

The need to survive is ingrained within the human psyche, but where does self-preservation end and self-destruction begin? Hermione is captured by Death Eaters and is held hostage by Snape and Pettigrew, but she comes up with a plan to escape. Not a romance.

Part I, chapter 1

Chapter 1 of 28

The need to survive is ingrained within the human psyche, but where does self-preservation end and self-destruction begin? Hermione is captured by Death Eaters and is held hostage by Snape and Pettigrew, but she comes up with a plan to escape. Not a romance.

AN: *This story is inspired by the first three or four chapters of Orm Irian's "Shades," though I want to reiterate that my story is **not** a romance.*

Thanks go to Southern for agreeing to beta this questionable story.

Warning: Unpleasant situations, unpleasant behavior and unpleasant characters, although the non-con is all implied and off stage. Dubious consent, however...

She was pathetically easy to capture. As expected, all she needed was to down one of us, and then she gloated. A simple Stunner, a quick Accio, and voilà! The Dark Lord's plans were accomplished once more. Damn the girl.

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She woke up to the sound of voices buzzing around her. At first she thought her mum had left the telly on again, but then everything came crashing back. The fight in the alley. Being outnumbered. Hitting that big Death Eater with something he'd remember for years, and then... and then...

She hoped she was in Grimmauld Place and the Order was gathered around, waiting for her to wake, but the sound dynamics were different wherever she was. Just going by the slight echoes created by the whispers, she knew it wasn't any room she'd been in before. That and the floor was damn cold.

"It seems our guest has awoken," a chilling voice said, and the crowd immediately went silent.

Fear stabbed through Hermione in a way she'd never known before. She hadn't ever heard that voice before, but she knew whose it was. She immediately tried to erect her Occlumency walls, but Voldemort just chuckled.

"Yes, Hermione, it is I, Lord Voldemort. I suggest you not waste your energy shielding your mind and get up now."

She felt her body rising under a power not her own, but was unable to stop it. Once up, she was glad for the support; as she looked around, her legs weakened at the sight before her. Death Eaters. Lots of Death Eaters. Lots and lots of Death Eaters. And Voldemort, too.

She nearly giggled at her mixed-up priorities, but managed to restrain herself. Unfortunately, Voldemort wasn't known as the most powerful Legilimens for nothing, as he smirked and released the spell holding her up. She crashed to her knees, crying out in pain and humiliation as the Death Eaters laughed.

She knelt there for a moment, trying to overcome the pain and gather her wits. There was no chance of her surviving this, but she might be able to die with dignity.

"I think you overestimate yourself, Hermione," Voldemort said in an amused tone. "Either that, or you underestimate yourself most shamefully."

At that, she raised her head, looking at the vile wizard directly. He just smirked cruelly, almost as nastily as Professor Snape.

Not 'Professor' anymore, she thought ruefully, returning to her feet with deliberate calm.

"So, I'm nearly as nasty as Severus, am I?" Voldemort said mockingly. "Severus, perhaps you could give me lessons on how to properly intimidate these youth of today. It seems I'm lacking that special something."

The crowd laughed again, and a tall, masked figure next to Voldemort stepped forward and bowed.

"I suspect it is merely familiarity with you she lacks, my Lord," the masked figure intoned in that horribly familiar voice. Snape looked at her then, and she could swear she could feel his sneer as he said, "After all, she wouldn't know that I am just the humble apprentice, now would she?"

Voldemort and everyone else laughed again, and Snape stepped back into the shadows.

"Too true, Severus. Too true. Well, back to business, I think. Does anyone have any other suggestions for what we should do with the girl?"

The crowd shouted out a few rude suggestions that seemed to amuse everyone but Hermione herself, who didn't know what to think. Surely she would just be killed, wouldn't she?

Voldemort stepped forward at that thought, and the crowd went silent once more. He approached Hermione slowly, gracefully, and reached out to slide his finger along her jaw in a sick parody of a caress.

"Yes, my dear, don't you fret. You will die. We just have to decide whether or not today will be your last day or if there is some use to keeping you alive for a bit longer. There is merit to that plan after all," he said, turning to a squat figure who stood on his other side. "But it is also the riskier option."

The squat figure bowed and bobbed his head obsequiously. "Of course, my Lord, but I think..."

"It does not matter what you think, Wormtail. It only matters what Potter will do about it."

Hermione looked at the squat figure again and noticed the silver hand peeking out of his sleeve. She shivered in disgust and quickly looked away, only to find herself confronted with Voldemort's red gaze.

"Yes, how will your friend react, hmm?" Voldemort whispered, grabbing her chin softly and holding her in place as he came closer. "Would he be more devastated if you were sent back dead, of course or if he were kept in suspense, not knowing your fate, letting his imagination carry him away?"

She tried to block her mind, to keep her fears from his penetrating gaze, but it was useless. He thrust himself into her mind and searched out every morsel of knowledge she held onto about Harry, Ron, the Weasleys, Snape, McGonagall, Kingsley, Tonks, Remus... everyone. In a matter of seconds, she had betrayed everyone she knew, even her parents.

Voldemort was smiling when he stepped back, and he caressed her face again. "Yes, your parents will die as well, I think. MacNair! Yaxley!" Two masked figures stepped forward, and he gazed at them until they each nodded and then quietly disappeared.

It only took a second for Hermione to figure out what that meant.

"No!" she screamed, trying to yank her face from Voldemort's grasp. He tightened his grip painfully and stilled her straining form with just a breath.

"You have no say in your fate or the fate of those you care for, Mudblood." He lightly stroked her jawline again while keeping a tight hold on her face, scraping her skin with his sharp fingernails. "You are alive right now on my whim alone. You are whole on my whim alone. Protest if you wish, but it will not change your fate. Or your parents' fate either."

He let her go, and she fell to the floor to the renewed laughter of the crowd.

"Perhaps, my Lord, it would be better to discuss the ramifications of her capture without her in hearing range?" Snape asked.

Voldemort shook his head, still staring at Hermione intently. "No, I think the girl should help decide her fate. It would be quite rude to omit her from the process altogether, don't you think?"

The crowd tittered again, though this time with an anxious note to it.

"No. I think it's only fair to present the girl with all of her options, and let her choose for herself."

"Kill me then. Just AK me right now," Hermione pleaded from the floor.

"You see, my compatriots," Voldemort said, looking around at his followers. "She has provided the answer to our questions. Amazingly, she would rather we kill her outright. She wants it to be quick and relatively painless. With those few words, she has told us that she will not barter for her life. She will not sell out any remaining secrets she may have kept from me for her freedom or her health. She simply wants to die quickly.

"And so we know what course to take, don't we?"

The crowd roared its approval, making Hermione realize the trap she'd walked into. She closed her eyes in resignation and prayed she'd die quickly anyway.

"Dolohov, you've been itching for a bit of revenge, haven't you?"

"Yes, sir!" the masked figure replied, almost pathetically eager.

"Well, here is your opportunity. Do with her what you will."

"My Lord," Wormtail squeaked hastily. "What little I know of Harry, of Potter, he'd be more upset if he knew his friend was suffering rather than just dead."

Voldemort nodded, although somewhat impatiently.

"And it's no secret he hates Snape and me," Wormtail continued, wringing his hands nervously.

Voldemort paused at that, then looked over at Snape, who was standing a little stiffer than usual. He thought for a moment, then seemed to come to a conclusion.

"Do with her as you will, Dolohov, just be sure to keep her alive. I believe Severus will hold her as a hostage once you're through."

Dolohov nodded curtly, then waved his wand and floated Hermione through the door to a more private room. Hermione heard a few others requesting something of Voldemort before she was out of hearing range, but it didn't matter to her. She heard a door close behind her, and then a silver masked face was hovering over her.

"It's time to reap what you sowed, you little bitch," he rasped. He pointed his wand at her, but before he could say anything, the door opened and a small crowd entered.

Dolohov stood up straight and looked at the intruders.

"What is it now?"

"Can we play, too?" a deep voice asked facetiously.

Dolohov looked at the crowd, then back at Hermione. She shivered at the glint in his cold eyes.

"The more the merrier, I always say," he answered and lifted up his robes.

Part I, chapter 2

Chapter 2 of 28

The need to survive is ingrained within the human psyche, but where does self-preservation end and self-destruction begin? Hermione is captured by Death Eaters and is held hostage by Snape and Pettigrew, but she comes up with a plan to escape. Not a romance.

AN: Huge thank you to Southern for betaing this. And, before I forget, thanks also go out to Mundungus42 for her encouragement. Without it, I never would have exorcised this piece from my system.

Damn that bastard! Damn that short, rat-faced, backstabbing little bastard! The girl in my care? The word 'care' being used very loosely, of course. He might as well have hexed a bloody Can't-Miss Charm onto my back and put me directly in Potter's path!

Fuck it all to hell!

What am I going to do with her?

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She woke up to the sound of voices muttering just beyond her hearing range. This awakening, however, was bereft of any denial. She could feel everywhere she'd been attacked, both by flesh and magic, and the overall effect was nauseating. She tried to hold back a whimper, but found it hurt to exert even that much effort.

Her whimper, quiet as it was, silenced the voices in the other room. She heard a slight shuffling, and then a door squeaked open.

"Finally decided to join us, did you, Granger?"

Hermione could have cried.

She cracked her eyes open to see a blurry Snape looming over her threateningly. He crossed his arms as if expecting an answer. She started to shake her head in acknowledgment, but that caused her back to spasm, twisting a broken shriek from her.

Trying hard to stop her body from shaking, she worked to relax herself, although it was only minimally successful. It felt like ages before she could open her eyes again, but when she did, everything was the same. The room was still unfocused, and Snape was still standing there, staring down at her coldly.

"My parents, sir?" she croaked out, almost choking from the raw feeling in her throat.

Snape stilled for a moment, but there was nothing else.

"Wormtail!" he called out after another moment.

"Yes, Severus?"

"Fetch the potion."

Hermione closed her eyes again, trying to hold back the tears. She didn't want to cry if she could help it. She didn't want him to see her cry again. Not now. She needed to be strong.

As she fought for control, she heard some more shuffling, and then a hand was behind her head, forcing it upwards. Instinctively, she fought back, twisting to the side away from the arm, not stopping as pain seared through her body in reaction.

The hand grabbed her hair and held tight, and then she felt another hand on her shoulder, forcing her back down. She strained against the hands, not caring if she was injuring herself, just wanting to get away, to not suffer through that again.

"Calm down, Granger!" Snape barked, applying more pressure to her torso as he did.

"Please. Please don't!" Hermione pleaded, trying to force her body to do something *useful*.

"I'm not going to hurt you, idiot girl!" Snape said, impatience making his tone sharp.

Exhausted, she gave up and relaxed her spasming body as much as she was able to. Opening her eyes again, she found Snape was still looming over her, only closer

now, thanks to his hands holding her down. She swiveled her eyes around a bit more to find Wormtail standing behind Snape, watching the proceedings nervously.

"What do you want from me?" Hermione whispered hoarsely, looking back to Snape.

Snape relaxed a fraction and lightened his touch, although he didn't remove his hands altogether.

"I want you to take this healing potion."

"Why? Why bother healing me?" she spat, bitterness welling up.

Snape raised his eyebrow, and his mouth twitched. "So that you won't be lazing about needing a nursemaid. Things need to be done around here, and I am not going to pick up after you."

She looked into his cold black eyes for as long as she could stand before averting her gaze and nodding her head just slightly.

He smirked and released her hair, moving his hand to the base of her skull again.

"Let me support your head. If you stay relaxed, your back shouldn't spasm again," he murmured softly before she tried to sit up. Nodding her understanding, she let him do all the work – and felt more helpless than she had the night before. His less than scathing tone was the only thing that kept her from bursting into furious tears, but it did nothing to lessen her shame.

The brew tasted awful, but she managed to take the entire dose with Snape's help. As soon as she swallowed the last mouthful, she realized something was wrong. Her head was spinning, and she couldn't focus on anything, not even a thought.

She looked up at Snape to see satisfaction written all over his face.

"Bastard!" she whispered, and then the void consumed her.

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Perhaps I *shouldn't* have slipped her the sleeping potion, as I doubt very much she would want to be conscious for this, especially as I heal her more intimate wounds. And it is impossible to die of mortification, much as we would all like to at one point or another.

But, this way, when she wakes up completely healed, she can believe it was the potion that did all the work. She may suspect I had a more... involved hand in it, but she'll always have that lingering doubt.

Can't make things easy for her after all.

Part I, chapter 3

Chapter 3 of 28

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AN: *Thank you, Sun!*

She woke up abruptly, and the first thing she noticed was the lack of pain. If it hadn't been for the unfamiliar surroundings, she could have almost convinced herself that it had all been a dream. But the strange room tore away that glimmer of hope, and all the memories came crashing in on her, overwhelming her.

Without even checking to see if she was alone, she broke down and started crying, falling back to the lumpy mattress as self-pity encased her.

She was so ashamed of herself. Not only had she been caught in the first place but then she'd also barely tried to resist Voldemort's mind probe. On top of it all, she'd practically invited her fate by asking, no, *begging* Voldemort to kill her. She should have known better than to provoke his perverse nature like that. If she'd just kept silent, then he'd have assumed that death was the worst fate and killed her.

She'd been so stupid. It was her stupidity that had got her raped and tortured. She hadn't been smart enough to provoke any of that crowd to kill her. And now she had to pay for her stupidity by being held hostage by *Snape*.

She remembered the look on his face right before she'd passed out and shivered. What had that bastard done to her? Had he taken advantage of her while she'd been unconscious? Or had he drugged her for Wormtail's pleasure?

Suddenly hit with a bout of nausea, Hermione desperately looked around for the loo and hoped the door at the other end of the room led to one.

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She should be awake by now. I dare say she is, but is crying her poor little heart out, bemoaning how unfair life is, how horrid I am and generally indulging in righteous self-pity.

Waiting another fifteen minutes won't hurt me.

Part I, chapter 4

Chapter 4 of 28

The need to survive is ingrained within the human psyche, but where does self-preservation end and self-destruction begin? Hermione is captured by Death Eaters and is held hostage by Snape and Pettigrew, but she comes up with a plan to escape. Not a romance.

AN: Thanks again to Southern for being an awesome beta! Also, sorry for the short chapters. There aren't that many very short chapters like the last one, but there are a couple. Please bear with me.

Hermione stood at the only other door in the room, wondering whether she should leave the room or not. She had no idea what to expect, architecturally, behaviorally, or psychologically. The window showed that she was above the ground, probably on the first floor, but other than that, there was little information to be gained, except that the window was locked, probably magically. The back gardens and alleys looked like she could be anywhere there were row houses, and seeing as she'd never been in a row house, she didn't know what would be waiting for her. Would the floors creak? Would the stair be to the left, right or directly across from her? Would there be any chance of escape?

She closed her eyes and shook her head. Of course there wouldn't be any chance of escape. Snape was nothing if not methodical, and since he'd been ordered to hold her hostage, there was more hope of Hell freezing over than of her escaping.

For a brief moment, she considered suicide, but knew that she wouldn't be able to go through with it, even if she could find the means in the abysmally bare room. Sighing in resignation, she reached out for the door and shrieked when her hand touched fabric rather than metal.

Jumping back three feet, her eyes sprang open to find Snape leaning against the now wide open door frame, smirking at her.

"Rise and shine, merry sunshine," he said so smoothly it made Hermione's skin crawl. She instinctively took a step back and crossed her arms defensively.

She opened her mouth to ask what was going to happen to her when Snape raised his hand, the smirk now gone and an ugly snarl in its place.

"I will not tolerate your questions here, Miss Granger. This is my home, and you *will* obey my rules; the first of which is *no* questions. You are not a guest here; you are my hostage. As such, any questions, even if it's only what will be for dinner, will not be tolerated. It will not kill you to be left in the dark, and if it turns out I am wrong about that, then kudos to you for figuring a way out of this before the Dark Lord decrees.

"Second, as I am sure you have reasoned out by now, there is no escape. All exits, all holes – everything is secured with wards well beyond your knowledge. Only Wormtail and I know the passwords for exit and entrance, and I promise you that trying to decipher it would result in much unpleasantness for you."

He looked at her thoughtfully and then amended his statement. "Perhaps I should say that trying to decipher the code *will* be very unpleasant for you, seeing as I doubt even the threat of torture would prevent you from trying."

He paused for another moment, as if weighing his options. When his face became even darker, Hermione shuddered in suspense.

"And finally, since it has become my job to keep you alive for the Dark Lord's purposes, it is my unfortunate responsibility to keep an eye on you. As such, you will stay within eyesight of either Wormtail or myself at *all* times."

Hermione recoiled a bit at that, though one of her first thoughts was relief that there were two of them, rather than just one. She would rather not witness Snape or Wormtail piss if she could help it at all. But then the ramifications of that decree sank in.

She opened her mouth to ask where she would be sleeping, but at Snape's hard glare, shut her mouth with a snap.

No questions.

Snape's lip curled up slightly into an expression that almost resembled humor, if it hadn't been so cruel.

"It's good to see you catch on so quickly. Hexing can be rather draining after all," was all he said, offering no information about his last rule. She knew he was testing her, baiting her into disobeying, especially given that he'd hinted at the repercussions.

Hermione decided to carefully take the bait.

"I only see one bed, sir."

His lips curled even further, giving his face a mask-like appearance of wicked humor.

"So there is, you *clever* girl." His tone sent another round of shivers down her spine, making her feel irrationally filthy. "And as a reward for being such a *clever* girl, I'll give you the choice of whose bed you sleep in."

Hermione felt the blood drain from her face at the prospect of being molested by either of the men, both of whom were the most odious examples of humanity she could think of.

"I'll think on that then," she hedged.

His smirk remained in place as he smoothly answered, "You do that."

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At least she seems quick on the uptake. We'll see how quick she really is – how long it takes for her to *really* understand.

Part I, chapter 5

Chapter 5 of 28

The need to survive is ingrained within the human psyche, but where does self-preservation end and self-destruction begin? Hermione is captured by Death Eaters and is held hostage by Snape and Pettigrew, but she comes up with a plan to escape. Not a romance.

AN: *Because no one seems to be updating *insert whine here*, I thought I'd put another one out there. Thanks, as always, to my beautiful beta, Southern.*

She was nervous all throughout his preparation of her breakfast. She watched him as closely as possible from her place at the table, making sure he didn't add anything unusual. She had no desire to be knocked out again, especially by him. Unfortunately, her vantage point wasn't the best, as he was often blocking her view of the frying pan with his back. When he set down a plate of beans and toast in front of her, she realized that she would never know if he'd drugged her until it was too late.

Unfortunately, she was starving. She hadn't eaten in at least twenty-four hours, possibly more, seeing as she had no idea how many days had passed while she'd been unconscious. She tentatively cut off a piece of toast and brought it to her nose, trying to suss out any unusual smells. Unfortunately, the smell of the tinned beans was overwhelming everything else, so it was impossible to tell anything.

"I'm not about to waste my poisons on you, girl," Snape bit out impatiently. He looked rather offended, which only made her angry.

"Pardon me if I would rather be cautious than unconscious, *sir*."

He smirked. "You will have to sleep sometime."

"A natural sleep is better than a drugged one," she retorted.

"Why would I bother to drug you?"

"Good question, *sir*. Wh—" She barely stopped herself before she could finish the word, knowing that it could be construed as a question in itself. After a taking in a shaky breath, she continued, "That is what I've been wondering."

He rolled his eyes and crossed his arms. "Did you not consider that I laced the healing potion for your benefit alone?"

"But wh—I see *no good* reason for you to do so, *sir*, other than to make me more... tractable. *Sir*."

He narrowed his eyes into a scowl, and slowly, ever so slowly, leaned in toward her, stopping only when their faces were a few inches apart. She could feel the animosity radiating off of him, and fear sliced through her again.

"'Death Eater' is not a synonym for sexual predator, Miss Granger, despite your previous experience," Snape growled, then stood up abruptly and took her plate away from her, dumping the contents in the trash. "If you want to err on the side of caution, then you will do the cooking. I hope for your sake that you know how. I do not tolerate waste, and if another dish goes into the bin, you *will* suffer for it."

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What does she think I am, a necrophiliac? Even vampires prefer their victims to be moving when they start! How dare she accuse me of stooping so low? I should tell her precisely how I prefer my women and watch her squirm in mortification as she's forced to listen to *me* talk about sex.

Part I, chapter 6

Chapter 6 of 28

The need to survive is ingrained within the human psyche, but where does self-preservation end and self-destruction begin? Hermione is captured by Death Eaters and is held hostage by Snape and Pettigrew, but she comes up with a plan to escape. Not a romance.

AN: *Thanks again to Southern, for being a wonderful beta!*

"Granger."

She jumped at Snape's bark; she hadn't noticed him move. He'd been in his ratty chair ever since breakfast and hadn't even looked her way since.

She almost responded, "Yes, *sir*?" but caught herself in time. Instead she simply looked up to see his face.

"I expect dinner to be ready in an hour. You might want to get started now."

She nodded. "Yes, *sir*."

She then got up and made her way to the kitchen, very aware of Wormtail's eyes following her every move. She didn't allow herself to react until the kitchen door closed behind her, when she started shaking. She forgot Snape's third decree until he said, "You didn't seem to have a phobia of kitchens earlier today."

She whirled around to find him leaning on the door frame, watching her with a sardonic grin. She wanted nothing more than to slap the expression off his face, but knew

that might be a bad idea.

"No, sir."

"Then why the theatrics now?" Snape asked. Hermione had the suspicion that he knew exactly what was going on.

"My blood sugar seems to be a little low, sir. That's all."

He raised an eyebrow in disbelief, but didn't say anything. Instead, he sauntered over to the table and sat down, watching her the entire time. After a few moments under his stare, Hermione remembered what she was supposed to be doing and made her way over to the stove, looking around for the larder.

It took fifteen minutes just to find all the utensils she needed, and another ten to figure out what to make from the ingredients she could find. By the time she'd put the pasta on, about thirty minutes later, she was getting rather panicky. She didn't know if she would be able to have dinner ready in time.

Meanwhile, Snape was still watching her; she could feel his black eyes on her, weighing her down and depriving her of air. She tried to shake off the dread his stare evoked, planning all the finishing steps of the meal in her head while she collected the plates and moved to set the small table. She'd set the last fork in front of Snape and was about to turn back to the stove when Snape grabbed her wrist and twisted her around to look at him.

"Have you made your decision yet?" he asked, his voice and face unreadable.

She looked down at his hand on her and was surprised when he immediately released her.

Looking back up at his face, she straightened her spine, raised her chin and cleared her throat.

"I choose to sleep in my own bed, sir."

She thought she saw his lips twitch, but the next instant he was sneering once more.

"Is that so," he said, his lip curling up. "And what makes you think that is a choice?"

"You said I could choose whose bed to sleep in, sir. You didn't narrow down the choices to only your bed or Wormtail's, and given your predilection for details, I highly doubt that was an oversight on your part. Sir."

That time she was sure she saw his lip twitch.

"You are basing your choice on an assumption of how I operate."

A hiss from the stove reminded Hermione of the pasta, which was probably overcooked now. She rushed to the stove, grabbed a sieve and a large bowl, and drained the pasta water into the bowl. As soon as that was finished, she attended the simple sauce she'd made up and looked for serving ware.

By the time she turned around to face Snape again, the finished meal was in her hands. She walked over to the table and gently placed the dishes before Snape and then, reflexively, looked up at the clock. She had just barely made it.

Looking at Snape triumphantly, she said, "The assumption of how you operate is based upon observing you for the last six years, sir. In that time I have determined that you are indeed detail oriented, and only once have I observed you to speak without knowing exactly what you are saying, and even that one time was questionable."

Snape's lips didn't twitch, and he didn't nod or give her any indication, but she felt she had won her point and was proved correct when he said, "Your bed will be in my room."

She nodded gravely, although she was quite happy to have won that battle, even though she knew she was unlikely to win the war.

She sat down across from Snape and observed him surreptitiously. He was lounging in the small straight-backed chair, which was an action she wouldn't have thought Snape capable of doing. She'd never seen him before when he didn't look like he had a broom handle for a spine.

He was filling his plate with a generous helping of pasta, and she was pleased to see his nose twitching in what seemed to be approval. She hoped it was approval. It smelled good to her anyway.

"Why did you save the pasta water?" he asked unexpectedly, right after calling Wormtail to dinner.

"Because you said you don't tolerate waste, sir. Pasta water is excellent as a soup base and saves salt," she said eagerly, glad she could prove that she could follow instructions.

"What a pity there isn't a NEWT for being held hostage," he jeered.

Hermione hid her disappointment by serving herself some food.

"What do you think you're doing, Granger?" Snape snarled.

Hermione looked up, confused by his tone. "Helping myself, sir."

He took her plate away from her and exchanged it with Wormtail's empty plate, just as Wormtail himself entered the kitchen.

"What makes you think you have any privilege here, Granger? You get what's left only after we've both had our fill."

Hermione's gaze immediately went to the rapidly shrinking pile of food as Wormtail shoveled more and more onto his plate. She bit her lip; she hadn't made enough. She wasn't going to get to eat.

"Is that understood?" Snape barked.

She bowed her head in a defeated nod. "Yes, sir."

She watched the two men eat their way through the entire bowl of food, the wonderful smell torturing her empty stomach. The final insult came when Snape licked his lips after the last morsel was gone, looked her directly in the eye and said, "That was adequate. Next time you might want to make enough for yourself as well."

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She still hasn't quite reached full understanding of the situation. Perhaps hunger is making her dimwitted?

Part I, chapter 7

Chapter 7 of 28

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AN: *Patience is not one of my strong suits. I tried waiting a little longer between updates, but Southern was wonderful enough to beta this for me, and I couldn't resist any longer. *hugs SW and offers her chocolate**

Speaking of hugs and chocolate, I haven't mentioned it explicitly yet, but I really do appreciate every review. Thank you for letting me know you like/hate/whatever this story. Your comments mean a lot.

But enough of that and on with the... plot movement?

After dinner, she was having a hard time remaining calm. Anxiety, anger and hunger were warring within her, and her concentration was the casualty.

She was furious at Snape. She had followed all the rules he'd laid out, and then he not only prevented her from eating but had also made her sit there and watch while they devoured the meal in front of her, knowing that she was starving. And then he'd mocked her. If she were able to do wandless magic...

Wormtail wasn't much better. He hadn't said anything, but the self-satisfied smile he'd worn as he took the last helping of food had almost been enough to make her cry with fury. And on top of that, he'd been leering at her whenever he could, though he seemed hesitant to do so in front of Snape.

Their dynamic was strange. Snape obviously despised the rat, and Wormtail feared Snape. Whenever Snape wasn't looking, Wormtail would shoot him the blackest glares. But Snape reacted to Wormtail's presence as well. It was almost impossible to tell what he was thinking or feeling, but she sensed that Wormtail made Snape uneasy. He certainly never exposed his back to him if he could help it.

If it were someone other than Wormtail, she might have expected it to be a power struggle, but her brief time with Voldemort and his followers showed that Snape was definitely favored over the rat. Was Wormtail simply jealous, or was there more to it than that? From what Harry had told her and Ron about Voldemort's return, Wormtail probably felt entitled to Voldemort's esteem and was bitter that Snape had one-upped him. But why Snape's unease?

She looked at the two men from under her lashes and shuddered. They were both despicable traitors. They were both callous murderers. And they both were her captors.

Wormtail looked her way again, and she quickly averted her gaze. She really didn't like the way he looked at her. It brought to mind things she'd rather forget, not to mention it made her grateful for Snape's presence.

She really wished she knew what Snape had done when he'd knocked her out. Despite what he'd said at breakfast, she didn't trust him. She wished she could feel safe from molestation from at least one of them.

"Hermione... You're the girl Ronald fancies, right?" a high-pitched voice said to her left, startling her out of her numb thoughts.

She wanted to tell the rat off, to tell him to get away from her, but she didn't dare. She didn't know much about Peter Pettigrew, but she suspected that he was the type to store up resentments and take out his frustration on anyone who was weaker than him, which, at the moment, she was.

"Yes."

He hummed in agreement and sidled around to stand in front of her, twisting his hands and nervously glancing in Snape's direction.

"Hmm. Ron has obviously grown up since I last saw him. He used to talk of nothing besides Harry Potter and Quidditch and what prats his brothers were, all but Bill and Charlie, that is."

He paused, and Hermione shuddered. It was still horrible to think that this rodent had been so close to them. Even more than horrible, given the lecherous vibes he was radiating. The last time he'd seen her, she'd only been a child.

"It was my idea, you know, keeping you alive," Wormtail squeaked, glancing nervously over his shoulder as he moved to sit down next to her. She scooted over, trying to make space between them.

"I know." She tried to keep the bitterness out of her voice, but knew she'd failed when she saw him flinch minutely out of the corner of her eye.

She refused to look at him, continuing to stare at the bookcase as if it were the only thing in the room she could see.

He shifted in the seat next to her, but she couldn't tell what direction he was moving until she felt his breath on her cheek.

"You've no hope of rescue, you know. No one is going to find you here – it's Secret-Kept. No one knows about this place besides me and Snape – and the Dark Lord, of course."

"I'm guessing the Dark Lord didn't choose you as the Secret-Keeper." The words slipped off her tongue before she could stop them, but as soon as it was said, she froze, waiting for his retaliation.

To her surprise, he laughed, and to her relief, he relaxed back into the sofa, away from her.

"No, he didn't. As a matter of fact, he's the Secret Keeper. He likes to keep things close to his chest, if you know what I mean."

She turned to look at him, making sure she had eye contact before saying, "He doesn't trust anyone."

He gave another high-pitched squeak of laughter and turned to Snape.

"She's a clever one, isn't she, Severus?"

Snape looked up slowly, gave both of them a bored glance and went back to his parchments he was poring over. "She gives that impression, yes."

Wormtail chuckled again and then winked at Hermione playfully. "Don't mind Severus. He's just a sourpuss."

Hermione almost smiled at the scowl that crossed Snape's face at that. To hide her amusement, she turned back to face the bookshelves, unconsciously sighing as she did so.

"If I remember right, you like reading, don't you?" he said quietly, leaning toward her once again. There was a nasty quality to his voice that gave her goose flesh. She nodded.

"I'll tell you what I'll do then," he whispered and leaned closer, placing a hand on her thigh as he did so. She froze and clenched her teeth, positive she didn't want to hear what he was going to say, but unsure how to get him away without angering him. "Severus is rather chary with his precious books, but I bet if I could convince the Dark Lord to keep you alive, I could convince Snape to loan you a book here and there. You don't seem the type to mark books, after all."

She turned to look at him and found him closer than she expected. Their noses were barely an inch apart, and his shallow breaths were assaulting her nose. There was no doubt as to what he wanted from her, based on his leer. She automatically recoiled in disgust, but that's when it occurred to her: *Wormtail knows the password*. In that instant, she decided her course. She took a deep breath and tried to relax, although she was still far too nervous to pass for 'at ease.' She lifted her lips slightly, trying to smile in a way that would seem nervously grateful, and nodded her head just barely. "I'd like that."

Judging by the slow smile that spread across Wormtail's face, she thought she might have a chance if she played her hand well and didn't underestimate the wiliness of the rat before her. Without thinking, her eyes flicked to Snape to see if he was observing them. Wormtail noticed and patted her thigh with a smile.

"Don't worry. I'll deal with him."

Hermione didn't bother to hide her fears but tentatively smiled back anyway.

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Perhaps she is clever after all.

I think Wormtail actually has a good idea, though, offering her reading material. I don't want her getting restless.

Part I, chapter 8

Chapter 8 of 28

The need to survive is ingrained within the human psyche, but where does self-preservation end and self-destruction begin? Hermione is captured by Death Eaters and is held hostage by Snape and Pettigrew, but she comes up with a plan to escape. Not a romance.

AN: Thanks to Southern, beta extraordinaire.

"Granger!"

Hermione woke up with a start to find Snape looming over her. She instinctively pulled up the covers, even though she was still in her clothes. Snape sneered at her reaction.

"Trust me, Granger, I have no interest in molesting swotty little know-it-alls, despite what your friends are probably thinking right about now." He gave her a nasty smile that gave her no reassurance at all.

"So am—so I am being held just to torture Harry."

Snape scowled at her and moved back from the bed a step. "You knew that already. Now get up. I need to get to work."

Hermione sat up, but when she swung her legs over the side of the bed, she found that there wasn't much room to stand with Snape standing where he was.

"Wou... Please move, sir," she said as politely as she could.

"You would do well to learn how to respect your betters, girl!" he snarled. "Now get up!"

She scooted over a bit in the bed, but Snape just stepped in front of her again, narrowing the distance between her knees and his calves at the same time.

Her shoulders slumping in defeat, she stood up, making sure not to look up into Snape's face until she was standing straight, only inches away from him, just as he'd surely intended. She looked up at him then, making certain her face was a mask of indifference; she didn't want to see what his reaction would be to defiance.

He looked down his absurdly large nose at her, his face blank as well, then quirked his eyebrow up a notch.

"You might want to use the toilet now, as you won't have another opportunity till lunchtime."

Hermione set her jaw and nodded minutely. Going to the bathroom was a humiliating experience. Snape hadn't made an exception to the "stay within eyesight at all times" rule, so he stood in front of her the entire time.

After she'd washed up, she preceded him into the living room where he told her to stop.

"Choose a book."

She turned to look at him, gratitude and confusion breaking through her mask. She hadn't seen Wormtail talk to Snape the night before, and she doubted that Snape had left her alone in his room. Nevertheless, it was an offer she wasn't going to refuse.

She opened her mouth to ask what he'd allow her to read, but closed it before she could utter a sound. There was no way to find out without sounding rude or ungrateful.

"Thank you, sir!" she finally said as she moved over to examine the texts.

"Be quick about it, girl!"

Jumping, she quickly scanned the shelves and plucked out a surprising and familiar tome. She turned toward Snape questioningly. He raised an eyebrow and smirked, but only said, "Interesting choice. Now come."

He moved towards the stair to the basement. Hermione looked longingly in the direction of the kitchen, but turned and followed Snape obediently, having no wish to upset him.

He led her to a deceptively plain looking wooden door that was practically humming with all the wards placed upon it. Snape waved his wand almost negligently and all wards but one fell down. She gasped when she recognized the one he'd left up.

Snape looked down at her curiously, and she tried to school her face back into something impassive, but Snape was already smirking nastily. "And, pray tell, where did little Miss Prim and Proper learn about this ward, hmm?" It seemed to be a rhetorical question, so Hermione kept her mouth shut. He chuckled ominously.

"Well, at least I don't have to warn you about the consequences of coming or going uninvited."

He looked at her intently, as if expecting an answer.

"No, sir," she replied, happy that her voice wasn't trembling like the rest of her body.

"Good. It really is a bother having to clean up the mess intruders make," he said with a wicked grin, then held out his hand. "Now come."

Biting her bottom lip, Hermione took his hand and let him lead her through the ward, not realizing she was holding her breath until they'd crossed the threshold.

"You are to sit over there," he said and pointed to a small stool in the corner. "If you distract me in any way, you will no longer be welcome here." His smile sent chills down Hermione's spine; she was quite sure he meant it.

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This could be fun. She has read enough to have a good imagination. I shall have to steer her toward that book on interesting forms of torture.

Part I, chapter 9

Chapter 9 of 28

The need to survive is ingrained within the human psyche, but where does self-preservation end and self-destruction begin? Hermione is captured by Death Eaters and is held hostage by Snape and Pettigrew, but she comes up with a plan to escape. Not a romance.

AN: *Thanks, Southern!*

Hermione's stomach groaned again, and she bent over a little more, trying to muffle the sound. She hoped Snape wouldn't be so unfair as to blame her for her stomach's noise, but she wasn't willing to bet her life on it.

They had been down in the lab for hours now. She hadn't eaten in... She didn't know how long it had been since she'd had more than a biscuit, but she knew that Snape would break for lunch sooner or later. He had told her that she would get another pee break at lunchtime, so that meant he intended to eat at some point. She just hoped it would be soon. Her stomach's growls were getting louder.

She curled up, pressing her crossed arms to her stomach, trying to simultaneously stifle the noise and distract herself from the gnawing pain. Without thinking about it, she started rocking back and forth just slightly while gazing at the book on the floor.

She should have known that Snape, of all people, would not have a copy of *Pride and Prejudice* on his shelves. She should have expected something more like the vile treatise the book was. She'd had a good idea about the pride purebloods took in their lineage, what she hadn't known, though if she'd thought about it, she would have guessed, was how victimized they felt. They felt the Muggle-borns and the Wizarding world were persecuting them for their superiority. They felt the world was prejudiced against them!

She had very, very little patience for that type of argument, especially while she was being held hostage by a half-blood on the order of another half-blood who was trying to pass himself off as the savior for pureblood supremacy. To tell the truth, it irked her quite a lot.

Her stomach gave a stab of protest at its lack of contents, and she curled in on herself a little further, holding in a whimper.

She knew she shouldn't be such a ninny about something that was more of an inconvenience than anything, but she was tired and emotionally upset. She just wanted food and a good lie down, preferably with a book that wasn't full of hateful rhetoric.

She knew that was asking too much, though. In her current circumstances, she would be lucky if Snape didn't deliberately stuff himself just to prevent her from eating. She didn't know what Wormtail would do, though she suspected he might be willing to eat a little less than he had the night before, simply to worm his way into her pants.

She cringed and wondered again if she could go through with her plan. He was such a repulsive little man... She thought she had a better chance of conning him than she had of conning Snape. She just had to be careful; that was all. But the thought of him touching her still made her feel ill. Or maybe that was the hunger.

Suddenly, a pair of black boots appeared in her line of sight. Looking up, she found Snape was sneering at her.

"Oh, did that book offend your delicate sensibilities?" he asked in a tone that reminded her horribly of Dolores Umbridge.

She struggled with the urge to glare at him and shortly did manage to compose her face into a blank expression.

"Considering current circumstances, I find I have few sympathies for their case."

She nearly jumped when he let out a sharp bark of laughter, but tried not to look startled.

"Better arguments have been made in their favor, I assure you," he said as the humor abruptly left his face. "Now come."

He gestured for her to rise, and she did so, surprised that he moved back to give her a bit of space. They walked to the door, and then he extended his hand to her once more. Still uneasy about the ward, she gingerly took his hand and followed him out, dropping his hand as soon as they were through.

Her hopes that it was lunchtime were rewarded as Snape made his way to the kitchen, his long strides making her trot to keep up, which she was eager to do. She couldn't wait to eat. It wasn't until they entered the kitchen and Snape sat down at the table that she remembered cooking was her job.

With a quiet sigh, she went to the larder for the bread and meat, hoping he wouldn't mind canned ham sandwiches. She knew *she* was hungry enough to tolerate anything. She would even eat mushrooms if they were on hand.

She finished making the tea and two sandwiches each when Wormtail walked in. She eyed the tin of ham, a knot of dread forming in her chest. She wasn't going to get to eat again.

Straightening her shoulders, she divided the sandwiches onto two plates and took them to the men, not bothering to get her own plate of food. She sat down in her seat from the night before and tried not to salivate as the men devoured the sandwiches.

"Was that all you made?" Snape asked disapprovingly.

"I can make more if you're still hungry, sir," she said, trying for a neutral tone.

"Then make more," he snarled.

Nodding, she got up and crossed to the counter again. She was surprised to hear Wormtail actually speak up in her defense.

"She's just trying to be thrifty, Severus. You needn't be so hard on her."

"And what would you know about conservation?"

"I'm here, aren't I? I've offered the Dark Lord more--"

"Rubbish, Wormtail, rubbish. The only reason the Dark Lord has put up with your offerings is because he knows that, rat that you are, you aren't able to distinguish between what's of use or refuse. He is most merciful, knowing that it's a biological failing."

Hermione heard Wormtail splutter for a moment or two, then mutter something.

"What was that, Wormtail? I'm afraid I missed that last bit."

"You're one to talk."

"Pray tell, Peter, what do you mean?"

Hermione closed her eyes and shook her head in dread when Wormtail actually answered him.

"I mean you're not exactly a piece of biological perfection in your own right. I might transform to a mere rat, but at least I'm an Animagus!"

"True, but I didn't have the need. I didn't have those kinds of friends."

Hermione could tell Snape was enjoying himself, and at that point she just wished Wormtail would shut up. Didn't he know that he was going to lose any verbal battle against Snape?

"At least I had friends."

"Oh, I had friends, Wormtail. And, unlike you, I've managed to keep most of them."

Hermione heard the sound of a chair being slammed back and turned to find Wormtail standing, pointing a shaking wand at Snape, who just raised an eyebrow.

"Go ahead, Peter. See how far you make it."

Wormtail clenched his fist while Snape took a sip of his tea, looking decidedly unconcerned.

"Fuck you, Snape!" Wormtail spat at him and then left the room in a huff.

Hermione watched Snape with wide-eyes as he took another sip of his tea and then put his cup down with a steady hand.

"Any day now, Granger."

Starting, she turned and collected the sandwiches she'd made and hurried to the table.

Five minutes later, Snape pushed his plate away with nearly half a sandwich leftover.

"Not your best showing, Granger, but you can have the leftovers if you want."

She looked up from the sandwich to find him watching her with a shrewd expression. At that moment she wished desperately that she wasn't so hungry. She wanted nothing more than to leave that sandwich where it was and keep her pride. But...

Lowering her eyes, she reached out for the sandwich, only to have Snape grab her wrist before she could touch it.

"You didn't say thank you, Granger. I thought I told you to learn some respect, girl!"

He shoved her hand away and took the plate to the trash bin. Hermione bit her lip to keep from crying out for him to stop, but couldn't stop the wince when he dropped the sandwich into the bin. Placing the empty plate onto the counter, he then crossed the room to loom over her.

"Well? What have you to say for yourself?"

Hermione stared at the floor, willing herself not to cry.

"I'm sorry, sir," she whispered.

"Look at me when you're talking, and speak up!"

Hermione lifted her head first, then her eyes, still willing herself not to cry.

"I'm sorry, sir." Her voice was shaky, but audible.

"Sorry for what, precisely?"

Clenching her eyes shut, she jumped when she heard something whip against the table, and then felt the wind of displaced air brush against her face. Opening her eyes, she found Snape's face inches from hers, his cold eyes glaring at her with obvious malice.

"You will look at me when I am talking to you. Do you understand?"

Hermione nodded fearfully before remembering to vocalize. "Yes, sir."

He backed off enough to stand up and loom properly again. "What are you sorry about, or were you just offering false platitudes?" he demanded.

Hermione pursed her lips, trying to keep her chin from wobbling. "I'm sorry I was disrespectful, sir."

"Is that all?"

Hermione shook her head while trying to think what else she should be sorry for. To him. She sniffed and wished she could keep from crying. When he crossed his arms impatiently, she looked around the room for inspiration. That's when her eyes fell on the trash bin.

"I'm sorry to have wasted food, sir."

"Is that all?"

Thinking for a moment, she nervously nodded. "Yes, sir?"

"Is that a question?" he asked, his lips turning up into a wicked smirk.

"No, sir!" Hermione said quickly.

His smirk grew as he regarded her coolly, but then he backed off, and his stern demeanor waned. "I shall forgive you this time, for the disrespect, but as for the food..."

"I really am sorry, sir!" Hermione cried, letting the tears flow. She *was* sorry! She hadn't wanted that sandwich to go into the trash. She wanted to eat it! She was so hungry!

He leaned back against the counter lazily. "If you feel so horrible about it, I suppose I could let you remedy the situation."

Hermione froze. She didn't like that tone. She didn't like the possibilities that were presenting themselves. She really didn't like Snape. Swallowing, she looked up at him.

He was regarding her coolly, smirking in a self-satisfied way and obviously waiting for her to make the next move.

"Wha...I would appreciate the chance, sir." She didn't like the way he smiled when she said that.

"Then let there be no waste."

She looked at him in wide-eyed comprehension, trying to believe he didn't mean what she thought.

"I..."

He shrugged. "Either dig out the sandwich and eat it or go without food and water for the next three days. Your choice, Granger."

She realized her jaw had gone slack and closed her mouth with a snap, suddenly resolute.

"I'd rather starve, sir."

His smile didn't fade, but it got very hard around the edges.

"So be it. Now come. You've wasted food and time enough."

Allowing herself one muffled sob, she followed him out of the room, trying not to think of the half eaten sandwich lying in the trash.

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Oh, how terribly predictable. Foolish girl. Does she really think that starving herself is going to help her out? It'll just make the landing that much harder when her pride finally falls.

Part I, chapter 10

Chapter 10 of 28

The need to survive is ingrained within the human psyche, but where does self-preservation end and self-destruction begin? Hermione is captured by Death Eaters and is held hostage by Snape and Pettigrew, but she comes up with a plan to escape. Not a romance.

AN: *Thanks again to Southern the Magnificent!*

She set the plates full of food on the table, gritting her teeth at the sight. Even though she wasn't eating, Snape was still making her cook. She had hoped she'd be able to sneak something while preparing the meal, but he'd watched her very closely the entire time. It was worse than Potions used to be.

She sat down across from them, trying to block out the sounds and smells of dinner, but Snape was being unusually vocal, the bastard. He was being as bad as Ron: sighing every time he took a bite, smacking his lips disgustingly, and audibly chewing. It was almost enough to destroy her appetite. Almost.

She was not going to go through the trash, though. She was not going to beg. She'd already apologized, and that was humiliating enough without begging for literal garbage to eat.

Her stomach growled again, painfully.

She saw Wormtail looking at her again.

"Let her eat, Severus."

"She has chosen not to. Who am I to force her?"

Wormtail eyed her shrewdly. "It doesn't look like this is her choice."

"Consequences, Wormtail, consequences. I know that's a big word, and it's difficult for you to understand, but she has chosen to suffer."

"And what will the Master say when she dies of hunger?"

Snape sighed and shook his head pityingly at Wormtail. "She won't die. Why the concern, Wormtail? Are you feeling sorry for the girl? Have you suddenly tapped into a wellspring of house loyalty for her? Is this something I should report to the Dark Lord, that although you had no problem betraying your friends when they trusted you with their lives, you're showing signs of disloyalty for a girl half your age?"

Wormtail glared at Snape. "The Dark Lord knows I'm faithful to him alone."

Snape's face twisted into a sneer, and he said with delicately intoned sarcasm, "Yes, and that's why he put you here."

"Whatever you think, Snape, you're not my keeper."

Snape just chuckled condescendingly. "Of course not, Wormtail."

"Your arrogance will get you killed one day."

Snape delicately wiped his mouth with his napkin. "And who will be my executioner? You?" He laughed outright when Wormtail continued to look at him hatefully.

"Wormtail, look at yourself! You're about as threatening as a flobberworm. Why do you think the Dark Lord doesn't keep you at his side where he can watch over you personally? He doesn't want to tarnish his reputation by having a weak idiot like yourself as a visible sycophant. It would give a terribly bad impression, after all."

Wormtail turned red and stood up so fast his chair rocked back and fell over.

"Go fuck yourself, Snape."

"Oh, once again such a clever comeback. Bravo." Snape clapped slowly, mockingly.

Peter narrowed his beady eyes at Snape and left. He hadn't even finished his dinner.

Hermione looked longingly at the plate of food, and Snape noticed.

"Tsk, tsk. Such a waste."

Hermione turned to him with fearful eyes and was not relieved when he smirked until he said, "Don't worry. That's Wormtail's fault, not yours."

Relief flooded her, as well as a touch of gratitude for him being fair enough to recognize the truth. She barely noticed when he threw the remains of Wormtail's supper into the bin.

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This is far too easy. But enjoyable.

Part I, chapter 11

Chapter 11 of 28

The need to survive is ingrained within the human psyche, but where does self-preservation end and self-destruction begin? Hermione is captured by Death Eaters and is held hostage by Snape and Pettigrew, but she comes up with a plan to escape. Not a romance.

AN: *Sorry for the delay. Thank you, Southern!*

She woke to Snape's hand on her shoulder, shaking her.

"Wake up, Granger."

She sat up immediately, staring bleary-eyed around the room. She had not slept well; her stomach kept protesting throughout the night. It was still upset, but now she just felt ill, rather than hungry.

Snape must have thought so as well, as he stepped back from her with a look of distaste, as if expecting her to vomit on him. She wished she could.

"You need to bathe today," he said.

She felt her shoulders collapse in defeat at the promised humiliation. So far she'd escaped being completely nude around Snape, to her knowledge. She still wasn't sure what had happened when he'd knocked her out, but that seemed so long ago, she barely took that into account.

"Yes, sir," she said as clearly as she could, but unable to look him in the eye. She chose to focus on his chin.

His mouth thinned, and he stepped back again, gesturing for her to make her way to the bathroom.

She sluggishly got up, finding that she felt weak and slightly dizzy. Snape must have noticed, for he stepped forward and took hold of her elbow, gently supporting her.

"Thank you," she mumbled and tried not to lean into him.

He filled the tub with a wave of his wand and then let go of her. She stared blankly at the water for a moment before an impatient noise from Snape reminded her that she was supposed to be in the water. She slowly started taking off her clothes, keeping her back to Snape for as long as possible.

She lifted her leg to get into the tub, and the world started to tilt. The room was spinning around her, and she couldn't tell which way was up.

Suddenly, a hand gripped her arm firmly, stabilizing her until she regained her balance. She clenched her teeth together at the feeling of his hand on her, but couldn't help being grateful. She nodded her head in thanks, still refusing to look at him.

He guided her into the tub of warm water, and she sighed in appreciation as she sat down. He let go of her arm then, and backed away.

Her first thought was to lie back and relax into the warmth and had started to do so when she remembered that Snape was watching her. That realization woke her up. She sat up, trying to twist away from him and cover herself at the same time, even though she knew it was pointless. She looked around for the soap and found it was on a shelf just out of reach.

Snape reached around her and handed her the soap. She took it, still refusing to look at him.

She was able to wash most of her front before she started fumbling the soap. The third time the soap slipped from her hands and plunked into the water by her feet, she heard Snape sigh in exasperation. She cringed, not knowing what he would do if she continued to let the soap slip through her fingers.

She was surprised when his bare arm reached into the water to retrieve the soap.

Looking at him fearfully, she was relieved to find that only his shirt was missing. His trousers were still in place, and it seemed he had no intention of losing them.

"Lean forward," he ordered gruffly. Tensing, she complied and was surprised when he gently started soaping her back, using his hand to spread the lather around her back. She found herself relaxing into the luxury of his touch, although she kept waiting for him to do something unpleasant.

"Are you hypoglycemic?" he asked as he started scooping water onto her back to rinse her off.

"Not that I've been diagnosed."

"Hmm," was all he said in reply until he finished rinsing her.

"Can you stand?"

She nodded and started getting up, but soon found the room spinning around her again. Once more, Snape came to the rescue, grabbing her arms till she was steady, then offering his hand for support as she got out of the tub.

Once she was standing on the tile, dripping everywhere, he opened a towel for her. After a moment of hesitation, she walked into it and then took the ends from him, wrapping it around herself snugly.

He stepped back and motioned for her to go to the bedroom. She looked at her clothes for a moment and swallowed, not sure what to expect. He motioned for her to sit on his bed, which she did while nervously keeping an eye on him. He went to the wardrobe and pulled out a ragged robe of his and handed it to her.

"This is yours until you've laundered your clothes sufficiently."

She took the robe, grateful once more for his generosity. She slipped it over her head and did up the clasps to the neck. The hem dragged about her feet, and the sleeves covered her hands past her fingertips, but it was clean.

"Thank you."

"See that you don't ruin it. And now for breakfast. It seems I need to find another consequence for your impertinence, as it's obvious you will be more of a hindrance without food."

He then swept out the door, assuming she would follow him, which she did.

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I think I will cook the next few meals for her. I will blindfold her once we are in the kitchen after she's seen the array of potions by the stove and force her to eat everything I prepare.

A mild poison here and there will just add spice to the mix. The fact that Wormtail will suffer as well is just something I'll have to learn to live with.

Part I, chapter 12

Chapter 12 of 28

The need to survive is ingrained within the human psyche, but where does self-preservation end and self-destruction begin? Hermione is captured by Death Eaters and is held hostage by Snape and Pettigrew, but she comes up with a plan to escape. Not a romance.

AN: Thanks go to Southern for her fabulous beta work, though she's not to blame for any mistakes herein.

She was setting the meal on the table when Snape let out a hiss and clutched his arm. Wormtail looked up at Snape, his expression worried at first, then confused.

Snape saw his confusion and scoffed. "Are you really so dim, Wormtail? Nagini is obviously hungry. We all know how difficult it is to distinguish you from all the other rats."

Wormtail flushed with either embarrassment or anger, though probably a mixture of the two, as Snape stood up and looked at the two of them disdainfully.

"I know it goes against your nature, Wormtail, but do try and refrain from doing anything stupid." He then waved his wand, clothing himself in his Death Eater costume, and disappeared with a very quiet 'pop.'

Hermione looked at Wormtail warily. He'd been avoiding her for most of the week, and she didn't know if that was because Snape had kept her by his side most of the time or because Snape had been getting extremely nasty toward Wormtail over the past week, even going so far as to hex him if he coughed too frequently. She knew that *she* was doing everything she could to avoid upsetting Snape.

Wormtail didn't look at her, though. He kept his eyes focused on the food he was eating. He looked to be in a sulky mood, and she wasn't sure how to use this opportunity to her advantage. It wasn't until he finished his plate that she saw an opening.

"Would you like some more?" she asked, forcing herself to sound tremulous.

He did look up at that, surprised and possibly pleased. "Yes. I'd like that."

She offered him a shy, nervous smile as she refilled his plate. She opened her mouth to say something, but then decided it would be better to wait for him to make the next move.

As it turned out, that in itself was the perfect move.

"What were you going to say?" he asked.

She cast her eyes down in what she hoped was a demure fashion. "I just wanted to say thank you, sir. I really appreciate your getting Snape to lend me his books."

It was a gamble, as she was fairly certain he hadn't actually asked Snape for that favor, but this gave him an opening. She was hoping he would stick to his slimy self and take the credit.

He did seem to debate it for an instant before his eyes took on a shrewd look. "You're welcome, Hermione."

She smiled at him again, and this time it was genuine, though she struggled to rein it in. She ducked her head and looked longingly at the food on Snape's plate knowing she wouldn't be able to eat until after Snape returned.

Wormtail picked up on that and decided it was in his interest to act chivalrously. "Here. I doubt I'll be able to finish all this," he said as he put a good portion of his second serving onto her plate. She thanked him heartily, and they ate in silence, though she felt him looking at her throughout most of the meal.

When he finished, he pushed his chair back a little and gave a little sigh of satisfaction.

"It's good to have you cooking for us again," he said, rubbing his belly contentedly. "Not only does it taste better, but with you cooking, I don't have to worry about him slipping something into the food."

He couldn't have given her a better opening if they'd rehearsed beforehand.

"Oh, Snape's just horrid! I can almost understand him treating me the way he does – after all, I *am* his prisoner – but the way he treats you is abominable!"

Wormtail looked at her sharply, and for a moment she feared she had laid it on too thick. Subtle and slow were the keys here, and that hadn't been either. She hoped he would overlook it, but she'd have to be extra careful from here on out.

"How does he treat you?" Wormtail finally said, still giving her a hard, searching look.

She only barely managed to keep herself from smiling too happily, restraining it to something that might look like a brave smile.

"Oh, you know... He... he's just his normal, cruel self. I think he actually enjoys the power plays he makes to lord it over me, like those potions by the stove while he was cooking? Those were for my punishment. He just... he uses the normal head games to control me, to make sure I remain compliant."

And I hate that I do comply she added mentally. The bitterness must have shown on her face, however, as Wormtail reached out and patted her hand with a wry smile.

"That's how he does things. He didn't have the weight to throw around bodily as a kid, so he mastered the fine art of fucking with your head." He sounded as bitter as she felt. He absently patted her hand again.

They sat there silently for a few minutes. Hermione didn't quite know where to go from there without being too obvious. Finally, she decided that maybe some basic hosting was in order.

"Would you like some tea, sir?"

He withdrew his hand rapidly and looked up, obviously startled. He looked around the room for a moment until he realized that she had been talking to him.

"Er, yes, please. That would be nice."

She smiled at him again and got up to make the tea, glad to get away from his sweaty hand. Once again she was having doubts that she could go through with her plan. If his touching her *hand* grossed her out...

"Hermione," Peter called out from the table. She turned to find him watching her with that shrewd look on his face again.

"Yes, sir?"

He flinched. "Please don't call me 'sir.' It makes me think of either my father or... other authority figures."

Hermione smirked to herself. "Then what should I call you?"

"Most people just call me Wormtail," he replied in a sulky tone.

She carefully avoided his eye. After a few moments, she said in as timid a voice as she could fake realistically, "Would you mind terribly if I called you Peter?"

If she hadn't needed him for her plans to work, she would have given up right then thanks to the scheming, self-satisfied smirk that crossed his face.

"Peter would be fine," he said, trying for charming and falling well short. His tone reminded her of that night in the Shrieking Shack – oily and smarmy, only without the desperation. She didn't grimace in disgust, though it was a close thing. Instead, she smiled.

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I wish I didn't have to leave Wormtail unsupervised in my house. I hate the thought of that dirty little animal crawling over my belongings.

Part I, chapter 13

Chapter 13 of 28

The need to survive is ingrained within the human psyche, but where does self-preservation end and self-destruction begin? Hermione is captured by Death Eaters and is held hostage by Snape and Pettigrew, but she comes up with a plan to escape. Not a romance.

"Well, well, well," Snape drawled lazily, "doesn't this look cozy."

Wormtail immediately shut his mouth and backed away from Hermione, looking at Snape warily, though definitely with a put-out air.

Hermione, however, was glad Snape had interrupted them. Wormtail – *Peter*, rather – was telling her about his pivotal role in bringing Voldemort back, whether to impress her or scare her, she wasn't sure, although he was failing miserably in either case. He had been inching closer and closer to her, and although he hadn't actually made a move yet, things were moving far faster than she wanted.

She needed to play on his sympathies and get into his heart, not just his pants. She suppressed another shudder at the thought and looked to Snape.

He was looking at Wormtail with undisguised loathing.

"I thought I told you not to do anything stupid, Wormtail," he sneered, leaning against the kitchen wall.

Wormtail looked confused and angry. "I haven't!"

"Oh, and the Dark Lord's secrets are just the stuff of polite conversation?"

"He didn't tell me anything I didn't already know," Hermione said and immediately regretted it when she was blown off her chair with an unfamiliar hex. She landed hard on the floor with the wind knocked out of her and her ears ringing. She could see Wormtail was standing now and was saying something to Snape, probably yelling, judging by the color of his face. She wondered if he was scolding Snape.

That thought amused her, so she chuckled – and immediately regretted it. Her chest objected strenuously to the contractions of her diaphragm, and she rolled over onto her side, clutching her ribs.

As she struggled to regain composure, she saw Snape curse Wormtail with a Body-Bind Hex and then he came to loom over her. He was obviously yelling something at her, but her ears were still ringing so badly that she couldn't make out even a word.

The effort of trying to keep her eyes on Snape, combined with trying to control the pain and breathe at the same time, proved to be too much, and the world faded away.

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Stupid girl. Or possibly very clever girl. Clever for figuring out a way to keep his hands off of her, but stupid for even thinking of defending him. She should know her place by now.

Oh, fuck.

That was what Father always said.

AN: *So ends Part I.*

*A huge thank you to those of you who have stuck with me so far, and for letting me know what you think. Your reviews mean more than you know, especially for this bugger of a story. *hugs**

Also, props to Southern for betaing this monster. I appreciate all the help, doll!

Part II, chapter 1

Chapter 14 of 28

The need to survive is ingrained within the human psyche, but where does self-preservation end and self-destruction begin? Hermione is captured by Death Eaters and is held hostage by Snape and Pettigrew, but she comes up with a plan to escape. Not a romance.

AN: Here's a nice (?) long chapter for you, and it is here so quickly thanks solely to the efforts of Southern the magnificent.

That's it. Snape had better watch out because I swear, one of these days, he's going to go to bed without his room warded against me, and he won't wake up until it's too late. I don't know how, but I'll get him.

I wonder why she's such a sore spot for him. If I didn't know better, I would say he was jealous, but he treats her worse than me.

But he *is* sensitive about her...

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Hermione woke to a low rumbling and winced. Looking around her, she found she was in her cot, but had no memory of getting there. She did remember Snape hexing her. It was the first time he had actually done more than threaten her, and she wasn't certain why. She supposed it was her defense of Wormtail, but she didn't quite get the reasoning behind that. Was it that she was just supposed to stay quiet, or was it because she'd defended *Wormtail* that made Snape so angry?

She sat up, wincing some more as her chest and back protested. Unfortunately, her movement also signaled her need to use the bathroom. Looking around for Snape, she found the source of the rumbling. Snape snored. She wondered why she hadn't heard it before until she realized that he probably did slip a mild sleeping potion into her evening water every night.

She wondered why he hadn't done so that night.

Slowly, carefully, she rolled out of bed, biting her lip to keep herself from crying out from the pain. She started to head toward the bathroom on the other side of the room, but the sight of Snape lying there, five feet from the toilet, made her take a risk.

She didn't know how deep a sleeper he was, but she didn't want to wake him. She didn't want to suffer from his rage if he discovered her disobedience, even if it was an urgent matter. So, she crept slowly to the door out. She expected it to be warded but was surprised to find that it was merely locked the Muggle way. She wondered if there were wards she couldn't immediately feel, but was too impatient. Her bladder was not pleased.

Opening the door slowly, she took her time slipping from the room, making sure to leave the door open just a crack so she could get back in.

She then found herself in a dark hall that she'd never had the chance to explore. She decided that exploring would have to wait a little longer and headed down to the ground floor and the water closet off the kitchen.

She was in such desperate need of the toilet, she didn't notice until she was on her way back that Wormtail was still in the kitchen. He was lying on the floor in a Full-Body Bind, right where Snape had left him. As she looked at him, his eyes moved to meet hers.

She gasped and jumped back in surprise, her hands covering her mouth. Shaking herself for her silliness, she quickly reoriented herself and looked for Wormtail's wand. She found it in his clenched fist.

It took awhile, but after much coaxing, she finally freed it from his grasp. It was a heady moment, holding a wand again, knowing she could curse Wormtail or Snape, and they wouldn't be able to do anything about it. It was a tempting thought. Unfortunately, it would leave her trapped. She needed the password to leave, and she really did not want Voldemort dropping by to find out why his loyal servants hadn't reported for work.

She gritted her teeth and cast a Finite Incantatem on Wormtail, releasing him from the body bind. He groaned and stiffly got to his feet, stretching his muscles. He seemed not to care that she was still holding his wand until he held out his hand.

Hesitating for only a moment, Hermione gritted her teeth again and handed it over. It was necessary for the plan.

"Thank you," he murmured, still rubbing his joints. "It's bloody uncomfortable being a stiff for so long."

"You're welcome," she whispered in return, hoping she'd made the right decision.

He looked at her for the first time, his eyes narrowing slightly. "And what are you doing up? Trying to sneak out?"

"Of course not," Hermione snapped, her body aches making her irritable. "I know better than that. I just had to use the toilet and didn't want to wake up Snape."

He narrowed his eyes even more and took a threatening step toward her. "Don't get snotty with me, girl!"

She closed her eyes, praying for patience. "I'm sorry, Peter. It's just... that hex... I'm in a lot of pain right now."

She jumped when she felt his hand on her shoulder.

"I forgot about that. Would you like a massage to make it feel better?"

She was glad she was facing the floor because she couldn't hold back her grimace at his sleazy tone. Taking a deep breath, she composed her face into something more grateful and looked up at him.

"That would be wonderful."

That look was back in his eyes, making her uncomfortable, but, at the same time, steadying her nerves. This was her way out. She could do this. She had to.

"Sit down, then," he said, his fingers twitching as if he couldn't wait to touch her.

Trusting that this couldn't be any worse than what Dolohov and company had done to her, she straddled the kitchen chair and leaned her head forward onto her crossed arms. She tensed as she waited for his touch and flinched when she felt his cold hands on her shoulders. The left one was trembling as if he were over-excited, but it was the right one that made her shudder. She could feel the dark magic of the silver hand trying to creep into her skin.

She reacted instinctively and tried to get up and away, but Wormtail held her in place.

"I'll make you feel much, much better," he tried to purr, but it came out more like gravel. That did not make her want to relax. However, she needed to cover her reaction; she needed him to think she trusted him.

"Sorry, Peter, it's just that your hands are really cold."

At that he did remove his hands from her, and she shuddered in relief. She'd had no idea that his hand would *feel* evil. She now wasn't convinced her plan was a good idea. If she felt like she would be infected with dark magic by simple contact with that hand, what would living with it do to a person? Did he have a heart for her to seduce? Or a soul to persuade?

His hands returned to their places, and she was glad she was already as tense as she could get. At least his hands weren't so cold; he'd cast a warming spell, which made his silver hand almost sufferable.

As he started to roughly knead her shoulders, she realized she was going to be very sore in the morning. He had no clue what to do. She was glad he couldn't see her face; there was no way to hide her grimaces.

Finally, she couldn't take it any longer. The metal hand was chilling her to the bone, and she felt dirty everywhere it had touched.

"Thank you, Peter," she said, squirming out of her place on the chair and standing to face him. He looked upset, both angry and sulky.

"What, you don't like my touch?" he asked, advancing slightly. She was amazed at how intimidating he could be, considering he was nearly half a head shorter than she was.

"It's not *your* touch that I don't like," she lied, then decided to risk a half truth. "It's that hand." She let her hand tremble as she pointed to his clenched right fist. "It... it just feels *wrong*."

He lifted the hand up to examine it, obviously getting angry.

"The Master gave this to me," he stated, as if that made everything better. She couldn't think of anything to say to that, so she just looked away.

He took her chin in his false hand and made her look at him. His grip was hard, and she cried out in pain. He immediately removed his hand but only to put it up to her face, forcing her to look at it.

"It is not *wrong*. It's beautiful!" he spat.

She touched her jaw tenderly and wondered if he'd broken it. When she opened her mouth to speak, she knew he had, for pain exploded in her face.

"Look at it!" he ordered, his voice squeaky with emotion. "Look at it and say it isn't beautiful!"

She brought her other hand up to cradle her jaw and looked at him through teary eyes. She then slumped down into the chair beside her, knowing what the stars in her vision meant.

At her collapse, he seemed to come out of his defensive trance and looked at her with beady eyes.

"What's wrong now?" he asked, obviously still angry with her. She closed her eyes and pointed to her jaw. She didn't open her eyes again until she felt the tip of his wand run along her chin. When she looked, she found Wormtail looking at her worriedly and squirming as if he had an itch.

"I I didn't mean to hurt you, Hermione. I... Does it feel better now?"

She touched her jaw tentatively at first, then a little more firmly once there proved to be no pain. Still thoroughly upset, she forced herself to smile at him, although it was wobbly.

He gave her a relieved smile and then looked back at his hand. She could almost see the emotions of fear, doubt and awareness running through his head, and she shuddered that there hadn't been any remorse.

Suddenly, she felt very afraid.

He glanced up at her and, seeing her expression, hastily hid his hand behind his back, though he looked more pleased than ashamed by her reaction.

"Don't worry, Hermione," he said, his voice losing its squeak as it became very oily again. "I won't hurt you. You've been nice to me. I don't have any reason to hurt you." The emphasis on the last word did not take anything away from the implicit threat of that statement, though, and Hermione struggled to hide her growing unease.

"I... I trust you, Peter," she lied, cursing her voice for breaking.

He smiled, and his beady eyes roamed over her form, as if exploring the possibilities with new eyes. Hermione tried not to react as if she'd noticed.

"Is your back feeling better?" he asked.

She nodded with a faint smile that obviously wasn't convincing.

"Now, Hermione, don't lie. I won't touch you with this hand if you don't want me to." She bit her lip reflexively, debating with herself. Her body and instinct was telling her to run for safety, even if that safety was Snape's room and possible wrath. Her mind was telling her she needed to prove her supposed trust.

"Alright," she muttered, ignoring her roiling stomach and made to straddle the chair again, but he intercepted her.

"I have a better idea," he said, his beady eyes glittering as he took her hand and pulled her out of the kitchen.

"What? Where are we going?" she whispered.

Wormtail smiled at her. "Someplace where we can be more comfortable."

She was glad he turned around again as he pulled her forward because she could feel the blood drain from her face. As they made their way up the stairs, she wondered if she could escape to Snape's room or call for help, but she knew Snape wouldn't help. He'd probably think that this was her just reward for sneaking out of his sight in the first place.

She cursed herself again and again for coming up with the stupid plan, realizing, a bit belatedly, what she'd brought onto herself. Once more, she felt very, very stupid.

She had to turn it around. He hadn't attacked her yet, so maybe she could do something to forestall it or avert it altogether. Showing her fear would only make things worse, she knew that much, so she deliberately started rhythmic breathing. She could fix this.

She knew she wasn't stupid, not really. She knew she could solve just about any problem that was set before her; she'd proven that time and again. If she had a wand, she wouldn't be in this position at all, seeing as she'd have hexed Wormtail's balls off at the first sleazy look he gave her.

But she didn't have a wand, as was made even more obvious when Wormtail shut the door behind them and cast a Silencing Spell.

"Don't want to wake Snape, do we?" he said in what was supposed to be a reassuring tone, though there was a hint of fear buried in there.

That's when she realized her strength. She was the stronger person. She didn't need more powerful people around for their protection. She was surrounded by strong

people, but she was the one who took care of them! She wasn't weak-willed the way Wormtail was, always sucking up and pandering to those who might help him. She just needed to prove to him that she was the stronger of them without getting herself killed.

She needed to convince him that she could help him more than Snape could. She had to convince him that she could *protect* him.

She smiled at the irony.

"Sorry about the mess," Wormtail said, suddenly nervous. She was standing straighter, and she knew that he could sense her inner power. Her smile broadened.

"Don't worry about it," she said, ignoring the big bug scuttling across the floor beside Wormtail. "You know, it really is kind of you to help me like this," she said.

Wormtail flushed, looking slightly confused. He was probably wondering where the scared girl from the kitchen was. She smiled reassuringly.

"And after moving around a little, I really feel a lot better. Do you?"

"W What?" he stammered, thoroughly confused.

"Do you feel better?" She stayed where she was, thinking that walking toward him at this point would be counterproductive.

"Um... I suppose." His eyes were shifting all around the room, looking for some possible reason for her newfound confidence.

"You aren't still stiff?" she asked, but then suddenly saw the double entendre. She didn't really feel like going there as of yet, so she added in as innocent a tone as possible, "You were lying on that cold floor for a long time after all."

Comprehension dawned, as well as a flicker of resentment.

"Oh... yes, that. It's... I'm still a little sore."

She adopted her normal bossy stance and said, "Well then, it's only fair that I return the favor."

He looked at her wide-eyed and a little slack-jawed. "Come again?"

She smiled sweetly. "Lie down on your stomach, and I'll give you a back massage."

He stared at her warily for a moment, as if trying to suss out any threat, but, finding none, slowly did as she'd requested, though he tried to keep his eyes on her the entire time.

She smiled reassuringly once more and walked up to the bed. When her face was no longer visible to him, she bit her lip, allowing herself that one sign of distress as she climbed up onto the bed and straddled him.

He tensed visibly and flinched when she gently placed her hands on his back. She obviously wasn't the only one with trust issues.

"Ssh. Relax and I'll make you feel better," she said, mirroring his words from earlier. Not surprisingly, that did not make him relax.

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What is she up to? She's been so nervous and looked downright terrified in the kitchen. Did Snape send her? It's not like him to let her out of his sight, and I know he's not that deep a sleeper... What is he up to?

But, oh, Merlin, her touch... If this is what a massage feels like...

Maybe I *can* use her against Snape. One way or another.

Part II, chapter 2

Chapter 15 of 28

The need to survive is ingrained within the human psyche, but where does self-preservation end and self-destruction begin? Hermione is captured by Death Eaters and is held hostage by Snape and Pettigrew, but she comes up with a plan to escape. Not a romance.

AN: *Thanks to Southern for making the time for me!*

"Granger."

Hermione sat up, immediately awake. Snape loomed over her as usual, but there was something different about his air. She didn't know if it was her new confidence or a change in him, but he seemed less threatening.

"Good morning, sir."

"That remains to be seen," Snape replied in his usual snide manner. "Do you need any healing potions?"

Hermione blinked. Did Snape just offer her comfort, or was that a threat? She hoped the two sentences weren't related, as she really did want a healing potion. She was even stiffer now than she had been when she'd crept back into the room after Wormtail had fallen asleep.

"I would appreciate a healing potion very much, sir."

He narrowed his eyes and scrutinized her for a moment before nodding and stepping back. He walked towards the bathroom, indicating with a finger that she should follow.

When she caught up, he was standing by the sink holding a small blue bottle out to her. "Take this," he ordered.

Still not certain that she trusted him, she decided it would be better to have him drug her than to suffer the consequences of doubting him yet again. With very little hesitation, she swallowed the dose and gave the bottle back to Snape, who nodded.

"Now bathe."

Hermione flushed with embarrassment, but nodded and started stripping. Ever since that first bath, he had ordered her to bathe every day. She hated that he did it, although she understood why he did so; it was a highly effective demoralizing technique. She hated even more that she was affected by it. She wished she could just strip bare, bathe and towel off without so much as a blush as he watched her.

At least since that first bath he hadn't touched her again.

Pursing her lips, she decided that she wouldn't blush. She wouldn't let him terrorize her. Yes, she was his prisoner, but she wouldn't give in so easily. She would not lose herself.

On that thought, she straightened her shoulders and took off her robes, keeping her head held high. She turned on the shower and stepped into the cool water right away. She didn't look at Snape. Besides not wanting to see him leering or glaring at her, she didn't want him to see her resolve. She didn't want to give him any excuse to beat it out of her.

She was so wrapped up in her thoughts that she didn't know Snape had moved until he touched her lightly on the shoulder. Startled, she whirled around so quickly that she slipped on the wet porcelain. She had a sense of déjà vu as she started falling, especially when Snape reached out and caught her by the arms, steadying her until she'd regained her footing.

She locked eyes with him and just stared for a moment as the now warm water continued to beat against her skin. He released her arms and backed away, scowling, and offered no explanation for his touch.

She continued to stare at him until he raised a sardonic eyebrow and made a point of sweeping his eyes over her body. She instinctively crossed her arms, which only made his lips quirk. Annoyed with herself that she had let him get any reaction out of her, she turned back to the task at hand and quickly finished washing herself.

She steeled herself when she turned off the water. This was the part she hated most. She had to turn and walk towards Snape to get her towel. She had to either avoid his gaze or look at him watching her. Neither was an appealing option, but today she chose to look at him.

The worst part about looking at him wasn't that he was ogling her. In fact, that might have made it better. It was the fact that he looked her over with complete indifference. She didn't want him to be lusty after her, but his indifference, and occasional sneers, made her feel far more inferior than any of Draco's taunts of 'Mudblood' had.

Today was no different, except that he seemed to be in a worse temper than usual. She made a mental note to do her best to remain on his good side, if there was such a thing.

"Get dressed," he barked. She headed to the bedroom wardrobe automatically, grabbing the ratty robe and slipping it over her head.

"Now come," he said and took off for the potions lab, just like every other morning.

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I can't believe I fell asleep! But her touch was so relaxing... Well, it won't happen again, not until I know what Snape is up to and why he's using Hermione as his weapon.

But, Merlin, that was the best night's sleep I've had in ages. Her hands are magical. I wouldn't mind finding out what those hands feel like in other places.

Part II, chapter 3

Chapter 16 of 28

The need to survive is ingrained within the human psyche, but where does self-preservation end and self-destruction begin? Hermione is captured by Death Eaters and is held hostage by Snape and Pettigrew, but she comes up with a plan to escape. Not a romance.

AN: *This went through queue at OWL far faster than I thought it would, so here's the next part for your reading... erm, pleasure? Thanks to Southern.*

"Get up, Granger," Snape barked, as Hermione finished off the last of her sandwich.

She got up, put her plate in the sink and moved toward the laundry tub, just like every other day.

"The laundry can wait. Now come," he said, leaving the room with an imperious swish. Hermione followed, throwing a questioning glance to Wormtail as she left. He seemed tense and was watching her intently.

She followed Snape through the living room and up the stairs to the bedroom, growing increasingly worried about what he had in mind. The fact that they were going to his bedroom made her more than leery; he did not go upstairs until bedtime.

She followed him into the room and was startled when he magicked the door shut behind her. He stood by the bed with his arms crossed, glaring at her.

"Come here."

She could refuse. She could stand her ground, but she knew that if she did, he would hex her and then get her to do whatever it was he wanted her to do in the first place afterwards. She went to him, stopping when she reached her personal boundary.

"Closer."

Swallowing, she took two more steps toward him. She was only a few inches away from him, and she could feel the heat of his body. She kept her head held high, but refused to look up at him until he commanded her to.

“Strip.”

Her eyes went wide, and despite her resolve, she glanced up at him. He was staring down at her with a smug look of satisfaction. It was the same look he'd worn when she'd consumed his drugged healing potion.

Mouth dry, she quickly lowered her head again to hide her fear. She closed her eyes and tried to start her rhythmic breathing, but his impatient, “Any day now,” jolted her out of her meditation. Her fingers responded to his voice, though, and started undoing the buttons on the robe.

When it came time to take the robe off, she debated how to go about it. Should she lift it over her head or try to squeeze out of it the other way? It was oversized, so she probably could get it off that way without damaging it, and then she wouldn't put herself into such a vulnerable position.

So, she struggled out of the robe, carefully bringing one arm through the neck, then the other, while trying to avoid touching Snape. She wasn't completely successful in that endeavor, but she managed to keep the contact to a minimum. Then, with her shoulders through the neck hole, the robe slid down until it loosely caught on her hips. She looked up at Snape, who pointedly looked at her hips, then raised an eyebrow at her.

Closing her eyes, she pushed the fabric down, and it fell off of her, gathering in a puddle around her feet.

Fear made her breathe quickly, but determination made her raise her chin, looking at Snape through defiant eyes. He just smirked, then stepped back to look at her body. With slow and deliberate moves, he circled around her, but didn't touch her. She tried not to look at him, but could feel his cold sneer anyway.

He did another half circle, then stopped behind her. She felt him step up behind her, standing so close that his robes were brushing against her shoulders and buttocks. He leaned toward her and, with a very light touch, moved her hair away from her ear.

“Stay exactly where you are,” he whispered, then walked off to the bathroom. He came back after only a couple moments carrying a dark cup full of something, which he then handed to her.

“Drink that.”

The color of the cup masked the color of the potion, so she had no idea what he was giving her, but in her gut she knew it was a contraceptive potion.

Swallowing back her tears, she lifted the cup to her mouth and drank – and found it to be another slow acting healing potion.

A host of possibilities flew through her mind. *Was he going to rape her or was he going to beat and torture her and then let the potion do its work? Was there another potion hidden in there? Would she wake up the next morning with no clue as to what he had or hadn't done? She nearly sobbed, upset as much by not knowing what to prepare herself for than by what he could be intending.*

He circled once more, then stood in front of her and crossed his arms, looking displeased.

“Well? Get dressed and get to work,” he barked. She looked up at him, astonished. He looked at her as if she were filthy. “What are you waiting for?”

She quickly bent down to gather her robes, as much to hide her trembling lips and body as much as to stave off his impatience. Relief was coursing through her, but so was rejection and humiliation. She was grateful that he hadn't done anything to her, but she couldn't help feeling that he didn't do anything because she wasn't good enough.

She squeezed her eyes shut to try and stop her tears and reminded herself that it was a good thing if he didn't find her attractive. She reminded herself that this was his form of torture. She reminded herself that his intent was to humiliate her, and to do that he would play on her fears and insecurities. She reminded herself that he'd had six years to observe her fears and insecurities.

She was still trembling and on the verge of tears, though, when she stood up and got dressed under his continued scrutiny. She found she couldn't look at him, no matter what she told herself.

“Now come,” he said and led her downstairs to the washtub.

Wormtail was still in the kitchen when they returned. She refused to face him, not wanting to lose the illusion of confidence she'd evoked the night before, but she could feel his gaze on her.

“The Dark Lord is calling me again,” Snape said to Wormtail in a matter of fact voice. “This time, use whatever brains you have *before* you talk to the prisoner.”

Hermione listened, and her knees shook. Had he stopped only because Voldemort had summoned him? Had he really intended to violate her? She listened for the tiny pop that signaled his departure, then leaned her head against the wall above the washtub.

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She looks like she's been crying. What did Snape do to her? Maybe she didn't do what Snape sent her to do last night.... Why didn't she? Could it be that she actually likes me? Is she actually grateful?

Well, I'll have to make sure not to let Snape turn her against me. I'll get him yet.

Part II, chapter 4

Chapter 17 of 28

The need to survive is ingrained within the human psyche, but where does self-preservation end and self-destruction begin? Hermione is captured by Death Eaters and is held hostage by Snape and Pettigrew, but she comes up with a plan to escape. Not a romance.

AN: Thanks as always to Southern!

"Hermione?"

She hastily stood up and wiped her eyes before turning around to smile shakily at Wormtail.

"Peter?" she tried to joke, but his look of genuine concern made her think of the boys, and her facade shattered into tears.

She slumped against the washtub and slowly sank to the floor, only to be stopped by his arms. She instinctively turned to his shoulder, clutching at his robes as she tucked her chin down and sobbed. She cried until there weren't any tears left and took shuddering breaths as Peter rocked her back and forth soothingly.

Hermione marveled that Peter was being so caring and compassionate. He hadn't ever seemed to be the sort to care about anyone other than himself, but his holding her while she vented all her rage and frustration and humiliation seemed quite decent.

And then she realized his hand was starting to roam.

Not even remotely ready to go there yet, she pulled away as far as his embrace would allow and gave him a smile of gratitude.

"Thank you, Peter."

He smiled back at her, although his small eyes were somehow beadier than usual. When he pulled her toward him, she knew she'd underestimated his lust.

She didn't try to resist, but she did evade. She let herself be pulled in, but when his face was near hers, she shifted to the side and hugged him.

"You've been so kind to me, Peter," she said, hoping that praise might deter him for a little while.

She'd misjudged, however. He pulled back and leaned in for a kiss, moving fast enough that she couldn't avoid him again. His wet mouth found hers, and he proceeded to move his lips against hers in a sloppy imitation of a kiss.

She waited until she had schooled her face into something other than disgust before pulling away slowly.

"Peter, I... This... I—" She had no problem sounding flustered, but before she could find the right words, he put his pudgy finger to her lips and shushed her.

"I'll show you how good it can be."

She smiled at him, but shook her head. "I'm not ready for this... yet."

"You're just scared. I won't hurt you. I want to make you feel good."

Her stomach clenched in fear and disgust, but he seemed to mistake her expression for insecure reluctance as he drew her back toward him for another wet kiss before lowering her to the floor.

"Don't be afraid, Hermione," he said, stroking her arm with one finger and giving her what was meant to be a reassuring smile, though it just looked lecherous to her. He leaned forward to kiss her again, shifting his weight to allow his real hand to fondle her breasts.

Hermione quickly weighed her options. It was possible that fucking him now would sate him, and she wouldn't be able to move forward with her plan. The thought of allowing him to touch her like this for no purpose was almost enough to make her gag. However, there was the possibility that he did feel the beginnings of fondness for her and rebuffing him now would kill any chance she had. It was also very possible that rebuffing him now would lead to him taking her forcibly.

Her options weighed, she forced herself to relax into his kiss. It was all the encouragement he needed. His hand worked its way down her side until he'd reached her hip, and then he gripped her robe. He continued to kiss her distractedly, but he focused most of his attention on pulling her robes up.

After a minute of fumbling, he finally disengaged his mouth from hers and used both his hands to pull her robe up over her hips. He didn't seem disconcerted in the least to find her knickerless as his real hand went to play clumsily with her crotch while raising his own robes up with his other hand.

She held her breath as he positioned himself between her legs and then lowered his weight onto her, coming in for another kiss. He was too short, though, to reach her mouth from where he was, so he grabbed her hips with both hands and shoved himself in and up her body. She bit her cheek to keep herself from crying out.

The only good thing about the coupling, in Hermione's opinion, was that it was over very quickly. As soon as he was inside her, he let out a whimper and started thrusting rapidly. It was only seconds before he tensed up and let out a strangled yell, and then collapsed onto her.

She struggled for breath until he raised himself up onto his elbows and looked at her almost fondly. He kissed her forcefully and enthusiastically before raising himself off of her completely, muttering, "That's a good girl," as he looked her over and tucked himself back in.

The most difficult thing Hermione ever had to do was to force herself to smile up at him in false gratitude.

//////////\\\\\\\\\\\

Maybe I shouldn't have gone so quickly; I don't want to remind her of Snape. Still, she didn't seem to mind.

And, oh! She feels even better than I thought she would! Next time, I'll do things more proper like. I want to feel her bare beneath me.

Part II, chapter 5

Chapter 18 of 28

The need to survive is ingrained within the human psyche, but where does self-preservation end and self-destruction begin? Hermione is captured by Death Eaters and is held hostage by Snape and Pettigrew, but she comes up with a plan to escape. Not a romance.

AN: *Southern rocks, ya'll!*

"Granger, it's bedtime."

Hermione looked over at Snape warily before risking a quick glance at the clock on the mantle. It was an hour before he usually went to bed. Her concern must have shown on her face, as he added, "Now come!" rather forcefully.

Meekly, she got up and followed him to the stairs, resolutely not looking over at Wormtail. She suspected he would behave in some suspicious manner, so she didn't want to compound it with her own. Snape was volatile enough without provocation.

"Awfully early for bed, isn't it, Severus?" Wormtail called out just before Snape took the first step up.

Snape paused and looked over at Wormtail, his expression completely shuttered. "Perhaps," was all he said before motioning for Hermione to precede him up the stairs. Silently, she complied, still not risking a glance at Wormtail.

She entered the bedroom and heard Snape quietly shut the door. She turned to find him staring at her thoughtfully. After a moment, he shifted into his normal domineering pose.

"Strip."

Swallowing the lump of fear that was rising, she did as he ordered. When the robe had fallen to the floor, she straightened her shoulders and looked at him resolutely. She was expecting the same expressionless mask he always wore when he looked at her nude form, but was surprised to find his mouth tightening in anger. It was gone quickly, but it had been there. She wondered what he was angry about.

She had thoroughly washed herself before Snape had come back, so there wasn't any hint of her copulation with Wormtail. She'd even wiped down the inside of the robe, just in case Snape's sense of smell corresponded with his nose size.

He hadn't made any indication that he knew what they'd done, but that was the only thing she could think of that might make him angry.

She was startled out of her thoughts when Snape took three large strides, coming up just short of touching her. He towered over her for a moment, peering intently into her eyes. She'd been no match for Voldemort, but she thought her Occlumency was good enough to keep Snape out, so she looked back nervously.

His mouth tightened just slightly as he glared at her, but then he stepped back and gazed at her indifferently.

"Where did you get the new bruises on your shoulders and left hip?"

Hermione frowned and looked down at her hip. Sure enough, there were six nasty bruises developing right where Wormtail had grabbed her with his silver hand. She supposed her shoulder bruises were from the massage, or the floor.

She wasn't sure what to do. Snape had viciously hexed her the last time she'd defended Wormtail, but it wasn't obviously a handprint at this point. Still, it would probably develop into a handprint by the next morning if he didn't offer her some bruise-healing paste or another dose of healing potion.

She looked down and chewed her lip. "Wormtail grabbed me, sir."

"He's been molesting you?"

She continued to nibble her lip and look at her bare toes, still not sure how to best answer him. Obviously not happy with her demeanor, he grabbed her chin and jerked her face up to look at him. "Answer me." His voice was as hard as his grip.

"No, sir."

He raised his eyebrow in obvious skepticism. "Really? It's been blatantly obvious since he got you placed here that he's been lusting after you," he gave her body another dismissive glance, "for whatever reason. He's an opportunistic little rat. I would have thought he would take every opportunity given to him to avail himself of you."

She bit her lip nervously and shook her head in denial.

"I know you're lying, Granger. Tell me now what the rat is up to, and I won't practice my new hexes on you tonight."

What *Wormtail* was up to? She did some very quick thinking.

"He thinks that you are... that you and I are... He believes you feel possessive about me, sir. I think he's trying to ingratiate himself to me in hopes that it will annoy you, although I don't follow his reasoning, and his logic is based upon a premise that is questionable at best--"

He held up a hand to cut her off. She was surprised to see a speculative look on his face instead of anger. He stared at her for a long moment.

"What have you told him?"

"I... not much of anything, sir."

His lips thinned at that. "*What* have you told him?"

"I..." She didn't know what he wanted. He sighed in impatience. "I haven't really had much of a chance to talk to him, sir. If there's conversation, he's the one contributing the most. I really haven't said much at all."

Snape raised his eyebrow again, but it was more an expression of amusement than disbelief. He then crossed his arms and raised a finger to tap on his lips. After a moment, he lowered his arms and took one step back from her.

"Granger, who do you think wields the power in this house?"

"Er, you do, sir," she answered tentatively, not sure where he was going.

"Correct. Have you also determined that your health or lack thereof is at my discretion?"

She nodded her head, uttering a very faint, "Yes, sir."

"Good." He paused, then smirked. "I trust you to keep that in mind when you interact with Wormtail."

She furrowed her brow unsure of what he meant, but said, "Yes, sir."

"Now use the toilet and get to bed."

As she relieved herself, she smiled. Not only had he not hexed or molested her, but for the first time since she'd been taken hostage, he wasn't standing there watching her pee. Relief and gratitude overwhelmed her, and she thought that maybe Snape wasn't so bad after all.

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What is Snape doing to her? Does he suspect? He didn't seem suspicious at all, but what if he does suspect? Is he making her talk?

It doesn't matter if he finds out, though. Yes, he may be upset, but the point of her being held hostage is to torture Harry, and I doubt Harry would like it if he knew I was fucking her.

Yes, the Master will be on my side. I don't need to worry.

But what is he *doing* to her?

Part II, chapter 6

Chapter 19 of 28

The need to survive is ingrained within the human psyche, but where does self-preservation end and self-destruction begin? Hermione is captured by Death Eaters and is held hostage by Snape and Pettigrew, but she comes up with a plan to escape. Not a romance.

AN: *Thank you, Southern!*

"Granger, wake up!"

She sat up, immediately awake and aware of the man standing above her. Something was different about him, and it took her a moment to realize that he wasn't wearing a shirt, although one was in his hand. It took her another moment to realize that the light in the room was from the moon. That explained why everything seemed distorted and off.

It took her yet another moment to realize that she'd had another of those disturbing dreams featuring Snape, featuring him in a way she was not at all comfortable with.

"Get up, Granger. The Dark Lord is waiting."

Hermione froze in the middle of her attempt to get off the bed.

He couldn't be taking her to Voldemort. Voldemort would find out about the plan and then...

"Get up **now!**" Snape barked, prompting her back into action. She quickly got up and put on her shoes – there was nothing else for her to put on – and watched Snape.

He looked tense. His mouth was pinched, and that line between his eyebrows was deeper than she remembered, even accounting for the eerie shadows. She wondered what this was about.

She saw him wince before he stalked over to her, grabbed her arm in a merciless grip and practically dragged her to the door. He led her down the hallway to Wormtail's room and pounded on the door.

Wormtail was obviously not quick enough in answering because Snape took out his wand and blasted the door open. He shoved Hermione ahead of him so hard that she lost her balance as she tried to stagger to the bed and fell hard onto her knees.

By this time, Wormtail was alert to the invasion.

"What's going on, Severus?" he asked with a nervous twinge in his voice. Hermione could see him glancing at her every few seconds as she slowly picked herself off the floor.

"He's in a bad mood tonight." He winced again and snapped, "Don't let her out of your sight," before donning his Death Eater robes and disappearing.

Hermione heard Wormtail mutter, "Better you than me," as he stared at the empty hallway for a moment and absently scratched his arm. He then turned to her and smiled. She smiled back, genuinely relieved that Snape had not been planning to take her with him. However, it did remind her that she'd been their prisoner for almost a month, and she needed to move the plan forward. Fast.

Wormtail had been screwing her every opportunity he got, which seemed to be happening more and more often lately. Snape had been called away very frequently the last few days. It made her antsy, wondering what was so urgent.

It also, supposedly, gave her more time to enact her plan, but it didn't seem to be advancing. Although her contact with Wormtail had increased, it hadn't noticeably affected his regard for her. It seemed that she was just his own personal whore and bitching post as far as he was concerned. That was not what she wanted.

"So, how long do you think he'll be?" she asked, lacing her words with promise.

His smile turned into a smirk. "Oh, if it's a night-time summons, it's usually a few hours at the very least."

"Good," she said, as she slipped off her shoes and started unbuttoning the robe. "Because I've been thinking of you."

For a moment he looked surprised, but then his smirk was back in place.

"Have you now?" he asked, shedding his nightshirt as quickly as possible.

"Yes," Hermione whispered, getting onto the bed and crawling toward him. "You seem to be on my mind an awful lot lately." She hoped her attempt at a husky voice was

working. She thought it might be, judging by the sheen developing on Wormtail's brow.

"Funny, that. You've been on my mind as well."

Hermione just smiled and pushed him down onto his back. He looked up at her, surprise definitely outweighing every other emotion. She'd always been passive before. But passive wasn't getting her anywhere.

"Yes, that is funny, isn't it?" she asked and lowered herself onto him, making him gasp.

"Oh, God, Hermione. You feel so good!" he moaned, and she could tell he was on the verge of coming already. That would not do. She had to distract him.

"I've been wondering, Peter," she said while grabbing a few of his chest hairs and pulling just hard enough to distract him, "why you saved me."

She *had* been wondering that. Had it been lust, pure and simple? Was he just a sad, pathetic man who perverted after a girl young enough to be his daughter? Or was there more to it?

Wormtail was panting, trying to control himself, but she could feel the tremble of his hips.

"You were just..." he said, his voice breathy with excitement. "Just so pretty and innocent. I remembered you from... from before..." The shiver faded to nothing. It seemed a nerve had been struck there.

"And that was all?" she asked, experimentally moving her hips. He seemed to be lost in memories, though, and wasn't showing any signs of becoming overexcited. She started moving a little more earnestly, wondering if she might be able to use him for her pleasure this time. It was getting very frustrating as her dreams became raunchier, but his performance stayed woefully poor.

"Yes. Well... no, not really," he said. He looked up at her so earnestly that she stopped moving, realizing this might be a pivotal moment.

"You reminded me of my time at the Burrow, and not just because I remember you from there. You radiate kindness, Hermione. You remind me an awful lot of Molly. She took such good care of everyone. She loved them all so much, and she took care to make their small, pitiful home... *home*. I was a part of that home, even if I was a rat at the time, but I was included in it, and it reminded me of my... I... Well, you remind me of that."

A lot of snide comments about the appropriateness of screwing her if that was the case popped into her head, but she refrained from saying them. Instead, she leaned down and gave him a gentle kiss.

"Thank you," she said, smiling softly at him.

He looked at her intently for a few moments before wrapping his arms around her and kissing her back just as gently. When the kisses started becoming too invasive, she started moving again, giving her an excuse to break away.

She continued to move over him until he came, crying out her name for the first time. He then drew her into his arms, hugging her fiercely for a few asphyxiating moments, before letting her slide over to his side, but no further.

She nearly gagged on his scent, but remained where she was, knowing that she was back on the path out.

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God, she's amazing. She didn't laugh at me; she just... just *loved* me – I could feel it.

Oh, Merlin, what is she doing to me?

End Part II

Part III, chapter 1

Chapter 20 of 28

The need to survive is ingrained within the human psyche, but where does self-preservation end and self-destruction begin? Hermione is captured by Death Eaters and is held hostage by Snape and Pettigrew, but she comes up with a plan to escape. Not a romance.

AN: *Thank you, Southern!*

As she gradually woke up, she became aware that something was pressing down on her chest and her hips. It was much heavier than Crookshanks and not as furry. Trying to take a deep breath, she opened her eyes and was momentarily disoriented until she remembered the events of the night before.

Lifting her head, she found she was pinned down by Wormtail's arm and leg. Looking over to see if Wormtail could be prodded to roll over, she found her eye drawn to a tall, black column standing in the doorway.

Snape was leaning against the doorframe, watching her. His face was completely impassive, which made her flush with embarrassment. When he raised an eyebrow in response, she blushed even harder.

He raised his wand and sent a Stinging Hex at Wormtail, forcing him awake with a squeak.

"S-Severus! W-w-what brings you by?"

Snape smirked nastily. "I just came by to see if the girl was still here, but I see you managed to get up the wherewithal to keep her occupied." Hermione cringed. "I have a potion to make. Do you expect a summons this morning, or should I leave you to..." he paused and curled his lip up nastily, "*occupy* the girl?"

"I don't expect the Master will need me till this afternoon as planned, but if you need her—"

Snape cut him off with a raised hand and a sneer. "Wormtail, I have never even *wanted* the girl, let alone needed her."

And then he left. Hermione didn't know why she felt so completely embarrassed or humiliated, but angry tears were sliding down her face. She turned away from Wormtail and the door, curling up on herself. She knew what she was doing was dirty and wrong, and she hadn't expected Snape to respond so... indifferently. She had thought he would be upset.

She felt Wormtail place his hand on her shoulder. "Hey, what's the matter? At least now we know he doesn't care. We don't have to sneak around anymore."

She shook her head, trying not cry. "He thinks you're forcing me," she said thickly.

She didn't care that Snape was indifferent. She didn't.

The hand rubbed her shoulder soothingly. "It's better that way, Hermione," he said, and she turned to look at him in horror. He smiled at her expression.

"If he knew you were here by choice, then he would take it away from you. That's how he is."

Comprehension was her outward expression, but inside his words just twisted the knife.

Snape had been almost kind to her the last couple of weeks. Although he still watched her shower every morning, he let her relieve herself in quasi-private. He hadn't been too deliberately cruel to her and he'd even let her eat with them one night instead of feeding her their deliberately meager leftovers.

She thought he... what, had started to care for her? She nearly laughed at herself, even as despair threatened to choke her. She closed her eyes to hide her inner torment from Wormtail. She couldn't let him know how much Snape's words and actions affected her.

"Hey, don't cry. It'll be okay. Maybe he'll leave you alone now. Wouldn't that be good?"

She nodded her head, wondering why she was wanting Snape's attention anyway. Was she going mad, or had she turned into a masochist? Why else would she be developing such feelings for Snape?

She was so distracted by her thoughts that she barely noticed Wormtail trailing kisses over her shoulder until he reached her jaw and licked her. Caught unawares, she shuddered with revulsion, but fortunately, he had turned his attention to her earlobe and didn't notice her expression. He simply felt her shudder and mistook it for pleasure.

He shifted himself on top of her and looked down at her with a mix of lust and fondness.

"Let me make you feel better," he said and then put his attention elsewhere.

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So he *is* fucking her then. I imagine he has the Dark Lord's blessing in this matter as well. Potter could hardly be more annoyed if I was fucking the girl.

Part III, chapter 2

Chapter 21 of 28

The need to survive is ingrained within the human psyche, but where does self-preservation end and self-destruction begin? Hermione is captured by Death Eaters and is held hostage by Snape and Pettigrew, but she comes up with a plan to escape. Not a romance.

"Oh, God! Oh! Oh! Hermione!"

Peter slumped onto her, breathing hard. His slick flesh was already turning sticky, and she nudged him to roll over which he obligingly did. Unfortunately, he pulled her with him, as he'd been wont to do lately. She shifted her head from his arm onto his chest, knowing that her neck would get a major crick if she tried to keep her distance. Besides, he'd been getting a little more tender and attentive toward her since the cuddling began.

"Oh, Merlin, Hermione! Do you have any idea what you do to me?"

Hermione idly stroked his matted chest hair with a fingernail, entertaining and distracting herself by shaping the fur into cones, ridges and whatnot. "Besides the orgasms, you mean?"

He huffed a laugh. He was still breathing hard, but he shifted so that he could look at her and scratch his right arm at the same time.

"Yes, you silly girl, I mean besides the mind-blowing orgasms."

She couldn't help smiling at his fond expression. She was making progress. "No. What do I do to you?"

He grinned so broadly it threatened to split his face, and then he dove down to give her a heated kiss. She still wasn't fond of his kisses, but at least she had learned to respond to them.

"You make me feel human again," he said when he came up for air. The lines around his eyes softened, making him look more human as well. Hermione squirmed inwardly; there was an uncomfortable pressure in her chest.

He tenderly brushed her hair away from her face and bent down to give her another kiss, this one softer and almost chaste. "You make me feel as if I'm *Peter*, not Wormtail. You make me think that there's something to life after all."

Her chest clenched painfully.

This was it.

He loved her.

And she was going to sign his death warrant.

Suddenly feeling ill, she tried to cover it by pushing him over and replacing her head on his chest. He happily acquiesced, holding her to him tightly. She rested her hand on his chest but left his hair alone.

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She seems more withdrawn than usual today. There wasn't any unusual bruising, so Wormtail probably didn't beat her. Perhaps her menses are due? Or perhaps she's finally losing hope.

I shall have to keep a closer eye on her. If it's depression, I'll have to monitor her closely as the Dark Lord would not be amused if she successfully committed suicide. If it's Wormtail's doing... perhaps I'll come back sooner than expected one of these days. Call it a surprise inspection.

Part III, chapter 3

Chapter 22 of 28

The need to survive is ingrained within the human psyche, but where does self-preservation end and self-destruction begin? Hermione is captured by Death Eaters and is held hostage by Snape and Pettigrew, but she comes up with a plan to escape. Not a romance.

Hermione lay awake in her cot, wondering why Snape had stopped spiking her evening water. It obviously wasn't so that she could have midnight rendezvous with Peter, as he'd taken to warding the door to keep her in.

Maybe he knew that he snored, and this was just a new form of torturing her.

Of course, she wouldn't call that torture. Torture was feeling her heart speed up – and her body heat – as she watched him disrobe for sleep. Torture was knowing how sick it was to lust after this man who held her life in his hands and who hadn't shown an aversion to causing her pain and humiliation. Torture was the happiness a single act of kindness from him brought.

Torture was dreaming about him caressing her lovingly, only to wake up to his sharp bark and cold eyes.

She sighed and rolled over, trying to get comfortable and block out the sounds issuing from his bed.

She also wondered if he had always slept nude or if he'd started that when he began depriving her of sleeping potions.

She sighed again, trying to think of something or someone other than Severus Snape as she relieved her frustration with her fingers, but the memory of his impassive face as she stripped for him was what took her over the edge.

Once again, she silently cried herself into a troubled sleep.

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She was pleasuring herself again last night; she smells of sex – of woman. And yet asleep she looks so young, almost lost. Who is she really, girl or woman? Lost or found?

And which is it that makes her cry?

AN: *I know this is a very short chapter, but the next one will be uploaded tonight. Thanks, Southern!*

Part III, chapter 4

Chapter 23 of 28

The need to survive is ingrained within the human psyche, but where does self-preservation end and self-destruction begin? Hermione is captured by Death Eaters and is held hostage by Snape and Pettigrew, but she comes up with a plan to escape. Not a romance.

AN: *Thanks, Southern!*

Peter returned from his summons looking pale and wan.

"In a bad mood, is he?" Snape asked, looking vaguely amused.

Peter looked daggers at Snape, but then smiled rather nastily.

"Yes, he is, and now he wants to see you."

Hermione was surprised to see Snape looking mildly discomfited by that pronouncement, but he quickly masked it. He nodded, clothed himself in his robes and was gone within a matter of seconds.

Hermione looked back to Peter who had placed his wand on the table and slumped down into the chair nearest him. She felt a stab of pity at seeing Peter look so drawn and then realized that she hadn't thought of him as 'Wormtail' since the day he'd told her how she made him feel.

"Did he hurt you?" she asked, coming over to rub his shoulders while wondering if she was letting herself get too close to him emotionally.

"Mmm, right there," he murmured, stretching his neck to the side to accommodate her hands. After a few more noises of contentment, he answered. "Yeah. When he's in a bad mood, he likes to use Crucio on whoever annoys him. I always seem to annoy him nowadays."

She hummed sympathetically, continued to knead his shoulders until her hands cramped up and then sat beside him at the table.

"Do you know why?" she asked, curious despite herself.

He shook his head mournfully. "No, but I suspect I've outlived my usefulness." He looked up at her, and for the first time she saw a scared little boy sitting in front of her instead of a weak-willed man. Her chest tightened painfully.

"And there's nothing you can do?"

He shook his head again, his face a picture of bleak resignation. "No. I think the only reason he hasn't killed me yet is because of you."

Hermione nodded, understanding it had more to do with Harry than her.

"Can't you run away?" she asked tentatively.

He shook his head and unconsciously scratched at the skin around his silver hand. "He'd find me," he whispered. "He always finds them, the ones who run away. And we've all had to watch what he does to them. It's... it's horrible."

"What if you went to the Order..." Her voice faded at his pained look.

"And they wouldn't kill me?" he asked bitterly.

She had to concede that point. Even if he returned with her and she told them that he'd rescued her, he wouldn't survive. Harry and Remus would be after blood, and if they weren't, Ron would be. But even if they didn't kill him, it would probably destroy him to find out she'd just been using him.

She must have been looking as grim as she felt because he smiled half-heartedly and said, "It doesn't matter. Don't worry about it."

"But I do worry, Peter. I don't like to see you hurting."

He gave her a real smile at that. "You're a sweet girl, Hermione."

She stood up and took his hand. "Let me make you feel better," she said, tugging at his hand, but he shook his head.

"I'm too tired, love."

She smiled coquettishly. "You won't need to do anything but lie down."

He raised his eyebrows in interest, but then shook his head. "I'm sorry, but I really am too tired. All I want to do is go to sleep."

She conceded with an easy smile. "Then let's go do that."

//////////\\\\\\\\\\\

Potter must be doing something right. I haven't seen the Dark Lord this upset since the Ministry fiasco. I'm surprised Wormtail made it out alive, given the Dark Lord's current temper.

I suppose Wormtail gave the same excuse as I did; the Dark Lord has always had a soft spot for torturing Muggles and Muggle-borns.

Part III, chapter 5

Chapter 24 of 28

The need to survive is ingrained within the human psyche, but where does self-preservation end and self-destruction begin? Hermione is captured by Death Eaters and is held hostage by Snape and Pettigrew, but she comes up with a plan to escape. Not a romance.

AN: *Thanks, Southern!*

Hermione woke up gradually, not wanting to let go of her dream – no matter how wrong it was. Snape was nuzzling her neck and playing with her breasts, and she didn't want him to stop.

She moaned quietly, and he started kissing her neck, mumbling to her how beautiful she was, how young, how nice, how much he loved her.

That woke her up.

The kissing continued, however, and she found Peter fondling her and leaving a wet trail up her neck. It was almost enough to turn her off, but the dream was still fresh in her mind, and her body was thrumming with the energy.

Deciding she wanted something out of the encounter, she took over. Letting him know she was awake, she kissed him forcefully, nudging him over onto his back while she did so. He rolled over very happily, looking more than pleased when she straddled him.

She smiled right back before closing her eyes and started to tease him. She struggled for a few moments to get herself into an acceptable fantasy before giving up and imagining it was Snape she was straddling, then mounting. She felt him shudder beneath her and felt powerful, knowing she could bring him to his knees at this moment. He wasn't indifferent any more, and his twitching hips proved he was less than impassive. He was hers for the taking.

"Oh, God, that feels so good, Hermione!"

And just like that, her fantasy died. She looked down at the man below her, not sure if she was jealous or disgusted by his obvious enjoyment. His face was open, and his eyes were closed as he relaxed into ecstasy. Disheartened, she looked up only to find herself looking at the indifferent visage of Severus Snape.

He was leaning against the doorframe, his arms and legs crossed casually with his face devoid of any emotion. He might have been staring at a wall for all the expressiveness he was showing. But his eyes were on her.

Excitement surged through her, and she felt the thrum return. She changed her position just slightly so as to give Snape a better view and then rocked her hips. Her eyes took in Snape's form and face; she knew it was wrong, but she could feel her nerves awakening as she watched his cold, dispassionate face.

She watched as his eyes moved over her body without betraying any thoughts or feelings. She watched as his gaze stopped on the point where she joined with Peter, and noticed his nostrils flare just slightly.

She watched as his eyes flicked back to meet hers. He held her gaze for what seemed to be forever, but she broke it when she noticed his tongue darting out to lick his lips.

A surge of energy raced up her spine, and she opened her mouth to pant, knowing she was almost there. She looked entreatingly at Snape, though what she wanted from him, she didn't know. What she didn't expect was for his mouth to open just slightly and for his breathing to quicken. He was still leaning against the doorframe, but he was now tense, and she could see his hands twitching as if he wanted to be the one touching her.

That thought sent her over the edge, and she threw her chest backwards and screamed.

Hard hands grabbed her hips, and she became aware of Peter yelling her name as he, too, came. Out of breath, she looked to the door, but Snape was gone. Exhausted, she collapsed onto Peter's chest, barely listening as he went on about love, devotion and the best sex ever.

//////////\\\\\\\\\\\

What was I thinking watching something like that? What was *she* thinking?

I don't think that was just post-coital bliss talking; I think he actually loves her. Is that why she's been out of sorts? Her look wasn't one of simple defiance... Does she—no, best not think about that.

Damn that girl. What am I going to do with her?

Part III, chapter 6

Chapter 25 of 28

The need to survive is ingrained within the human psyche, but where does self-preservation end and self-destruction begin? Hermione is captured by Death Eaters and is held hostage by Snape and Pettigrew, but she comes up with a plan to escape. Not a romance.

AN: *Thanks, Southern!*

"Bedtime, Granger."

Hermione looked at Snape before quickly diverting her gaze to Peter, unsure whether she was nervous out of fear or anticipation. There were so many ways Snape could make her miserable having seen what he had, but... She didn't think she had imagined his reactions, and she also didn't think it was out of bounds to think that he'd been aroused. But he hadn't acted any differently all day.

Peter gave her an odd look, and she realized she was staring at him and hadn't moved to follow Snape. She gave him a small smile and dutifully headed up the staircase.

As soon as she entered the bedroom, the door closed behind her, and she felt the wards go up. She looked around for Snape and found him lurking by the door, his expression unreadable.

"I imagine that after this afternoon's performance, you must be positively *itching* for a shower." His voice was sharp and mocking. She didn't know what to make of it, but she nodded anyway.

He strode over to the bathroom door and indicated that she should enter. She did so and automatically followed the morning routine. She had turned on the water before she realized he wasn't in the room with her.

A bit thrown off by that, she stumbled a bit as she got into the shower, recovering quickly enough. She washed herself thoroughly and, when she turned off the water, found that Snape was still not in the room. It was oddly disconcerting to walk over to the towel rack without him looking at her. It also was slightly panic inducing.

What was he up to?

Drying off quickly, she kept the towel wrapped around herself as she left the bathroom. The bedroom was dark already, and she saw that Snape was in bed. Disappointment and relief spread through her, though she was appalled to find the disappointment overwhelming the relief.

Cursing herself for her muddled emotions, she quickly made her way to her cot, spreading the damp towel out over her bed frame before ducking under the covers. It was the first time she had been nude in her cot, and it was an odd feeling.

She lay there in tense anticipation for several minutes until she was sure nothing was going to happen. Finally, after Snape started snoring, she managed to relax and slowly drifted off to sleep.

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She looks very peaceful like this. She almost looks like the child I remember, not the siren she's become. Almost.

I want to touch her. I want to have her surrounding me while I make her scream the way she did this afternoon. I want her to look at me like that again.

I know I shouldn't, but I do.

I can't risk it. Not now that we're so close.

I really can't.

Part III, chapter 7

Chapter 26 of 28

What is betrayal, anyway?

AN: *Sorry if you got the notification for this chapter twice. My browser freaked and didn't show that it had added it, so I went and did it again.*

Thanks, Southern!

Hermione woke suddenly, the feel of a foreign hand on her stomach bringing her to instant awareness.

A shadow was by her bed, and for an instant she thought it was a Lethifold raising itself up before smothering her, but soon her eyes adjusted to the dark, and she saw it was a man kneeling beside her. Snape. He had pulled back her covers and was gently running his hands along her body, barely touching her skin.

Her gasp of awareness stilled his hands, and she could feel him looking at her, even if she couldn't see his eyes.

"You are my prisoner." His voice was rough, but very quiet. His tone was indecipherable, but she heard it as a threat.

"Yes, I am."

"My word is law." His hands rested upon her more firmly. She started trembling, though she still wasn't clear whether it was from desire or fear.

"Yes, it is."

He moved his hands along her body, this time with a firm touch, though it was still gentle.

"You will obey me or suffer the consequences." One hand had found a breast while the other was on her thigh, threatening her crux. She felt herself moisten, but *still* couldn't distinguish fear from arousal.

"Yes."

His hands moved, teasing her with their proximity, but not touching the sensitive areas. She squirmed, trying to get stimulation, but he withdrew completely. She bit back a whimper.

He leaned over, putting his mouth next to her ear. "Tell me, Granger," he whispered, "when your fingers smell of sex in the morning, who did you fantasize about?"

"You," she whispered back before thinking.

"And tell me, was it Wormtail's cock that made you come, or was it having me watch you?"

She whimpered before whispering, "You."

He let out a ragged breath just under her ear, sending shivers down her neck. "Who do you think of when you let Wormtail inside you?"

She closed her eyes in defeat before whispering, "You."

"What do you want right now?"

She could hear her voice trembling when she breathed, "You."

Suddenly, his mouth was on hers in a frantic, needy kiss. It felt as if all the indifference, all the mocking, all the violence had been hiding a growing need that was now near desperation. It was almost violent, it was so overwhelming, and it was not what she wanted. She wanted to tell him to stop, but she was afraid of what he'd do if she did.

He continued to kiss her hungrily as he moved up onto the cot. He lay down half beside, half on top of her, continuing to ravage her mouth while his free hand calmly slipped between her thighs and found her sweet spot.

She cried out, surprised and pleased that while he was kissing her like a teenager, his fingers were well trained. Her cry quickly became a moan as he demonstrated how skilled he was. Just as she was about to climax, though, he withdrew his hand. This time she didn't bother hiding her whimper.

He moved his mouth to her neck and started nibbling it delicately as he shifted over her. When he was positioned at her entrance, he lifted his head to look at her almost as if he was asking for permission. She smiled mockingly at herself for even thinking such rubbish.

Just after she smiled, though, he slowly eased into her, not stopping until their hips met. She released a shaky breath and was surprised when he did as well. She could feel his eyes boring into hers and, even though she could barely see them, she was awed by the intensity.

He started rocking his hips gently and whispered breathlessly, "Tonight, when you stripped for your shower... For weeks now... Every time... I've wanted you... Tonight, I couldn't look at you without... Every day since I found you in bed with Wormtail... I've thought about what it would be like to touch you, feel you... to fuck you... and I've wanted to kill him for..."

He stopped speaking suddenly, lowering his head to nuzzle her neck.

"For what?" she asked, starting to tremble under his ministrations.

"For doing what I wouldn't," he said, stopping his movements abruptly and raising his chest off of her. He was watching her, but the darkness shadowed his thoughts completely.

"What do you want?" he asked out of the blue, his tone somber rather than seductive as it had been before.

She stayed silent, thinking only of freedom, but not daring to voice that. He lowered himself back onto her and gifted her with another soft kiss, as if he was trying to coax the answer out of her. It started out almost chaste, but he started teasing her lips with his tongue and teeth until she allowed him in. His kiss grew in desire, but it wasn't the fierce need he'd attacked her with before.

When she moaned quietly, he gently rocked his hips, making her gasp. He broke off the kiss to lower his mouth to her ear.

"Tell me what you want." He rocked his hips again, making her moan in pleasure and anguish.

"Knowledge. I want knowledge."

He chuckled darkly. "Of course you do, but what do you want to know?"

"Everything," she whispered, moving her hips to meet his.

"Tell me," he said, continuing to slide in and out of her slowly and gently. "Tell me what 'everything' entails." He then descended on her neck once more.

"I...I want to know your caresses and kind words." He began to stroke her hair again before moving a hand down her body, almost tickling her with the gentle touch.

"I want to know how to pleasure you." She felt him smile against her neck, and he hummed contentedly as he slid back into her, breaking the gentle rhythm to push into her as far as he could.

"I want to know if you could ever be pleased with me, and if so, what sacrifices do I have to make?"

He stopped moving and lifted his head to look at her.

"Hermione..." His voice was surprisingly soft, much softer than she'd ever heard it before. It made her angry and very, very sad. It also made her brave and careless. She shook her head slightly and could feel her throat closing with tears.

"I want to know how you could betray us. I want to know how you managed to fool him."

He was tense now, and she tensed in reaction, waiting for the blow that was sure to come but refusing to look away. She was very surprised when he didn't hit her, but answered.

"Betrayal comes slowly, covertly, changing one thought at a time until your mind has rationalized that what you're doing is the right thing, or if it's too reprehensible for that, then it's the *only* way, and there's no point in resisting."

She was still tense when he raised his hand, and she flinched when it moved toward her face. He stopped moving for a moment before slowly resuming the path he'd taken till his hand was gently cupping her face.

"Spying is betrayal, and it wields truth as its weapon. It's easy to manipulate people into believing you when what you say has the ring of authenticity."

"This is war, Granger." His voice was still soft, but she could hear a bitterly sharp edge underneath. "Right and wrong lose meaning as we search for ways to win. By the end, it's usually difficult to tell who the enemy really is."

He rubbed his thumb over her cheek, wiping away the fresh tears. He then leaned down and kissed her again.

"I wish I could make it easier for you," he murmured, lightly resting his forehead on hers, "but I can't. I can only help mask the pain temporarily."

She closed her eyes as the despair grew, overtaking her heart.

"Help me. *Please*," she begged, her voice thick with tears again.

He paused and then lowered his head for another kiss, almost as if trying to soothe her broken spirit with his lips. He started moving once more but let her set the pace. It wasn't long before she was panting beneath him, straining her body to meet his. She could feel the energy build within her, pulsing in a manic rhythm till she could barely stand it.

Snape's pace became more demanding, reacting to her body's pleas for more. She could feel his excitement growing in tandem with hers until he was straining to stay in control.

"Is this better?" he growled between heavy breaths. "Is this what you want?"

She groaned her approval, unable to articulate.

"Good," he replied, his voice brittle with tension. "Now *come*."

And she did. The energy burst through her like electricity, forcing a scream of pleasure from her as her body convulsed from the shock. She felt him surge within her and cried out again and again as he lost his battle for control and sought his own release.

After what was both an eternity and an instant, the feeling passed, leaving them breathless and sweaty. She was aware that he was still on top of her and in her, but she

found the invasion of his weight utterly appropriate and oddly comforting. It wasn't long before she found herself yawning and drifting off to sleep.

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Oh, fuck. What have I done?

Part III, chapter 8

Chapter 27 of 28

The need to survive is ingrained within the human psyche, but where does self-preservation end and self-destruction begin? Hermione is captured by Death Eaters and is held hostage by Snape and Pettigrew, but she comes up with a plan to escape. Not a romance.

AN: *Thank you, Southern!*

"Wake up, Granger."

She sat up instantly, forgetting her lack of clothes until her brain caught up with her body. She pulled up the sheet to cover herself automatically before she remembered the events from the night before. She looked up at Snape with a smile that withered at his look of cold fury.

"You are my prisoner." His voice was cold and threatening.

She nodded hesitantly in confusion, not sure why his demeanor had changed so radically. "Yes, I am."

"My word is law."

She nodded hesitantly again. "Yes, it is."

He moved forward until he was looming over her in his most dominating pose. She found herself leaning away from him as far as possible, unnerved by the malevolence radiating off of him.

"And you have not obeyed me, so you *will* suffer the consequences."

Her eyes went wide as she reviewed what she had possibly done recently that could warrant punishment. Before she had a chance, however, he pulled her roughly from the bed and then pushed her face first onto the floor. She tried to get up, but his boot came down on her back, preventing her from moving.

"You disobeyed me last night, Granger."

Hermione focused on remembering the night before, and there it was. She had asked him two questions. She stopped struggling against his boot, going limp in defeat.

"Yes, sir," she whispered.

"It's all very well and good that you can admit it, but that will do nothing to lessen your punishment."

She nodded her head in acceptance, scraping her forehead against the rough carpet. Suddenly his boot was gone. She rested where she was for a moment before turning to look at Snape. Before she could turn more than halfway, however, she heard him hiss, "*Crucio!*"

Pain exploded throughout her body, and she felt as if her body was trying to split itself apart. All her nerve endings were burning in the fire, dampening all her other senses. She felt blind and deaf as the spell ravaged her body.

She had no concept of time and felt as if it had been hours of hell he'd put her through by the time he lifted the spell. She lay on her back, panting and twitching, vaguely aware that she was crying, but knowing it was pointless to try and stop.

Snape came into her field of vision, his face hard with hatred.

"Next time, I won't be so lenient. Now get up."

Hermione struggled into a sitting position but found her body was being less than cooperative when it came to standing. She heard Snape huff in impatience, and she had to work hard to repress the rising panic. She was trying to obey him, but her body just wasn't letting her.

Suddenly, his hands were on her body, and he was lifting her up to her feet. She tried to struggle, but he merely tightened his grip. She let out another sob, not knowing what was coming.

"Hush," he murmured softly. She didn't know if it was an order or not, so she tried to calm herself, despite the dreadful feeling of having been torn apart from her heart out.

Without another word, he half walked, half dragged her down the hall to Wormtail's room. Without bothering to knock, he blasted the door open and shoved her into the room.

Wormtail was already at attention, giving her a worried glance before looking to Snape.

"Better take her while you can, Wormtail. She's been a naughty little girl, and you won't be getting her back after I return." He then conjured his work robes and was gone.

She wanted to be strong, she didn't want to show Peter how terrified she was, but Snape's parting words shredded what little hope she had left, and she collapsed by the bed in tears.

"Are you alright?" Peter asked, rushing over to her and taking her into his arms. "I heard you screaming, and I... What did he do to you, love?"

She was still shaking from the curse and the betrayal and was unable to answer.

“What did he do to you?” he repeated, tightening his grip on her protectively.

The real concern and anger in his voice brought her mind back into gear, and she thought of what Snape had told her about how he used the truth to manipulate people. If she hadn't been so miserable, she would have smiled at the irony of using Snape's advice against him.

She felt her throat constrict again at the thought of Snape and vowed more fervently than ever that she would get out or die trying. If using Peter was the only way, then she would use Peter, no matter how wrong it now felt.

“He... he...” She was suddenly glad she was so distressed. “He wanted me to... he wanted me. Wanted to... I was so powerless... He... so terrible.”

Peter's arm tightened painfully until she whimpered, when he hastily relaxed.

“Don't worry. I won't let him hurt you again. I'll protect you.”

She laughed, but fortunately it sounded hysterical even to her ears. “He's going to kill you, Peter! I'm sure of it! He just Crucioed me, and I'm sure his next punishment is going to...” She hiccupped miserably. “He said he wanted to kill you.”

“I'll just get to him first,” he said with an odd note to his voice. She looked at him and saw his expression was murderously pale.

“Peter, he's gone to see Voldemort,” she said, grabbing his robes for emphasis. “He saw us yesterday. He knows how you feel about me – how I feel about you.”

Peter's expression faltered at that. She could see fear and panic seize him, but then he looked at her and something changed. He set his jaw stubbornly and took a deep breath.

“Well then, I guess I've got to get you out of here.”

“What?”

“I know the password, and I can get us out of here. I'll take you to your friends; you'll be safe there.”

She could almost taste the freedom, but there was too strong an undertone of guilt to make it sweet.

“What about you? Voldemort will be after you.” She knew she shouldn't be pointing it out, but she found she didn't want him to die. She didn't want to be the death of him.

But he just nodded his head and scratched his arm, the stubborn set to his jaw firming. “My life is forfeit anyway, Hermione. At least this way I can try to make-up... I can save at least one person I love.

“After you're safe, I'll make a run for it. I'll get as far away from here as possible. I'll lure them as far away from you as possible.”

Hermione found herself unable to say anything for a long moment as tears of genuine gratitude gathered.

Exhaling a shaky breath, she asked, “Are you sure?”

“Positive.” His looked turned mean. “I'm not letting him hurt you ever again if I can help it.”

Hermione looked at Peter with new eyes and felt sick to her stomach. She was condemning this man to death by using his love for her against him. It was wrong. It was terribly, terribly wrong. And it was the only way for her to escape. If she didn't go, everything would blow up in her face. Either he would find out she'd been using him and would kill her, or Snape would... would torture and kill her. At the very least, Voldemort would find out eventually, and both she and Peter would die horrible, painful deaths.

Tears overcoming her again, she nodded.

“We'd better go now,” Peter said, taking her hands and helping her up before digging out a robe for her to don. “I don't know when Severus will be back.”

She nodded again, slipped the robe over her head and leaned against him as they made their way downstairs. At the front door, he stopped and said, “The password is 'traitor.' The trick is to really feel it, like with Apparating. Do you think you can do that?”

She almost laughed at the grim irony. “Yes, I think so.”

He extended his real hand. She took it, and he gave her hand a sympathetic squeeze. “Let's go.”

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She escaped.

The Dark Lord will not be happy about this. He'll be even unhappier that Wormtail successfully defected. I *almost* pity Peter.

She did it, though. She's *gone!*

Only one chapter to go.

Part III, chapter 9

Chapter 28 of 28

The need to survive is ingrained within the human psyche, but where does self-preservation end and self-destruction begin? Hermione is captured by Death Eaters and is held hostage by Snape and Pettigrew, but she comes up with a plan to escape. Not a romance.

Hermione looked around for a moment, dazedly taking in her surroundings. It seemed so surreal and dreamlike until a voice pierced the bubble.

"Hermione?"

She turned around to find Ginny sticking her head out her window. She smiled up, hope finally bubbling up to the surface.

Ginny smiled back, disbelief and hope warring on her face. She disappeared from the window, but Hermione heard her yell, "MUM! DAD! HERMIONE'S OUT FRONT!"

Hermione couldn't help but smile in earnest when she heard several crashes and a dull bang, and suddenly seven people were on the front step. Ginny, Molly and the twins somehow managed to restrain Harry and Ron while Arthur came rushing forward, his face a muddle of emotions.

He stopped a few feet away and looked at her apologetically. "I'm sorry, Hermione, but--"

"Don't worry, Mr. Weasley. I understand you need to ascertain my identity first."

"Sounds like Hermione to me," Ron commented to Harry, who just elbowed him in the ribs.

Arthur relaxed a little and smiled. "What's your favorite book?"

She smiled. "Well, Ronald and Harry would say it was "Hogwarts: A History," which I do find fascinating, but I think my favorite book is probably the little cookbook Mrs. Weasley gave me just after the wedding, knowing that the boys are completely hopeless with taking care of thems--"

She was cut off by seven people hugging her fiercely. After lots of joyous noise and hugging and Molly's crying, they all finally gave her a bit of room, except for the boys.

They looked at one another awkwardly before Ron gave in and swooped Hermione into his arms, swinging her about happily.

"I didn't think we'd ever get you back," he said thickly after putting her back on the ground.

She looked up at him and gave him as happy a smile as she could muster, but thought, *You didn't.*

She was a traitor now.

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She was trying to concentrate on the meeting, but she was finding it difficult. She'd had trouble concentrating ever since she'd escaped, and it bothered her. Her mind kept wandering back to Snape and why he'd tortured her. There had to be a reason, didn't there? He couldn't just be completely evil, could he? The way he'd made love to her... He couldn't be evil. Evil wasn't capable of such tenderness.

They – Ron, Harry and the rest of the Order – had asked her what had happened, and she'd explained most of it, but she hadn't been able to bring herself to mention that night. She hadn't really explained how she'd managed to get Peter to release her either, just telling them the basics of her plan while conveniently leaving out the sexual seduction. Despite of, or perhaps because of, her vagueness, she knew by the grown-ups' looks that they knew. She hadn't been able to look Remus in the face since. She didn't think Harry had guessed what *she* had done, but the way Ron had been hesitant to touch her afterwards, she suspected he had figured it out.

That thought scared her more than anything.

But as for Snape... She'd told them how he'd humiliated her, how he'd subjugated her, how he'd Crucioed her, but she couldn't, just couldn't tell them about their night together. She didn't know if she felt it would be betraying him or herself, Harry or Ron, but whichever way, she felt enough of a traitor without adding that bit. As it was, Harry and Ron were both seeing red.

Her stomach roiled with worry and guilt again, and she impatiently concentrated on keeping the bile down. She knew there would be physical symptoms to go along with her stress, but she needed to get over it. There was a war to win, and she damned well wouldn't be lying around sick for the rest of it. She'd been enough of a hindrance already.

A startled word brought her attention back to the meeting just as an owl landed on the Burrow's table in front of Harry. It had a rather large package attached to its leg.

Harry took out his wand and untied the package magically, making sure that he didn't touch it. Hermione had never seen him so cautious before.

He and a grim looking Moody worked on the package, casting every known revealing charm on it until they were sure it was safe to open. Hermione was surprised when Ron then took the package and was the one to open it. He saw her looking at him quizzically and smiled.

"We developed this strategy after they... while you were gone. Harry doesn't touch any letter or package anymore, and we each take turns opening strange letters and parcels." He shrugged and cut through the twine binding the package with his wand, then looked up at her again and smiled ruefully. "It's my turn."

She nodded worriedly, crossed her arms across her stomach and started rocking reflexively while she watched him open the package. As soon as the box was open, his smile disappeared in horror, and he looked back up at Hermione.

Everyone craned their necks curiously, although no one strayed from their seats. Harry was looking at Ron impatiently, but Ron kept his attention on Hermione. He frowned and then gulped before levitating a silver arm out of the box.

Hermione felt herself go white and was suddenly very glad to be sitting down, as she felt quite woozy.

"Mum!" Ron called out, pointing to Hermione. Molly, who was sitting beside Hermione as usual, quickly put her arms around Hermione's shoulders, steadying her until her breathing was a little slower and her dizzy spell had passed.

Hermione tried to get control of herself, and before long, she was able to smile shakily at Molly in thanks, although the older woman didn't let her go. She just adjusted her grip into a hug, offering Hermione a sympathetic look.

Meanwhile, Ron had opened the letter addressed to Harry and was silently reading it, going from red to purple to white. When he'd finished, he looked down into the box with a scowl, even as Moody took the letter from his hand.

Moody grunted his displeasure when he read the letter to himself and then cocked an appraising eye at Hermione before reading the letter aloud.

Hermione, however, wasn't listening. Her whole attention was on the letter Ron was handing her. She'd seen him take it from the box and try to open it, but it refused to cooperate. She took it with a shaking hand, instantly recognizing the spiky lettering that scrawled her surname across the parchment.

Taking a deep breath, she opened it and started crying when she read the single line:

It was the only way.

AN: First, if you want more resolution or answers to some of the left over questions, there is a small one-shot sequel called "Closure" that is now up. Compared to this, it's downright fluffy, but its still on the gritty side of fandom.

Second, and more importantly, it's time to thank everyone, Oscar style. First off, thanks to Orm Irian whose wonderful story really did inspire me. Thanks to ashfae, who provided a bit of inspiration on Peter's character when I was having a huge amount of trouble writing him. Her story, "Wormtail," is an excellent little character study. (<http://www.fictionalley.org/authors/ashfae/wormtail01a.html>) Thanks also to Mundungus42, who was really curious to see what had me so troubled and convinced me that at least one person would be able to bear the squick, and to Shiv, who settled my frazzled nerves.

A huge thanks to everyone who reviewed. You have really made my month! And finally, thank you to SouthernWitch69 for being my best beta.

You all rock!