

The Research Project

by timestep

Hermione finds Severus conducting research in the library, does he let her help?

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Chapter 1 of 1

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A/N: I want to thank my beta, dacian_goddess for her amazingly quick turn arounds and improvements! and my friend SneakyRhea for her encouragement.

If you love my story, thank the group above, if it's a mistake; it's all mine.

The characters don't belong to me; I just bring them to my sandbox.

The Research Project

Looking frustrated, Hermione left the stacks of books. The book she was looking for was missing from the shelves. She decided to see if someone had forgotten to return it to its assigned spot on the bookshelf. There were only a few weeks left before the students arrived on the Hogwarts Express, and she wanted to get a head start on her newest research project before they arrived.

As she walked from table to table, she looked at the various books that Madam Pince had yet to re-shelve, reading the titles to see if one of the books in the stacks might be the book she was looking for. She was amazed at how carelessly the faculty treated the library during the summer. They were definitely worse than the students ever were.

Severus Snape was the only teacher currently working in the library. Even with the students gone from the castle, he was still dressed in his formal teaching robes. While he didn't intimidate Hermione anymore, she did find that he was still very unpleasant to be around, and she found herself hoping that she would find the book before she was required to search the table he was working at.

As she finished her search of the remaining tables in the library without success, she sighed as she quietly approached Professor Snape's table.

"Oh, there it is. I've been looking for that book," Hermione said as she looked over Severus Snape's shoulder.

"I'm reading it," Snape responded dryly.

"May I please borrow it for just a moment? I need to check a fact."

"Library protocol dictates, Miss Gran"

"Professor."

"Excuse me?"

"My title is Professor, as you well know."

"My apologies; Professor Granger. Library protocol dictates that I am allowed to finish using this tome and then you may borrow it."

"But I just needed. . ."

"And I have said that you may have the book when I am finished. In your research circles, you may find it appropriate to interrupt each other, but it is not so in mine. Now, if you'll excuse me, I'd like to get back to my research."

"I'm surprised to see you reading a book on orchids; what are you working on?"

"Miss I mean Professor Granger, at what point did you become a Potions mistress?"

"I'm not," Hermione said, looking Severus in the eye. "But I just returned from the most fascinating conference, the main topic being the use of orchids in magic. The participants gathered were specialised in many different fields of magic, and we worked together trying to find the secret to using the flower. I just thought that maybe I could help."

"When you have at least ten years of accomplished research, I might be willing to discuss my research with you," Snape said vehemently. "Until then, I don't believe we have anything to discuss."

Hermione opened her mouth to respond, but found she could not seem to come up with an appropriate retort.

Snape closed the book in front of him and rose from the table. "As I seem to be unable to concentrate here, I believe I shall take this book to my chambers to read after my meeting with Headmistress McGonagall. Good day."

Snape walked out of the library with his robes billowing behind him.

As Hermione stared after him, still speechless, she felt someone walk up behind her.

"Don't fret about him, dear," Madam Pince said, putting a comforting hand on Hermione's shoulder. "Professor Snape tends to be a bit infuriating. I'll let you know as soon as he returns the book."

Hermione looked at Madam Pince, feeling slightly surprised. She had still not adjusted to the librarian treating her as anything other than a disdainful student.

"Thank you, Madam Pince. I'd appreciate it." She gave the librarian a small smile as she turned to return to her quarters.

~oOo~

Snape walked briskly towards the Headmistress' office. He wasn't sure why, but he did enjoy shocking Miss Granger into silence. He couldn't say if it was a reward for putting up with her incessant chatter while she had been a student, or whether he found it a challenge to find new ways to render her speechless, but he did enjoy his game. Since she had arrived back at Hogwarts the previous year to teach Charms, Hermione had provided him with almost daily entertainment.

As he approached the stone gargoyle, he slowed his step. 'What was it that Hermione had wanted to see in this book,' he wondered. Orchids had begun to fascinate him. Unlike most plants used as ingredients in potions, they had been found not to react based on predicted models and conventional rules. Actually, all specialists had found that the orchid did not react in any predictable manner. The "*Systemic Trials Encountered in Magic (STEM) Orchid Conference*" had been the first time multiple groups of researchers from different fields of study had gathered to compare their observations and discuss research related to the magical uses of the orchid.

Severus approached the stone gargoyle that guarded Headmistress McGonagall's office.

"Tartan knickers," he said with a grimace on his face. At first he had felt honoured that Minerva had given him a unique password granting him access to her office whether or not she was in; he would even have admitted the gratitude he felt for the fact that she still trusted him. After the Death Eaters had entered Hogwarts during the war, new security had been put in place restricting access to the school's Head office. Unfortunately, much like Albus Dumbledore before her, the Headmistress seemed to enjoy selecting passwords based on her whims and concocted to cater to her own amusement.

As Severus arrived at the top of the stairs, he knocked on the open door and walked into the office.

"Minerva?" he called out as he approached the centre of the room, noting that the office appeared empty. As he looked around, he noticed there was a parchment on the corner of the desk addressed to him.

Severus,

Poppy needed to see me quickly. I apologise for the delay in our meeting. Please make yourself comfortable and have some tea and biscuits while you wait.

Minerva

Severus sighed as he sat in his favourite wingback chair. He leaned forward to pour himself some tea, added lemon, and selected a chocolate biscuit. Sitting back, he sighed as he sipped his tea.

He looked around the office. Many of the portraits were either empty or sleeping. Usually, Severus enjoyed a few minutes of quiet in Minerva's office; but with the students gone for the summer, he almost felt restless in the silence. Putting down his cup, he opened the book he'd brought with him from the library.

"Severus!" a deep voice bellowed, breaking his concentration from the passage he had been reading.

"Yes, sir?" he asked, quickly looking up at Phineas Black's portrait. Phineas was sitting in his throne, or at least that was the only way Severus could describe the chair in the former Headmaster's portrait. He was wearing brilliant green robes and his ever-present scowl.

"We need to talk. Meet me in the usual place after your meeting."

"Yes, sir," Severus said, turning back to his book as he waited for Minerva to return.

~oOo~

His meeting with Minerva had gone pretty well, but after working together for so many years, there weren't too many issues they couldn't resolve within a few minutes unless it was related to his treatment of his Slytherins, he thought with a smirk.

He walked along the empty corridor, wondering what Black wanted to talk to him about that he could not bear to discuss in the Headmistress' office.

As Severus approached the Room of Requirement, he walked past the tapestry of Barnabas the Barmy three times while he thought, "I need a place to talk to Phineas Black; I need a place to talk to Phineas Black; I need a place to talk to Phineas Black." The door to the Room of Requirement appeared on the wall opposite the tapestry. As he opened it, he walked into the bedroom that Harry Potter and Ronald Weasley had occupied on the second floor of 12 Grimmauld Place, where the not uncommonly empty frame of Phineas' other portrait hung.

Severus looked between the two beds, trying to decide which would be a less distasteful place to sit. Finally deciding the answer was neither, he conjured a comfortable wingback chair between the two.

"If you are finally comfortable, Severus," Phineas stated impatiently, "we can begin."

"I am at your service."

"Work with Hermione Granger to solve the mystery of the orchid."

"Excuse me?"

"Work with Professor Granger."

"No."

"Severus, that wasn't a request. You will work with Professor Granger."

"You are no longer Headmaster here, nor have you been one for nearly one hundred years. I do not take orders from you."

"Severus," Phineas said, changing his approach, "I know you are a brilliant researcher."

"What is your point, Phineas?" Severus asked sceptically.

"I know you have been researching orchids."

"And how do you know this? I don't believe I have conducted any aspect of my research in the Headmistress' office."

"But the portraits in the library have reported your activities to me."

"And *why* are you so interested in my research all of a sudden?"

"When Hermione returned from her conference, she met with Minerva. At the conference, an award was announced, to be given to the first person who could successfully make an orchid everlasting. I believe that you and Hermione can solve this if you work together. The traditional methods have failed to preserve the flower."

"A fact that has been a source of much frustration over the past two years..."

"I think the reason for that is the need to combine different methods. We have been discussing this in the evenings after Minerva retires for dinner. It is our belief that you must combine Potions with Charms or Transfiguration to succeed. Hermione excels in both. By working together, you will solve this problem quickly. We would do it ourselves, but ... we seem to be lacking the necessary mobility."

"Of course; I suppose it is hard to research when you are a painting," Severus said dryly. "But that still doesn't tell me why I would want to subject myself to spending any more time with Miss Granger than absolutely necessary."

"Because you like solving problems."

Severus looked at his feet while he considered his options. As he sat, he tried to decide if his desire to solve this problem could outweigh his dislike for his former student. Knowing he didn't have a choice, he slowly nodded his head in agreement to the former Headmaster's request.

"I will not ask Professor Granger for her help, not to mention I just told her that I would not discuss research with her until she had completed at least 10 years of research."

"I anticipated that and have already created a plan for how we can, er, arrange for her to come to you."

~oOo~

A few mornings later, a beautiful eagle owl swept through the Great Hall at breakfast and landed in front of Hermione. She didn't recognise the owl. In fact, she hadn't seen an eagle owl since Draco Malfoy had left Hogwarts. The owl dropped a wooden box in front of her and flew away without even waiting for a treat.

During the summer, the staff who remained at the castle gathered in the Hall for dinner, but breakfast and lunch were much more casual affairs. While some of the staff took those meals in their quarters, Hermione and some others always preferred to gather informally in the Hall at a small table as they grew hungry. This particular morning, however, she found herself nearly alone at the table.

Hermione had no idea who had sent the box; it had arrived with no note. She looked more closely at the box. It was as smooth as glass and had no visible openings. The grain of the wood had been highlighted by the finish of the box, which brought out the red undertones in the natural Brazilian cherry wood. As she ran her hand over the box, she could feel the magic radiate through her hand.

Hermione pushed her plate aside and reached for her teacup. As she sipped at her tea, she studied the box. She tried to think about who might have sent it to her and, more importantly, why they would have done so. In the back of her mind, she heard Alastor Moody's words warning of a need for 'Constant vigilance.' She knew the first thing she needed to do was perform the diagnostic wand scan she had learned during the war to see if the box contained any protective wards.

After finishing breakfast, she decided to take the box out to the lake. She didn't want anyone noticing her checking the box for spells. Walking to a quiet area, Hermione set the box down and walked a few steps away from it. When Hermione and her friends had been searching for Horcruxes, they had developed a technique to scan items for dangerous spells while putting up protections in the event they would trigger a defensive spell. Now she applied the same techniques as she waved her wand over the box.

Quickly, her spells registered dark magic permeating the box. Hermione did not readily recognise the spells used to ward it. She started running through the list of people she could ask about the spells she needed to unravel. Her preference, she thought, was to ask Remus Lupin, but the full moon was tonight, so she couldn't inconvenience him. There was the new DADA Professor, but he didn't seem to know as much about old spells, and she suspected that her 'gift' was guarded by layers of forgotten, esoteric spells. That seemed to only leave Professor Snape.

"I really hate to ask him, but under the circumstances, I don't see too many more options."

Picking up the box, she slowly walked back to the castle in search of the Potions master.

~oOo~

Hermione walked into the library holding the box. As she looked table to table, she finally saw Snape sitting towards the back of the library. She squared her shoulders before walking towards him purposefully, hoping that he would not notice how intimidated she felt. When she arrived at his table, she set the box in front of him.

Snape looked up his book, surprised to see her in front of him so quickly.

"Miss Granger," he said with a nod, "do you need something?"

"I need your help," she stated pushing the box towards him.

"Why?"

"This arrived this morning via owl-post. I don't know who sent it, so I performed a wand scan on it. It appears to have many Dark spells on it. I need your help dismantling them so I can determine who sent this to me."

"It's a beautifully crafted box. The wood is the best Brazilian cherry. It is obviously expensive. Most likely not sent by a Weasley."

"That, Professor, was uncalled for. I just requested your help in dismantling the spells so I might open the box."

"And what is in it for me?"

"My gratitude," Hermione said.

Severus glared at her with the expression he used to reserve for Neville.

"And you won't have to find a way to cover my classes when I am mortally wounded," she added.

"As your gratitude has no value to me, and Minerva could cover your classes, I don't believe either of those is enough to entice me to help you."

"And if I offer to assist you in your research?"

"We've already determined that you are not a Potions mistress. . ."

"True, but I am competent in Potions and I'm certain you could use someone to conduct literature searches or organise research notes. And since I have been conducting my own research on orchids, I may be able to spot trends that research assistants would not notice."

"There is only one thing preventing me from accepting this offer."

"What would that be?"

"I don't like you."

Hermione sighed loudly.

"I would hope," she said, trying to keep the strain from her voice, "that by now you would be able to set personal feeling aside and realise that it is possible to have a professional relationship that has nothing to do with 'liking' one another."

Hermione watched Severus for a minute before continuing.

"But, I could charm a project research journal so we each have a copy. It would allow us to see each other's discoveries and observations, and we could leave notes for one another. It would be like performing the research together only we would not have to speak to one another or even be in the same room."

"I suppose I could agree to those conditions. Very well, leave me the box, and I will send you my research journal for you to copy. While you charm the journal, I shall see what I can do with the box. Once I have my copy of the updated journal, I will outline my project goals for the next step and your first task. Please ensure that you incorporate a charm to alert us when the other has made changes in the book. Good day."

Without another word, Severus turned back to his reading, thoroughly ignoring Hermione.

After watching him for a moment to see if he would say anything else, she turned and walked slowly out of the library as she tried to understand what had just transpired. Originally, she had wanted Snape's help with the wooden box, but suddenly she found herself working on his research project. It amazed her sometimes how easily Slytherins managed to convince people to do what they would have done if just asked.

~oOo~

By the time she returned to her rooms, it was evening. She found that Snape's research journal was sitting on her desk. She walked towards the desk in the alcove of her rooms that she used as her office. Her desk was a partner's desk, which allowed her to use one side of the desk for grading papers while putting the other side of it to use for research.

Picking up the journal, she noticed it was bound in very soft green leather. The title "Research Journal" was stamped in silver. She ran her hand over the leather as she breathed in the masculine scent. The smell of leather always reminded her of her father's study. She had loved to sit on the leather chairs as she did her reading during holidays. Her parents had always curled up together on the matching settee, reading dentistry journals and sharing titbits with each other.

Carrying the book to her favourite reading space in her chambers, Hermione sat down on the plush cushions on the window seat in the alcove's south facing window, pulled her legs under her, and opened the cover to read the first page of Snape's notes.

'So, he is working on the challenge from the conference,' she thought to herself after reading the first few pages of the journal. She decided to quickly skim all of his notes before beginning to compare his discoveries with those from her own research. As she reached the last page of notes, she understood why he had really asked for her help. The last entry, dated three days ago, read:

Determined success is dependent on combining magical disciplines. Not sure whether Charms or Transfiguration is required for success.

"That bastard!" Hermione exclaimed as she realised she had been set up. "I wonder if he was the person who sent me the mysterious box..."

Below the final entry, written in Snape's distinctive handwriting, a small addendum read:

Note to Miss Granger: Incorporate your research into this journal.

Hermione wondered if he would be upset if she reorganised his research journal. He probably would, she thought. But, if he was going to call her Miss Granger and treat her like a research assistant rather than a colleague, she was just going to have to take some control of the situation.

Picking up her wand, she tapped the book as she spoke the incantation she had created as a student to organise Snape's notes into the format she preferred. While she understood the tradition of incorporating research notes chronologically, she had discovered it was easier to group the information.

After reorganizing the notebook, she then started to insert pages for her own data, including the information gathered from reading books and articles, experiments she had attempted and their results and ideas for future experiments. She had also added a section for potions ingredients and their unique interactions with the orchids.

Like Snape, she had recently come to the conclusion that the only way to succeed in creating an everlasting orchid was to combine the disciplines of Charms or Transfiguration with Potions. While at the STEM conference, she had approached a few Potions masters to see if they would be interested in collaborating with her on this project. She had suspected from back then that Professor Snape would not be willing to work with her. Unfortunately, none of them had agreed with her beliefs that the solution to the challenge issued at the conference required a combination of magical approaches.

It was well past midnight when she finally completed the task of adding her notes to the research journal. She stood and stretched, finding her muscles sore after sitting in

the same position for so many hours and retired to her bedroom for the night.

"Dobby," Hermione called.

"You called, Miss?" Dobby asked as he popped into her room.

"Can you please do me a favour and deliver this to Professor Snape's desk? Do not wait on him; he will find it when he wakes in the morning."

"Yes, Miss. Dobby will be happy to serve the friend of Harry Potter."

"Thank you, Dobby," she replied quickly as he left her quarters.

Lying in bed a little while later, she thought about the project. Now that she was working with Professor Snape, she felt certain that they would succeed in completing the challenge long before anyone else. The thought made her smile.

'I wonder if working together will cause Professor Snape to finally begin respecting my abilities.'

Her last thought as she drifted to sleep was the devilish idea to have a lie in tomorrow, rather than take breakfast in the Great Hall. Then again, maybe she should face Professor Snape first thing rather than give him time to work himself into a bigger tantrum after he discovered the changes she had brought to the research journal.

~oOo~

After Severus Snape woke the next morning, he was surprised to see a book bound in red leather in his study. Looking closer, he noticed that the cover of the journal had gold lettering that said "Research Journal." Rolling his eyes, he decided that it must be his research journal with the cover changed to alert him that Hermione Granger must have provided her notes to the book. While he was curious to see what she had added to the journal, he felt it would be better for him to wait until after he had showered and had his morning coffee before settling in to read her additions.

After showering and dressing, Severus went to his breakfast table where his breakfast of coffee and toast waited with the *Daily Prophet*. He reached over and added sugar to his coffee and marmalade to his toast. He took a few sips of his coffee as he leaned back and looked at the research journal he had set next to his plate. As he felt the coffee begin to wake him up, he moved the *Prophet* to the chair next to him and reached for the journal. Taking one more sip of coffee, he opened the cover of the journal and promptly spewed the coffee across the journal.

"Bloody Hell!" Snape bellowed as he reached for his wand. "*Scourgify*," he quickly said as he cleaned the coffee off the pages of the journal. "What did that bint think she was doing changing my journal? How am I supposed to find a bloody thing in here now?" As he slammed the cover closed, he noted that the cover had returned to its green colour. That calmed him minutely, but he still wanted to find Miss Granger quickly. Donning his teaching robes, he grabbed the journal and strode out of his quarters, slamming the door behind him before pointing his wand over his shoulder and speaking the incantation for his wards.

Severus walked quickly towards the Great Hall with his robes billowing behind him in an intimidating fashion. When he opened the door to the Hall, he looked at the small table the staff used during the summer to find her sitting alone. Walking as silently as he could, he walked up behind her and placed the opened journal between her breakfast dish and the copy of the *Prophet* she had been reading as she ate.

"What," Severus asked quietly through gritted teeth, "is the meaning of this?"

With a big sigh, Hermione slowly closed the copy of the newspaper and set it aside. Glancing at the cover of the book he laid in front of her, she looked up at him and replied, "I updated the research journal as you requested."

"I know it's the updated research journal." Severus closed his eyes and slowly counted to ten before he said something he was going to regret. After all, this still was the Headmistress' favourite student, former or otherwise. "But, why have you changed the order of the information within it? I merely asked you to add your research to the pages. Have you forgotten how to follow directions?"

"Professor Snape, this may be how you treat your research assistants, but I am not a hired hand. It was too difficult to determine how to add my notes to yours, but yours easily converted to the model I have been using."

"That was downright Slytherin of you "

"Thank you. Now, let me show you how you find the information you will need."

As she described the format of the journal, Severus sat next to her, drinking a fresh cup of coffee. He could easily see advantages of the methods she used to organise the data, especially the section that summarised the potions ingredients, listing their interactions and cross-referencing to the source of the conclusion.

'Needless to say,' he thought to himself, 'I won't be admitting it to her any time soon.'

Looking up at her eager face, he found himself saying, "I suppose this will work. But," he paused to take a deep breath and try to look at her in his most intimidating manner, "please refrain from making any other changes without discussing them with me first."

"Why, of course, Professor," she responded calmly as she tried to keep the shock out of her voice after all, he had seemingly given her a compliment while not giggling at the intimidating look he was trying to give her.

"I'll go read your notes," he said as he stood to leave. "When I am finished, I will leave notes for you on the direction I believe we should take next."

"Thank you. By the way, I did note some ideas of my own in the last section. And, as I worked so late last night, I believe I shall take my book and go by the lake to read. The students will be arriving in the next few weeks, and I want to take advantage of the nice day while I still have time."

~oOo~

It was several days before Halloween. Hermione returned to her quarter after a frustrating day of teaching. The first-year students were obviously excited about the approaching holiday and were more interested in learning how to charm decorations than the lesson she had planned for them. Knowing that it wasn't going to get any better, she had informed them that as soon as all of them mastered *Wingardium Leviosa*, she would teach them some decorating charms.

Hoping to relax for a few minutes before dinner, she toed off her shoes and removed her teaching robes, hanging them on the rack near the door, and started to her settee to rest for a few minutes. As she crossed the room, she noticed that the research journal was suddenly coloured red, indicating an update from Snape. She opened the journal to the section they had set aside to leave messages to each other.

Last night, I tried the new potion. The changes we made improved the results. After dipping the orchid in the potion, it remained stable for an hour before dying. How is the modification to the preservation charm progressing?

Hermione looked around her room. The most frustrating part of collaborating on research in this manner was that there was no one to celebrate successes with. She would have loved to Floo Snape about this, but he was just starting to treat her with a small amount of respect. She wasn't sure if they would ever become friends, but she recognised that if they had any chance at all she had to be patient and let him come to her.

Reaching for a piece of parchment from the stack she always kept in easy reach, and her favourite quill, she quickly penned a note to Ginny.

Gin,

Wanted to celebrate! It's Absolutely Fabulous. Patsy has become closer to achieving a perpetual state of inebriation. Relations between her and Saffron are starting to thaw. Not sure they will ever get along, but may soon find a way to be in the same room with one another.

HG

When Ginny had visited Hermione at her parents' house, she had become addicted to the show Absolutely Fabulous on the telly. Since Hermione had wanted to be able to discuss her research with Ginny, they had decided to encrypt their conversations by using the characters in the show. She was still careful how much she said in writing, but was very glad to have someone to share the milestones with.

She rolled up the parchment, put her shoes and robes back on and quickly walked to the Owlery to send the note to Ginny before she needed to be in the Great Hall for dinner.

Hermione walked into dinner; she sat at her customary seat at the end of the table and next to Professor Summerby, the Transfiguration teacher. As she was putting her napkin on her lap, she noticed Professor Snape walking into the Hall. Walking behind her to his seat, he discreetly tapped the back of her arm and dropped a note in her lap. Flustered by the unexpected contact, she almost dropped the note.

We should meet after dinner to discuss the next step. Bring your copy of the research journal and meet me in my classroom at 8:00. If you have detentions and are unable to make it, move your drink to the left side of your plate; otherwise, leave you drink alone, and I will see you later.

Knowing Snape's students would notice if she were suddenly to talk to him in the middle of dinner, she understood his approach.

'He must be as excited as I am about his success if he wants to meet,' she thought as she tried to concentrate on eating. At one point, she did glance down the table to look at Snape and happened to catch his eye. She tipped her glass at him and he just nodded his head as he turned back to Minerva to answer a question.

At promptly 8:00, Hermione knocked on the classroom door.

"Come," Hermione heard Snape call from the other side of the door. She opened the door, stepping into the classroom quickly before closing and warding the door behind her. She added a silent *Muffliato* spell to ensure that no one would overhear their conversation.

"Ah, Miss, er, ah. Good Evening."

"Hullo, Professor Snape. I'm surprised you want to meet in person, Professor. I believe I recall you telling me that, and I quote, 'I hate you.' I didn't think you wanted to be in the same room with me during any part of this collaboration."

"Actually, I believe my exact words were 'I don't like you.' And I'm trying an experiment of my own to see if I need to reconsider my conclusions."

"Oh. We are really going to do this aren't we? We are going to find a way to make an orchid everlasting?"

"I suppose you have read the update in your journal by now? Then, yes, I am starting to believe so. But we need to solve the rest of the problem."

"I was thinking about this all evening. I need to perform some Arithmantic calculations on my latest ideas; but, if the numbers work, it may be worth trying the spell on the Potion-dipped orchid."

"How long do you think you will need?"

"Depends on how much longer you intend to keep my box. You haven't mentioned it for a while. I'm assuming you are still trying to dismantle the spells?" she inquired, suspecting he had forgotten about the wooden box.

"Ah, yes, your box. I must admit, I haven't worked on it lately, as I thought this project was more important. But, I suppose while you are working on the next steps of the project, I can spend some time working on solving the problems with your box."

~oOo~

Hermione stared out the window of her quarters and pulled her dressing gown a bit tighter around her. The snow was really blowing outside. Thankfully, they didn't often get harsh winter storms in November. But when they did, it seemed to feel so much colder than storms later in the winter.

Picking up the research journal, she walked towards her bedroom and snuggled under her covers to keep herself warm as she reviewed her calculations one more time.

'It seems to work,' Hermione thought to herself. 'Am I missing something?'

Reaching for her quill, she turned to the notes section.

The Arithmantic calculations appear to indicate that the Charms spell combined with Professor Snape's potion will succeed. Will test theory as soon as possible. HG

Hermione closed the book and leaned back on her pillows as the book suddenly turned red. Opening the book, she found the following note:

When do you want to perform this experiment? SS

Surprised to see that he was awake, she quickly wrote him back.

When will you have the potion available? I'm ready anytime the potion is. HG

While Hermione waited for Snape's answer, she watched the snow out the window. She was surprised to see a flash of lightning followed shortly by a loud thunderclap.

It's thundering and lightning outside. I've never seen snow lightning. Did you see it? HG

I'm in the dungeon. I have no way to see what is happening outside. SS

I wish you could see this. It is very odd to see lightning during a snow storm. HG

Maybe some day I'll come out of the dungeon. In the meantime, the potion will be ready in three days. Shall we try on Saturday? SS

If you leave me the potion, I'll try the experiment in my classroom and let you know the results through the journal. HG

"I wish he wasn't so bull headed," Hermione said aloud as she wondered, yet again, why she had agreed to collaborate on a project where they never worked in the same room. When no response was written, she closed the journal and leaned back on her pillows again.

"What if my calculations are wrong? What if I made a mistake? I really need this to work," Hermione thought, closing her eyes. "Please don't let me make a fool of myself," she pleaded with whatever deity was listening.

As she opened her eyes, she reached for her wand to extinguish the candles and go to sleep. Just before casting the spell, she noticed the book was once again red.

Come to the potions lab at 1:00 pm. You can perform the experiment here. SS

Hermione closed the book once more and moved it to the side table. As she extinguished the candles and snuggled deeper into her covers, she contemplated what Snape's last entry meant.

~oOo~

At 1:00 pm on Saturday afternoon, Hermione arrived at the door to the potions lab.

Straightening her robes, she quickly gave herself a quick pep talk and knocked on the door.

"Come in," she heard a voice respond.

Opening the door, Hermione crossed the room and set her copy of the research journal on the table nearest Snape.

"Professor Snape," Hermione said by way of a greeting.

"Professor Granger. Are you ready to try your modified spell?"

"Yes. Do you have everything ready?" she asked glancing around the room.

"In my private lab. Follow me," he said as he stood.

Hermione followed him into the next room. On the counter was an orchid plant, the potion and a ceramic bowl and plate. She also noticed her mysterious box was at the end of the table.

"I believe we should put the potion into the ceramic bowl, dip the freshly cut orchid in the potion, and then you should perform your new spell on the orchid. We know the potion alone worked for just over an hour. We should have preliminary results before dinner."

"Professor Snape, will you do the honours of performing the first stage?"

Snape poured the potion into the bowl and, taking his wand, cut the bloom from the plant. He carefully dipped the plant into the potion and placed it on a ceramic plate. Stepping aside, he allowed Hermione to step to the table. She practised the wand movements once. Taking a deep breath, she performed the wand movements as she said, "*Eternus vita*."

"Well," she said taking a seat on a stool next to the table, "now, we wait."

Watching the flower, Snape found himself asking Hermione questions about her approach and how she had created her spell. As the hours passed, they found themselves talking easily about many subjects. In a moment of silence, Hermione's stomach grumbled loudly.

"What time is it? I can't believe I'm hungry this early."

"It's 7:00."

"The flower it's . . . preserved!" Hermione exclaimed as she jumped up and hugged Snape, unable to keep the shock out of her voice. "Oh, excuse me," she said as she stepped back again and smoothed his robes in a sign of apology.

"It worked. The flower is as fresh as it was six hours ago."

Hermione stared at the flower, shocked, a small tear escaping from her eye.

"Professor Granger, are you all right?"

"I'm just so happy. I knew I was smart enough to solve this; I just needed to find someone who trusted me enough. I'm not sure why you decided to work with me, but thank you."

"Truth be told, it was Phineas Black who insisted," Severus admitted sliding the box towards Hermione.

"Were you able to remove the dark magic," she asked while rubbing her hand over the box's smooth surface, "or did you send this to me?" she teased while looking at him through lowered lashes.

"The box is safe. You may open it after you return to your rooms," Snape responded. "In the meantime, maybe we should head to the kitchens and see if we can convince the house-elves to make us some dinner."

"Only after we owl the STEM committee," Hermione stated while laughing with glee.

~oOo~

Hermione returned to her rooms after a visit to the kitchens. Still too excited to sleep, she sat on her settee and placed the box next to her. As she thought back over the day, she stroked the smooth wood finishing, finding that it gave her peace.

"He may seem like a bastard, my dear, but he is just hesitant to let anyone get close."

Hermione's eyes jumped to the only Hogwarts portrait in her room.

"Excuse me? Oh, hullo, Celeste," Hermione said, looking at the woman riding a horse around the lake in her painting.

"Phineas asked me pay you a visit, and I really enjoy riding around your lake. He had two messages for you," Celeste explained.

"Headmaster Black? What are the messages?"

"First, he wanted me congratulate you. Professor Snape stopped by the Headmistress' office to tell her about your accomplishment today."

"Please tell him I said thank you."

"He also wanted me to ask you to give him a chance," Celeste continued. "Severus needs a friend, and he seems to be opening up to you. You should open the box now."

Hermione waved her wand over the box, no longer detecting magic. As she waved her wand once more, the lid of the box revealed itself. Sliding it off the box, she found a note inside.

Hermione,

I apologise for using this box to trick you into collaborating with me. I suspect a better use of this box would be to store the orchid we preserved earlier today.

Severus

Leaning against the back of the settee, Hermione smiled as she thought of all she had accomplished.

~The End~

End Notes: A special thank you to Bambu for loaning me her box from her story "Calling Card" posted on OWL. It's a lovely story.

Original Prompt:

1. Snape and Hermione meet up in a library. Do they help each other out? Criticize the other's research tactics?
2. Hermione gets possession of a mysterious box and Snape becomes involved.

How did she get the box? What does it look like? What's inside?

If you are able to work the portraits (especially Phineas) into the fic I would be ever so happy!