

Independent Study

by Anastasia

"Quite a vocabulary."

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Disclaimer: All characters belong to JKR. I am merely paying homage.

AN: A debt of gratitude, as always, to Ariadne.

For those of you wondering, yes, these two are my Hermione and Severus from the 'Of Debts' universe. While you need not read that fic to enjoy this, there are subtle things inserted for those who have.

"It's here, I know it..." Hermione muttered, tilting her head and trailing a finger along the spines as she walked.

Lifting the lantern higher, she tried to keep it steady while walking along the uneven floor. Each time lightning flashed, she caught a better glimpse of the titles and knew she was in the right section. Warm light shuffled layered shadows as she held the lantern higher, following the alphabetical progression downward.

Hermione mumbled the titles aloud, adding a comment or two as to whether or not they'd help her research. Pulling a few books off of a lower shelf, she placed them on a table and settled down to read. Time passed in quiet contemplation, the sound of her turning pages and the scratch of her quill a soothing melody.

The lantern's flame leaned to the side, then snapped back up, catching her attention for a brief moment. A distant flash of lightning etched harsh shadows across the books, then faded, leaving a slow, cascading tremor in its wake.

The flame flickered once more, swaying, then lay flat down a quick movement.

Suddenly she was pulled out of the chair, grasped by the shoulders, spun around and pressed up against the shelves. A deep kiss, filled with the desperation of the here and now, his weight against her, the books behind her back, shifting, his hands in her hair. Several books tumbled to the floor around them. Her fingers twisted over in his robes, tearing, pulling him closer. Another book next to her head threatened to fall until his hand left her hair and shoved the book back into the shelf, ramming it flush with the others, rattling the row into submission. Needing to breathe, fighting it, never wanting to let go, they broke to gasp the same shared breath of air, lingering, taking each other's lips in turn, slowing in hesitant degrees.

Lightning flared again, exposing the nearby window, projecting gray light in distorted pieces along the shelves. They met each other's gaze in an instant of full brightness before it faded once more.

Severus held her hand, turning it over, the dim lantern light revealing an expression born of pure desire.

Raising her hand to his lips, he asked politely, "Where are my manners? Research, I presume?"

Trying to regain her breath, Hermione placed her free hand on his chest, drawing it away when her fingers automatically started to work the buttons on his coat.

"You are, as usual, a step ahead," she smirked, pushing him away, but not before she noticed the intense heat permeating the wool.

He followed, grinning as she stepped backwards, finding herself against another bookcase.

Dark curtains rose as he gripped her wrists, raised their arms together and brought his robes up around both of them. Lingered near her neck, his breathing slow, measured, washing over her chest as he looked down, his hair brushing against her face, settling along her cheek, falling.

"Something happens in the dark, Hermione," he murmured against her skin, teeth taking hold, a kiss replacing the mark. "The most primitive instincts rise to the surface. I believe you know that."

A long pause as each time she ventured to speak, he would move to an even more sensuous place, amazing her that he could still unnerve her with even the most innocent of touches.

"Somewhat," she breathed, tilting her head up, voice wavering when he brushed his lips along her cheek. Maddeningly light. Her knees threatened to give until he swiftly pushed his hips against her, pinning her against the shelves.

A rush of breath, deep laughter sending a low vibration into her bloodstream, spurring rational thought out and barring the door. Spreading her arms slowly out to the side, leaning harder, his teeth barely touching, following the curve of her ear. Her hands flexed against his, intertwining their fingers, feeling the heavy texture of his robes in each palm. A book shifted deeper into the shelf as her knuckles pressed against the imprinted title on the spine. Sliding into the depths before hitting the end.

Lowering his head, plunging her into darkness, finding her lips by her trembling breath and kissing her lightly, parting with pensive care.

Warm breath against her ear, a shudder rippling through her as he began to speak.

"Without light, the mind is forced to feel, to curse, mourn and flare to sensual life, to spiral down into the carnal darkness, and, ultimately, turn inward, revel in light's absence and even rejoice in its death. There is an undeniable attraction to that release, a savage beauty in the freedom to act on those wishes so often abandoned as extreme. Thoughts, sometimes prayers, only spoken of in the deep recesses of the instinctual mind. Desires held close. Denied. Never requested, never aloud..."

The lightest of kisses, barely a touch. He spread his fingers, his robes fell away and her lantern blew out, leaving them in darkness save for the faraway light of a gathering storm.

"But in the dark, yes, those barriers fade so that the mind drifts, reaches out and crosses over; abandoning rational thought for the pure fluidity of emotion. Words fall away so that only images reign; an erotic touch or the offering of fulfillment, the possibility of desires becoming reality. Only the singular word granting permission is sought, fought for, pursued with a raging instinct that shocks the meek and empowers the strong. It is, you see, the nature of us all, magical or not, the raw truth of what we all are in the end."

Tilting his head, Severus murmured against her throat as he brought an arm around her, "Dance with me."

Hermione leaned her face into his hair and smiled.

His hand splayed across her chest, thumb tracing over her heart. "It is certainly a crime against some greater entity to lose a moment such as this."

She covered his hand with hers, the heat of his palm burning, the fleeting lightning flickering only enough to reveal a gleam in his eye. Taking his hand, she held it and traced a light circle in his palm. He immediately stilled, remembering, watching how she traced an intricate pattern, creating the slightest friction as she traveled out to the ends of each finger, returned and then departed. Tilting her head, she kissed him softly, her fingers wavering over his skin, moving up to touch the buttons along his sleeves, dragging her nails down the row.

"Possibly," she whispered softly. A glance, a light only for him.

Severus surged forward, backing her against the shelves again, tearing her shirt aside, alternating feverish kisses and desperate attempts for air. Books shifted behind her, leaning over, falling off the shelves in a furious cascade. Hermione shifted aside, one hand gripping onto his hair, the other reaching out blindly behind her, grasping onto the back of a chair for balance. Severus pursued her further, reaching around her and pushing the chair aside to tumble to the floor. Backing up, Hermione found herself against a table, bending, her fingers twisting into his coat, grinding the buttons together. Hanging on with an arm around his neck, she returned his kiss with equal fury, her free hand attempting to free the buttons from the bottom up.

His hand grasped hers tightly, pulling it free. His lips were next to her ear, hot breath sending chills down her spine, rasping between ragged breaths, "Not yet."

A single shadow over Severus' shoulder caught Hermione's eye, a change in depth, indicating where the row of shelves ended. It then took on a defined shape and was now a long rectangular strip of light on the floor. As the sound of voices reached them, Hermione quickly grasped Severus' hand, pulled him off balance to his knees, shoved him under the table and pushed him to lie down. Lying next to him, she quickly pressed a hand on his chest when he tried to rise.

"Hermione, we're..." he growled, but her hand found his mouth in the dark and held him close.

She heard Minerva McGonagall and Irma Pince enter the library. Severus was still struggling to rise, muttering and shoving her hand away. Having no intention of being found like a rogue pair of students, Hermione blocked his hand and climbed on top of him.

She didn't need to see his face to know that he was shocked beyond all comprehension.

The voices were drawing closer, towards the sitting area on the other side of the row of shelves. Hermione almost groaned when she heard the sound of a lantern settling onto a table and a muttered, "*Lumos*."

Turning back to Severus, Hermione could barely see his face by the dim light now filtering through the shelves. Ignoring the witches' idle conversation, Hermione shifted over him and caught the look in his eyes.

Hermione dropped her head next to his and softly whispered, "You know... in the dark..."

When she laid her hand on his chest, freeing the first button, he moved to rise again, only stopping when she kissed him, ran her hand up into his hair and twisted slightly. A warning. Staring into his eyes and working the buttons on his coat, she dared him to move.

"You cannot be serious," he hissed, twisting away when she went to cover his mouth again.

"Cast a Silencing Charm then..." she whispered with a devilish grin, "if you must."

His eyes narrowed at the satisfied look on her face. "Hermione, I..." he growled softly, hesitating when Irma raised her voice to make some mundane point. He grasped her hands, trying to slow her progress down his chest, finding that she was already pushing the coat open, raising herself up to lay it aside. Struggling to rise, Severus had sat up part way when Hermione kissed him roughly and shoved his coat over his shoulders, pinning his arms to his sides.

Hermione brushed his hair away from his eyes and trailed her finger across his cheek. Lowering her head, she began to leave progressively lighter kisses high up behind his ear. As he turned away and tensed, she gripped his shoulders and breathed along the back of his neck, fighting a smile when he drew a breath in sharply through

clenched teeth.

When Minerva commented on the quiet atmosphere of the library at that time of night, Hermione grinned and moved to look into his eyes.

"Are you denying me?" she whispered with a smirk.

"Never," he hissed with indignation.

"Well then?"

Severus closed his eyes and sighed. "I cannot..."

Hermione rocked back, downward, then drew up by degrees, neglecting to suppress a grin at his strangled moan.

"You seem to be experiencing a betrayal of sorts here."

A glance between them in the low light; hers of triumph and his of reluctant surprise. He struggled to free his arms, only succeeding in tearing several buttons off, sending one to roll along the floor. They both watched it travel, wavering as it rolled, then laid to rest out in the aisle.

In plain view.

Hermione and Severus both froze listening.

Minerva's voice continued, arguing in a bored tone against Irma's position that the students be punished more severely for late library books and poor behavior.

Hermione leaned down, her hands on his shoulders, kissing a path around his throat and along his jaw line. She released one button on his shirt, shaking her head from side to side when he growled softly, a vibration against her hand. He tilted his head up as she moved, both a protest and concession at once.

"You can't deal with this, can you?" Hermione dared to whisper when Irma spoke louder, making her point by offering several examples of wayward students, including those who used her library to perform what she considered to be "barbaric acts" upon each other.

His eyes slipped closed, and he swallowed hard before opening them again, eyes darting to the side when Irma mentioned several pairs of students she had chased out of the stacks in just the past week.

"Insolent woman," he gasped, his words ending in a slow, strangled moan when Hermione's hand moved from his chest, slipped downward and paused at his hip.

His breathing settled to a long absence, followed with a deep gasp when her hand touched his waist, hooking a finger over the button. Waiting. Intimate with every breath he took, she watched his face, the light throwing a shadow along his cheekbone, dividing, changing with the motion of his jaw.

Gritting his teeth, a plea falling from his lips in a desperate whisper of his last breath, "Lower."

Shifting her shoulder, her hand moving from his hip, over, palm first, down, dipping low, lightly at first, then with confidence, pressing through the fabric, using it to generate friction, a pattern.

Severus laid with his head tilted back, his hair splayed out over the ancient wooden floor, settling into the uneven gaps, his throat working, mouth falling open.

A blessing, confirmation and admission all in a single word. "Yes."

Hermione grinned and dragged her nails down his chest, drifting over to the side to pass over his ribs, then back over his stomach to release another few buttons. She repeated the process slowly until the shirt laid open. His heart was pounding, mindlessly, she knew.

Less than ten feet away, the two witches were engaged in a spirited discussion.

"They're so close, Severus," she breathed against his bare chest, smiling when his muscles tensed as he stifled a groan. "The things I could do to you. While they're discussing punishment of all things."

In a voice that would have clearly exposed them if Minerva hadn't called for a house-elf at the same moment, Severus growled, "Free me."

Hermione whispered, "With pleasure." She shifted over him, lifted up and stared into his wide eyes as she worked the small buttons, took him in her hand, quickly pulled her robes and underclothes aside and guided him inside.

Covering his mouth, feeling the frantic rise and fall of his chest under her. His breath hitched, stopping, hips arching up to meet her. Throwing her hands out to the floor, she held her breath as he gripped her, driving upwards, harder, his eyes shining in the light filtering through the shelves.

With eyes shut and teeth bared, he rose, threw his head back and fought to shrug his coat off. Rolling over, he roughly kissed her, moaning softly into her mouth, his hands lost in her hair, leaning, her hands on his hips, pulling, demanding more. Her arms reaching upwards, taking hold of the table's leg, holding on, finding leverage.

Somewhere in the back of his mind, Minerva was discussing teenage hormones: how they couldn't help themselves at times and needed guidance and vigilance. The words faded, layers torn apart into meaningless sounds, blurred, lost in the dark. Somewhere in a raging torrent of images, a wand was produced and several spells muttered before it was tossed aside to clatter to the floor.

Hermione took hold of his shirt in her fists, tearing, ignoring how the fabric gave at the seams. Robes. They were still held by the clasp, dragging over her with each movement, sliding along the floor, rough wool against ancient wood. She could hear Minerva and Irma's conversation, her fractured mind following the words before they twisted over onto themselves and spiraled away. Fabric slid over them, plunging them into the dark. His voice, murmuring words only for her, a feral growl accompanying each phrase, some in another language, profound declarations needing no translation. Tone wavering, undulating furiously with each motion, reinforced with each passionate touch and caress, both holding her to this world and creating another.

Falling into the depths, nothing but the sense of touch, joined as one, a peace from within, then the fiery twist of desire, igniting a surge in emotion breaking over the ramparts. Anticipation of the touch, pure instinctual drive, searching, eyes wide open and shut at once, walls crumbling, shoved aside, rising higher. Each touch a plea, a prayer, a vow surging higher to arc, crash down and erupt into an oath, a dying proclamation of an eternal bond, taken willingly, held forcefully and defended with an impassioned power that could never be denied.

"Severus, a word please?"

Minerva watched as Severus twisted in his chair, either irritated at the interruption or at losing a spirited argument with Hermione involving numerous pieces of parchment and a rather intimidating book one of them had dragged to the High Table. It was a poorly kept secret that they were academically competitive and had, no doubt, come up with another point to research furiously in the hope of proving each other wrong.

After Severus walked alongside her to the Entrance Hall, Minerva stopped and informed him, "Severus, you are, no doubt, aware of the properties of certain charms?"

His eyes narrowed in suspicion. "Of course. Is there a point, Minerva?"

"Oh, there is, Severus. If you will allow me to finish? While I know you were an exemplary student in most subjects, I do believe your weakness was, indeed, Charms."

Severus scowled, his hand resting on the banister. He glanced at it for a moment before drawing his hand away and looking elsewhere.

"You are, then, aware that some charms require both concentration and possibly recasting at intervals to remain fully effective?" Minerva asked casually.

A change in the light of his eyes, nothing more.

Minerva looked at him seriously as she held out her hand and placed a single black button on the banister.

"You have quite a vocabulary."