

You Get What You Give

by Brenjunk

What happens when Hermione's accomplishments are not appreciated by everyone?

One-Shot

Chapter 1 of 1

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Disclaimer: They belong to JKR; that's why she's got all the money.

Hermione Snape raced from her personal lab and over to her fireplace. She quickly reached for the pot of Floo powder, took a pinch and threw it into the flames.

"Hogwarts: Herbology professor's quarters!" she called clearly and bent over to stick her head into the flames.

"Neville!" she yelled once the connection had been made.

After a few moments Hermione heard Neville Longbottom answering her summons from another room in his quarters.

"Hermione, what's up?"

"It's time. I can hardly believe it, but I've got it!" she responded excitedly.

"You're serious?"

"Meet me at St. Mungo's in five minutes. I hope you didn't have any plans for tonight."

Before she could hear his answer, she disconnected the Floo. Barely suppressing squeals of laughter, she rushed around her flat picking up her notebook, cloak and several vials of ruby-colored potion.

I hope I've got everything I need. This better work!

With a few final thoughts, she rushed back to the fireplace.

Exactly five minutes later Hermione joined Neville in the lobby of St. Mungo's. Together they started to rush to the Janus Thickey ward.

Hermione appeared to be on the warpath as she stalked down the corridor of the fourth floor with Neville trailing behind her.

"Hermione, slow down! They aren't going anywhere!" Neville called out to his companion.

"I've waited long enough, Neville. Come to think of it, you've waited even longer!"

Half-way down the hall Hermione was accosted by one of the nurses for the ward.

"Healer Snape! I'm glad you're here, I've been meaning to ask you..."

"Can't now, Merideth. I've got very important business to take care of," Hermione responded as she kept moving towards her destination.

Finally the two long-time friends reached the hospital room of Frank and Alice Longbottom. As they stepped into the room, they found Neville's parents sitting up companionably in their respective hospital beds.

"All right, this is what I want to do," Hermione said as she turned to Neville. "I'm obviously going to need to take care of one of them at a time. Do you have a preference as to who should go first?"

Neville stared at both of his parents briefly and then said, "Mum."

Without another word Hermione walked to the bedside of Alice Longbottom. She reached into her bag and pulled out one of the potion vials she took from her flat, uncorked it and held it out to Alice.

"Alice, it's time for your medicine. I'm going to help you with it," Hermione said softly.

Together the two women guided the potion to Alice's lips, and she began to swallow its contents. As soon as the vial was empty, Alice's body went shockingly stiff as if she had been hit with Petrificus Totalus. Next, Hermione took out her wand and began waving it over Alice's body while chanting quietly. After her spell work had been completed, she stared down at her patient, waiting for the desired response.

"Come on... Come on, Alice, you can do it," Hermione whispered from Alice's bedside.

Minutes stretched for what felt like hours, and Hermione turned to Neville to apologize. Just as she began to open her mouth, there was a groan from the hospital bed. Hermione quickly turned back towards the bed and found Alice staring back at her. There was something different about her eyes, though; the eyes staring back at her weren't vacant. They were alive.

Without turning away from the woman holding her gaze, Hermione reached her left hand behind her, beckoning to Neville. In a flash she felt his larger hand enclose around hers, and he was standing next to her at his mother's bed-side.

"Mum?" Neville asked quietly while looking down at his mother.

Hermione backed away from the bed so Neville could get closer to his mother. She watched the tears started streaming from Alice's eyes as she reached both of her arms out to her son.

"Neville..."

Hermione couldn't stop herself from crying as well as she watched mother and son embrace.

Get it together! You've still got to cure Frank too! He deserves to be a part of this reunion!

A few moments later, Hermione walked to the other side of the room and repeated the same process with Frank. She was quiet enough that neither Alice nor Neville noticed what she had done. That was until Frank Longbottom sat up in his bed and called out to his wife and son.

The Longbottoms were reunited at last.

Hermione continued to watch for a few minutes as Neville hugged and cried with his parents before she decided to interrupt them.

"Hey, everyone, I'm sorry to interrupt, but I've got to do a few diagnostic spells just to make sure everything is as it should be. Then I've got to Floo Severus and tell the Healer on duty what's been going on in here."

Frank and Alice both smiled at her and nodded.

Hermione preformed the spells she needed to do for her records. Before she could exit the room, Neville pulled her towards him and wrapped her in a fierce embrace.

"Thank you, Hermione. Thank you so, so much. I don't think I'll ever be able to repay you for this."

"No repayment necessary; I'm simply overjoyed that this worked and that you've finally got your parents back! Now, let me go. Severus is probably wearing a hole in the carpet waiting to hear from me."

"Why isn't he here?" Neville asked as he finally released her.

"I told him I didn't want a huge crowd for several different reasons, and as much as I love his support, I didn't want him to be here if I failed...." Hermione answered honestly.

"Go on then, we'll be here when you get back."

With that Hermione waved at Neville's parents and quickly exited the room in search of a fireplace.

The next day...

After a well deserved eight hours' worth of rest, Hermione ventured out to her tiny kitchen in search of coffee and the newspaper.

I wonder if yesterday's events made the paper...

She sat down at her small dining table with her coffee and unrolled the Daily Prophet to peruse the news...

Longbottoms Cured!

Late Tuesday night, Healer Hermione Snape cured Frank and Alice Longbottom of Cruciatus-induced insanity. The Longbottoms have been patients of the Janus Thickety ward of St. Mungo's since 1980 after being cursed repeatedly by Bellatrix Lestrange. Snape, most well-known for playing a large part in the downfall of He-Who-Still-Isn't-Named, has been working tirelessly for years to cure her friend's parents. (Continued on Page 3)

She smiled as she read the blurb under the headline and proceeded to skim the front page.

Hermione Snape To Be Granted Dilys Derwent Award!

After the events of last evening at St. Mungo's, we have already received word that Healer Hermione Snape will be given the prestigious Derwent Award. This award is

given to Healers who create a groundbreaking level of medical advancement. With the award, St. Mungo's will also issue a grant of several thousand galleons to its recipient for further research of their choosing.

Hermione's eyes nearly popped out.

"Oh... oh, wow... I never even thought... not even dreamed... I wasn't even doing this for any kind of recognition! This is just more than I ever could have hoped for!"

She dreamily set the paper down on the table as Severus came into the kitchen. He came over and placed a kiss on her cheek.

"Good morning, love. Is the paper full of the wonders of your cure?"

She smiled at him. "I can't believe this, Severus. They want to give me the Derwent award!"

Severus raised an eyebrow at her. "Really?" He pulled her up out of her chair and embraced her. "I can think of no one who would be more deserving, Hermione."

Hermione's arms encircled his neck, and she kissed him brazenly. Pulling back, she looked deeply into his eyes. "How can a man who sneers at everyone always know the right thing to say to his wife?"

Severus shrugged. "I have always been appreciative of intelligence. You know that."

At that moment a memo came sailing through the Floo and landed on the hearth rug. Severus reluctantly unwrapped himself from Hermione and went to retrieve the parchment. Scowling down at it for interrupting his 'Hermione time', he turned back to Hermione and reached out to give her the parchment.

"This is for you from the Ministry," he explained as he handed it to her.

She took the parchment and shook her head to clear it. So much had happened in the space of twenty-four hours, she wasn't quite sure she could take anything else. She gazed at Severus before opening the parchment. Reading through the note quickly she squealed and handed it to Severus for him to read.

Healer Hermione Snape,

St. Mungo's Hospital for Magical Maladies and Injuries has informed us that you are the recipient of the coveted Dilys Derwent Award for Groundbreaking Medical Achievement.

We would like to congratulate you on this impressive achievement.

A ceremonial banquet will be held in your honor on 12 December in the Ministry Ceremonial Hall. You will be presented with your award on that date. The Ministry congratulates you once again, and we look forward to seeing you at the banquet.

Kingsley Shacklebolt

Minister of Magic

Severus looked up at her, a smile on his face. "It looks like we need to prepare for a celebration."

Hermione caught her breath as she entered the large hall. The room was filled with tables, each holding at least nine guests. She saw her colleagues, Ministry officials, members of the media, friends, family and well-wishers all looking to her as she entered hand in hand with Severus. She suddenly halted, and her hand clenched in his.

Severus moved to her side and whispered in her ear. "Have I told you how stunning you look tonight?"

In fact, he had. At least three times. When he'd entered the bedroom and seen her standing in the floor-length black evening gown, he'd let out a low whistle and wrapped her in his arms.

As they'd prepared to Apparate to the Ministry, he'd suddenly grabbed her and kissed her passionately, stating afterwards that she'd enchanted him with her beauty.

Then, just before they'd entered the hall, he'd looked at her upswept hair and pulled a ringlet that framed her face.

"You look beautiful with your hair up like this, my love," he'd said. She'd beamed at him.

Now, though, fear had settled in her bones at the sight of so many people, and his words helped her to shake the fear off and move along. She looked at him gratefully.

"You are the most amazing man in the world."

Renewed by his remark, she began to walk again. He led her to their table, front and center of the room. Before they were seated, Kingsley stood and embraced Hermione.

"Excellent work, Hermione. You've given the Longbottoms back their lives. You should be proud."

Hermione smiled at him. "I'm just happy that all my research finally helped them."

She was suddenly embraced from behind. Frank and Alice Longbottom had risen from their seats at the table and were now surrounding her.

"We can't thank you enough, Mrs. Snape, for everything," Alice said with tears in her eyes.

Frank Longbottom looked to Hermione with misty eyes and nodded, too overcome to say anything. Neville came up and smiled at Hermione. He placed a hand on Alice's shoulder.

"Come on, Mum, Dad. I think they want to start."

With the guest of honor finally seated, the dinner part of the ceremony began. Everyone enjoyed the lavish banquet served by the Ministry. Severus was delighted to find roast beef and Yorkshire pudding as part of the offerings, and Hermione enjoyed a perfectly cooked steak with morel mushrooms. The Longbottoms, having had to sustain themselves with hospital food for years, gushed over the simplest of fairs. Even the fruit and cheese plate seemed like a luxury to them.

Once everyone had eaten their fill, Kingsley made his way to the podium behind the honoree table and began to speak.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I thank you for being here today. We are here to celebrate a very important event. Hermione Snape has achieved an astounding miracle through hard work and research. She has developed a cure for Cruciatus-induced psychosis. We are here tonight to honor her achievement. Because of her research, victims like Frank and Alice Longbottom can be cured and live normal lives."

Applause thundered throughout the room.

"Without further ado, I give you the Healer-in-Charge of St. Mungo's Hospital, Hugo Cornblith."

More applause greeted the short, stout man who made his way to the podium. Pushing his glasses up before he began, he cleared his throat and spoke.

"Healer Snape, during your tenure at St. Mungo's you have shown a caring for your patients that is unsurpassed. It is no wonder you have discovered this cure for those who have suffered such misery under the Cruciatus curse. Your work shows great initiative.

"The Dilys Derwent Award for Groundbreaking Medical Achievement was established for the purpose of honoring those who go far beyond the normal requirements of their positions. Certainly, Healer Granger is the epitome of such a person. Therefore it is my pleasure to present you, Hermione Snape, with this award."

He held up a beautiful onyx statuette of a Healer with her arms crossed over her heart. In her left hand was a diagnostic wand and in her right hand a daffodil, which symbolized hope. Hermione rose from her place at the table and made her way to the podium. She took the statue and fought back the tears that had formed in her eyes.

"Thank you, Healer Cornblith," she said with a nod toward the short man. "I am truly honored to receive this award tonight." Looking down at Alice and Frank, she smiled at them. "My reasons for becoming a Healer are sitting in this room tonight. As a young girl, I first met Alice and Frank Longbottom. My heart went out to their son, my friend Neville, who had not been able to converse normally with his parents his entire life. Something in me wanted to see them cured."

"Thus started my journey to becoming a Healer. After many years of study, I finally felt ready to begin researching the cure for the Longbottoms. It took many more years of trial and error before this cure became a reality. Now, not just Frank and Alice Longbottom will reap the benefits, but anyone who suffers from such horrible tortures can regain their lives again."

Hermione looked out into the audience, her gaze finally landing on Severus. "I'm so very grateful that you saw fit to honor me. I'd like to thank you all, but especially I'd like to thank my husband, Severus Snape, without whose support this task would have been abandoned long ago."

She raised the award high. The room erupted in applause. Smiling, she made her way back to her seat. Severus grasped her hand and kissed her cheek as she settled back in. Her smile at him was beatific.

At the press table, Lavender Brown, reporter for the *Quibbler*, sat next to Rita Skeeter, reporter for the *Prophet*. Both women frowned as they watched Hermione sit down. Lavender leaned over to Rita, who'd become a friend in the last few years. "Can you believe her? Smug as always!"

"I can't believe it at all!" Skeeter mused. "She hardly deserves that award. It's time someone put her in her place!"

The two women looked at each other. Who better than to set the world straight about Hermione Snape than them?

At six o'clock in the morning the day after the celebration Hermione's alarm went off, much to her husband's displeasure.

"You've got to be kidding," Severus groaned as he rolled over.

"I'm sorry, Severus," Hermione responded as she got out of their bed and turned off the offending object.

"You knew I had to work today. People don't stop getting sick just because I had a party," she continued while moving around their bedroom.

"I'm not getting out of this bed until the sun actually rises; I'll see you when you get home."

"Yes, dear," she said as she walked over to his side of the bed.

Hermione moved the comforter away from her husband's face and leaned over to give him a kiss.

"I love you."

"I love you, too, now leave."

Hermione could only smile as she exited her bedroom.

She continued with her usual morning routine. With coffee and newspaper in hand, she sat at their kitchen table. The front page of the *Daily Prophet* was full of wonderful photos from the celebration the night before. Since she was actually there, she decided to turn the pages and peruse the rest of the news.

On the editorial page, she read a headline that caused her breath to hitch as she stared at it in disbelief.

Snape Undeserving Of Award!

Last evening, this reporter attended the celebration for the presentation of the coveted Dilys Derwent award. The recipient of this award, as most of you may know, was none other than Hermione (Granger) Snape. I find the bestowing of this recognition on her, of all people, to be highly suspect. The cure she supposedly invented is part potion and part spell-work. It may have slipped past the board members of St. Mungo's, but did no one notice that she's married to a Potions master?

Hermione couldn't read any further due to the moisture that happened to be collecting in her eyes.

"Damn that woman," she cursed as she wiped her eyes.

"Forget this, I'm just going to go to work."

As quickly as she could manage without disturbing Severus, Hermione finished getting ready and left their quarters to start her work day.

When Hermione arrived at St. Mungo's, she could immediately tell that something was different. She walked down the hall towards her office, and everywhere she looked Healers and nurses were huddled together and looking at her.

Maybe I'm just being self-conscious...

She rounded the last corner before her office, and as she approached a nurse who had her back turned, she overheard her say, "Her Death Eater husband probably did all the work anyway! It's just not right that Miriam's been here for thirty-five years and has never received any kind of recognition for the work she's been doing!"

Instead of walking past the gossiping nurse, Hermione simply turned around and headed for the closest ladies room.

She walked straight to the stall furthest from the door, closed herself inside, and cast Muffliato.

Once safely ensconced, she let the tears fall freely.

"I swear I just wanted to help those poor people. That's why I became a Healer after all... and now... now it's not even worth it. I don't need this kind of drama, I swear I don't. I work so hard for these people and this is the kind of thanks I get...."

Hermione heard someone enter the ladies room, and then heard the new occupant lock and ward the door.

"Hermione, I know you're in here. Please come out, and talk to me...."

She cancelled her Muffliato and answered the other woman in the room.

"Hannah, now's not a good time. I'm really not feeling well..."

"I know you aren't feeling well, please come out."

Hermione trusted Hannah Abbott not to judge her obviously splotchy appearance. So, she decided to unlock her stall door and step out into the main area of the room.

"Why don't you take the day off, and I'll take care of your patients?" Hannah asked quietly.

"Oh, Hannah, I couldn't... you've got your own work load to take care of..."

"Hermione, you're not going to be able to get anything done anyway."

"I can't run away just because some cranky women feel like talking badly about me."

"How much do you know?"

"I read part of that blasted Skeeter woman's article before I left this morning. Then, when I was heading to my office, I overheard some nurse talking about how Healer Strout from the Thickey ward should have received the award instead... and that... oh, it's not important."

"Hermione, you should know that Lavender also ran a column this morning in the *Quibbler*..."

"You've got to be kidding. What's she saying?"

"Only that she thinks that it's unfair how the wizarding world is in love with Ron, and Harry, and you after all this time, and that no matter how old we get, any time any of you do something miniscule they need to recognize it. She is apparently still extremely bitter over the fact that she fought and was injured in the final battle and never received any kind of recognition for it, so she's taking it out on you."

"I can't believe this is happening. I never asked for that damn award. All I wanted was to cure Neville's parents and all the other victims! I just wanted to help them!"

"I know, Hermione. You're such a dedicated Healer, and I know you don't deserve any of what is circulating today. But you need to take the day to clear your head and let some of this die down. If you try to muscle through this, they'll just talk more. Well, they'll probably talk no matter what. At least if you go home, you can see your husband and give yourself some time to think without dealing with them too."

"I. Don't. Run."

"Hermione, you aren't running. You're reevaluating the situation and formulating a plan of action. Now, Disillusion yourself and stay close to me. I'm going to open the door, and we're both going to walk out. I'm going to stay right in front of you until we get to the lobby. Okay?"

Hermione stood staring at Hannah for a few moments before nodding in the affirmative.

The two women made short work of navigating the halls of St. Mungo's without incident. In no time, Hermione found herself back in her living room, where she immediately knelt down on the floor and began to cry once more.

Severus heard a whining sound and turned over in the bed. He blinked curiously. He knew he couldn't have slept the day away. He glanced at the clock and saw it was still early morning. Could Hermione be back already? Why would she return from work so early? Maybe she'd forgotten something. He turned over and tried to settle back in to the bed when the sounds of his wife weeping came from the other room. In an instant, he'd left the bed and hurried into the living room.

She was on the floor, sobbing. With a worried look, he rushed to her and knelt beside her.

"What is it?" he asked with concern.

"Oh, Severus!" she cried and threw herself into his arms.

The whole story rushed out of her so quickly that Severus had a hard time keeping up. Between her rushed words and gulps and sobs, he did determine that his wife was the victim of severe jealousy. He rubbed her back comfortingly.

"Shh, Hermione, shhh. It's all right," he soothed.

"They said you brewed the cure, and I just used it to get the award!"

He pulled her back and smoothed out the curls that lay damp against her cheek. "Now, we both know that's hogwash."

Her lips thinned, but she nodded slightly.

"What else are those foolish, catty witches saying?"

"They think that Miriam Strout deserves the Derwent more than I because she's been here so much longer and done so much more."

"Yes, she definitely did much, much more, letting a dangerous plant into the ward and nearly killing everyone. I suppose she's lucky there was only one fatality."

Hermione's watery eyes met his. She held his gaze for a minute, then started to chuckle. "It is amazing she's still employed at the hospital, isn't it?" she muttered.

"Tenure..." Severus mused.

Hermione's smile faded quickly. "Still, Severus, when I walked through the halls they were all staring at me. Some were even glowering. Why is it every time I get a little recognition, everyone comes out of the woodwork to revile me?"

Severus' hand came up, and he stroked her cheek. "Hermione, love, they are just jealous. Most of them don't have a quarter of your intelligence. They wish they could do what you do so easily. They're simply trying to make themselves feel better about their own mediocrity by putting down someone truly brilliant."

Hermione looked down, and he tugged at her cheek to gather her attention once again.

"Look at me. You know what you did was fantastic. Award or not, you achieved greatness with that cure. The Derwent recognition is simply icing on the cake. If the whole world decides to hate you for that, well, that is their loss. Those who really matter...those who know who you really are...would never, ever think of saying such things about you. Please, love, stop fretting about this."

He wiped her tears away as she looked at him. Softly, she answered him. "Of course you're right."

"When have I ever been wrong?" Severus asked with a smirk.

She threw her arms around him and pulled him close. "Never when it's been important!"

It was some time later that Severus left their home. He'd made sure that Hermione was in better spirits before leaving. His mood had seemed light when he'd told her he'd needed to go out to get some potions ingredients. She'd wanted to come, but he'd discouraged her by telling her it was the nastier things that were needed. They always made her squeamish, and she'd made her excuses.

But he wasn't going to get ingredients at all. His lighthearted grin turned into a scowl as he left his room and raced up the Hogwarts stairs. He was furious... simply furious about the way his wife had been treated. It had all started with that article from Skeeter. She would pay. He would make sure of it.

Making his way to the Apparition point, he Disillusioned himself and disappeared with a sharp crack.

In an instant he was standing outside the offices of the Daily Prophet. He quickly rushed behind someone entering the building and silently made his way to Skeeter's office. To his delight, the door was open. Skeeter was at her desk, talking to a Quick-Quotes Quill. He crept into her office and stationed himself in the corner.

"And this reporter feels it is high time that the Ministry do something about this problem that seems to never go away," Skeeter dictated to her quill.

There was a knock at the door, and Skeeter looked up. "Ah! Lavender, come in!" she cried.

The younger witch did so, closing the door behind her before settling into the chair in front of Skeeter's desk.

"Hi, Rita! Did you see my article?"

Skeeter nodded. "It was perfect, Lav. Blaming her notoriety on her lackluster job during the war was brilliant!"

"I bet she's crying her eyes out right now. The bint always was overemotional."

Skeeter grinned. It wasn't a pretty look.

"So, on to business," she said to Lavender. "Did you bring the item?"

Lavender nodded. She reached into her bag and brought out a pair of black suede gloves.

"I've applied the salve to the palms of the gloves. You need only shake hands with him, and it will absorb into his skin, making him sing like a bird," Lavender explained.

Skeeter grinned once again. "And it will make his mind open to suggestions?"

"Of course. If he won't say what we want him to, there's no point in interviewing him, is there?"

"And without his interview, there will be no book for us to co-author," Skeeter agreed.

"Oh, I can see it now!" Lavender said in a dreamy voice. "Boy-Who-Lived-Again tells all in this stunning expose! We'll get the *Golden Quill* for this, Rita."

"Oh, that would be wonderful! Now, here's the plan: Tomorrow at one pm I'll go to his office in the Ministry with my special gloves on." She motioned to the attractive gloves on the desk. "I'll shake his hand, transferring the potion to him. Then, once the potion has taken effect, I'll tell him he wants to give me an interview. Once he's agreed to that, I'll steer the interview to our liking."

She reached down into her lowest drawer and pulled out a manuscript, dropping it on the desk next to the gloves.

"I'll record him telling me all the information we used to write this, then we'll be set to go to the publisher."

Lavender eyed the manuscript. "How will you ask the questions to get him to say what you want?"

Skeeter smirked. "It's all in the inflection." Her face took on a sly expression. "Oh, come Mister Potter, you can't expect me to believe you haven't been cheating on your wife! Rumors abound that you've been seen ducking into alleys with a blonde witch. You are having an affair!"

Lavender caught on to the excitement. "And you really are incompetent with a wand, aren't you? The only spell you can do correctly is Expelliarmus. That's why you used that against You Know Who!" She squealed and clapped her hands together.

"Oh, Rita! There won't be any way he'll be able to deny it once you have it all recorded! He'll be ruined!"

"And you will finally get some of the recognition you should have received after the war!" Rita proclaimed.

Lavender nodded and sighed. She waved the comment off and stood. "I must get back to the office. Floo me when it's done."

"Oh, I will," Rita assured her.

The younger witch left. Rita returned the manuscript to her desk drawer and stretched. "I think it's time for a well-deserved break," she said to herself. She picked up her purse and waltzed out of her office.

Severus' mind raced. He snuck over to the desk and tried to pull the drawer open. It was locked of course. An unlocking spell didn't work. That was all right. The Ministry would be able to get into the drawer when needed.

He stood, a plan quickly forming in his mind. Without a glance back, he left the office. He had much to do before tomorrow.

Severus stood out in the street in front of the *Daily Prophet* offices considering his next course of action.

What an interesting turn of events. I'm going to need to brew the counter potion to Ms. Brown's, and I'm going to need to speak with Mr. Potter.... If I start the potion first, then attempt to leave again, Hermione will want to come too, so I hope Potter won't mind me dropping by.

Within thirty minutes, Severus was knocking on the office door of number twelve, Grimmauld Place.

A mildly surprised Harry Potter answered his front door and gestured for Severus to enter.

"Severus, what a surprise! What can I do for you today?" Harry asked while leading Severus through the foyer and into the sitting room. Once there, Harry gestured for Severus to have a seat in a comfortable-looking arm-chair, then he sat in an identical one across from him.

"Potter... is your wife at home?" Severus asked while looking around.

"Not at the moment. I think she should be back soon, though...."

"Very well... it has been brought to my attention that there is a plot afoot to not only smear Hermione's reputation but your own as well."

"It's that nasty Skeeter woman, isn't it?"

"And Ms. Brown is her accomplice."

Severus then continued to relay the events of the morning including his visit to Ms. Skeeter's office.

Severus waited patiently for Potter to digest the enormity of his information; finally his companion decided to respond.

"Now she's gone too far. How do you want to do this?"

"I know what potion Ms. Brown has doused the gloves in. The counter-potion is relatively simple to produce. When you and I have finished here, I'm going to go back to my lab to take care of it. We'll have to determine a time and place to meet tomorrow morning so I can give it to you."

"How many people should we get involved in this?"

"I want to see these slags behind bars; I don't care if you have to hide the entire Auror Department in your office plus Kingsley, just make sure it happens."

"So, I'm going to use the counter-potion and pretend to be under the original potion's influence while Rita questions me."

"Correct."

"How far should I let her get?"

"Until she's through and ready to take her leave. I want her to thoroughly tie and tighten her own noose. Try to get her to mention that Ms. Brown is her co-conspirator, if you please."

"I'll keep it in mind."

"We'll need to have some type of recording device set up also, so she won't be able to say that she's being falsely accused. If we don't tape her, she'll have it all over the Prophet that you're going after her because of what she wrote about Hermione."

"Understood. I'll set it up."

"Any other questions, Potter?" Severus asked as he began to stand.

"No, I've got it under control. If I think of anything, I'll ask you in the morning. Meet me here at eight-thirty tomorrow. Just Floo right in. Ginny will already be gone, and I'll be expecting you."

Harry stood up and extended his hand to Severus.

"I'll see you then," he said while shaking Severus' hand.

Severus nodded in response, quickly walking down the hall and out of the house.

Before heading back to Hogwarts, Severus made a few quick stops to pick up the ingredients that he had told Hermione he would get while he was out.

When he returned to their quarters, he found his wife curled up on the couch with a large slice of chocolate cake and a box of tissues.

"Hermione, I know you're upset, but..."

Before he could finish his thought, his very disheartened wife looked up at him with red-rimmed eyes and said, "Was it worth it?"

Severus sat next to her and pulled the cake plate out of her hands. He reached over and set it down on the coffee table. After the cake was out of the way, he put his arm around his wife, allowing her to rest against him in a comfortable embrace. As she snuggled into his chest, he began to gently stroke her hair.

"Of course it was worth it; the Longbottoms have their lives back. I don't want you to worry anymore over Ms. Skeeter and Ms. Brown. They will get what they deserve, I assure you."

"How can you be so sure?" she asked quietly.

"These things have a way of working themselves out. Some people say it's karma; I simply think it's just the way of the world. It may not be immediate, but eventually people get what they give."

"I just want to hurt them as badly as they've hurt me."

"I know, but you're better than that."

"Thank you...."

Severus leaned over slightly to kiss her head and then said, "Why don't you see what Ginny's doing? I think you could use some positive female companionship right now. I appreciate spending time with you, but there's something that I need to brew today that will take me a few hours."

Surprised, Hermione sat up and looked at her husband.

"Is everything okay?"

"Hermione, I just told you that I enjoy spending time with you like this, but you're supposed to be at work right now. There are things I do in the lab when you're working on Sunday, and unfortunately this is something that simply can't wait."

Slightly sulking, Hermione said, "Okay, I'll call Ginny... I'll be home for dinner."

Severus leaned in and kissed his wife once more.

"All right then, I'll see you tonight," he said after he stood up.

While exiting their quarters, Severus could hear that his wife was already taking him up on his suggestion to call her best friend.

Hermione sat slouched over on Ginny's couch, a look of forlorn misery on her face. Ginny watched as her friend was slowly burying herself in despair.

"Hermione," she finally said in exasperation. "I know all of this is hard to bear, but you need to cheer up. Come on... consider the sources here! You've got an incompetent Healer who thinks she's the best thing to ever walk into St. Mungo's, a reporter that will stop at nothing to get her story, and a flighty girl who rides on the coattails of others to get ahead."

Hermione looked to her friend with watery eyes.

"I know, I just... I don't know, Ginny. I haven't felt this bad in ages."

Ginny's eyes brightened. "Remember that time Lavender was dating Ron?"

Hermione nodded her head at her friend. "I can hardly forget."

"No, I mean right after Christmas. She'd given him that necklace and gushed all over him." Ginny raised her voice about an octave. "Oh, Won-Won, it's... it's just beautiful around your neck! It brings out the red in your *hair*. Oh! And it symbolizes our undying looove! Oh! Won-Won, I loooove you!"

She made little kissy noises and blew a kiss at Hermione. A smile came across Hermione's face, and her eyes lit up.

"Oh, Lavender, it's beautiful!" she exclaimed, imitating Ron. Then she turned and pretended to whisper to someone next to her. "Harry, save me! She's a succubus!"

The two girls doubled over in laughter. Hermione shook her head. "She really *is* the ultimate leech, isn't she?"

Ginny smiled, happy that Hermione's mood seemed to be lightening. "Of course she is, Hermione. She's barely got a brain in that head of hers! Remember how she used to go around thinking she was a Seer?" She paused, and her eyes got wide.

"Remember when she told you that you were in grave danger?"

"I wonder if she saw Ron's rejection coming?"

Hermione mused before bursting into more laughter.

"Exactly, Hermione," Ginny affirmed. "You can't take anything she says seriously. It's the same for that cow, Skeeter. She thinks that everything that comes out of her quill is perfect. I heard she's impossible to work with. Not only does she slander people, if anyone calls her on it, or wants her to go into greater detail, she accuses them of stifling her creative juices. Then she throws a fit."

"Honestly, Hermione, you know all this. For Merlin's sake, you kept her in a jar because you knew what she was capable of."

Hermione sighed heavily. "Of course, you're right, Gin. I just wish that my colleagues would see that too. Seeing them look at me funny hurt worse than anything else."

"And who was doing the looking?" Ginny gave Hermione a caustic look. "You've told me about them, Hermione. Many of them think the world owes them a favor. Of course they're going to latch onto a bunch of drivel written by Skeeter and Brown." She grasped Hermione's hand and gave her a stern look. Trying to be like her mother, she laid down the law. "I will have no more of this feeling sorry for yourself. We should be celebrating. You've given two people their lives back. How many more will thank you eternally for what you've done?"

Hermione took a cleansing breath. "Ginny, you're right. I'm done. I'm done agonizing over this. I did something spectacular, and if people want to rail against me for it... so be it! Now, where's that ice cream you promised me?"

Severus stirred the black soup. Just one more ingredient and the potion would be finished. He carefully lifted the ground scarab beetle and poured it into the cauldron. As he stirred it in, the liquid turned a deep turquoise. He smiled to himself.

Snake, you've done it again.

He bottled the solution and left his lab. Moving quickly through the study, he was surprised to see Hermione Floo in just as he reached the lounge. She was smiling. He felt relief course over him, realizing that her visit had done her some good.

"Ah, you're back," he mused.

"Ah, you're done," she replied with a smile.

He wrapped her in his arms. "I'm free for the rest of the day."

Her arms came up around his neck. "Really? So am I. You see, it seems that the dunderheads I work with want to talk behind my back, so I let them struggle without me today. Let them worry about Mrs. Henson's fever and Mr. Stratheby's mummified toe. If they want to be catty, they can do everything themselves."

Severus looked at her lovingly. "I'm glad my Hermione is back to herself."

She pulled him to her and kissed him. "Thank you for everything earlier, Severus," she whispered after her lips had trailed kisses up to his ear.

"It helped a lot."

"It seems that Mrs. Potter helped even more. I'm glad to see you smile, my love." He kissed her promisingly. "Now, what shall we do with all this free time we have?"

She drew her finger along his jaw line. "I could think up a few things."

He smiled devilishly at her. "I'm sure you could."

Severus Floo'd to Potter's at eight-thirty, sharp. He stared at Potter's extended hand before shaking it. Producing a vial from his pocket, he handed it to Harry.

"Drink the whole thing," he instructed.

In a few seconds, Harry had downed the potion, smacking his lips together to get the taste out of his mouth.

"Really, Severus, don't potions come in better flavors than puke?"

The edges of Severus' lips turned up in a smirk.

Harry motioned him to a box set on his desk.

Inside was a bud vase and small wooden box inlaid with a beautiful flower pattern.

"These are recording devices, glamourised to look like ordinary objects. We'll place them in my office. I figured having more than one would be a good thing, in case one was discovered. I've arranged for four Aurors to be Disillusioned and stationed in each corner of the office. They'll take their posts right after lunch."

"I will be Disillusioned also. I have no classes at that time of day," Severus stated. There was no room for argument in his tone.

"Of course," Harry said deferentially. "This is your plan, after all."

"The potion I gave you will stay in your system for twenty-four hours, so you need not worry about it wearing off before Skeeter offers you her hand."

"Will your potion affect me before she touches me?"

"Only in positive ways. There's a wit-sharpening element to it. You may find problems easier to solve and understand things more clearly because of it."

"All right. Let's go to my office and set these recording devices up."

They used the Floo and got to work, placing the bud vase on Harry's desk and the box on the windowsill. Harry looked to Severus.

"Where will you be?"

"I'll place myself right behind your chair; that way if there is any trouble, I will be able to either shield you or take down Skeeter."

Harry gave Severus an amused look. "We will have Aurors in the room, you realize. I doubt you'll have to even lift your wand if there's any trouble. They're perfectly capable of keeping their boss safe."

"If you say so," Severus grumbled.

"You were a spy for too long, Severus. Skeeter doesn't suspect a thing. Everything should run like clockwork."

"That's just it, Mr. Potter. I've found that the best plans can go awry when you least expect it."

Harry nodded his head. "Of course, you're right. Better prepared for something unusual than to be surprised and unprepared."

Severus gave a slight nod in affirmation to Harry.

"All right, then. I'll see you back here at noon," Harry told his partner.

"Indeed," Severus said quietly before turning and leaving the office in a flurry of robes. He smirked to himself as he left. How he loved to make an exit.

Harry sat at his desk, studying his office to make sure there was no evidence of the multiple Aurors who were standing around. Finally feeling completely satisfied, he glanced at the clock on the wall.

"She should be here any minute..."

He felt a hand on his shoulder.

"Potter, are you all right?" Severus said quietly from behind him.

"Yeah, I just want to get this over with. I'm not looking forward to the questions she's going to ask or the things I'm going to have to agree to."

"She is a nasty bint, but by doing this we'll finally put an end to her lies."

Harry considered what Severus had just said, and how he'd said it. Smiling, he turned his chair around and cast Muffliato. He looked at the seemingly empty space, cancelled the Disillusionment charm and asked Severus a very personal question.

"Why are you here?"

"Potter, I've already explained this. I'm your backup."

"I know that's what you've said, but you know there are Aurors all around this room that are also my back up. Just be honest with me for once, Severus. It's for Hermione, isn't it? You really do love her."

"I knew the wit-sharpening aspect of that potion would be the death of me. Yes, Potter, I love her. This Skeeter woman has not only upset her, but has diminished a very special achievement that Hermione has worked very hard for. I plan to make sure Rita wishes she never lifted a quill in her life."

Harry nodded his head in response and then simply stated, "I'm glad she has you in her life. She deserves someone who is so committed to her and her well being."

"This is all very touching, Potter. I'm glad you finally approve, now can we get back to business?"

Harry and Severus quickly worked on setting themselves back up for Rita's arrival.

Moments later, there was a knock on the office door.

"Come in," Harry called out as he tried to look like he wasn't simply waiting for her to show up.

"Mr. Potter, I'm so glad you're in today!" Rita said as she smiled brilliantly and causally entered the office, closing the door behind her.

"Yes, Ms. Skeeter, what can I do for you?"

"Mr. Potter! I was hoping you might have a few minutes to spare. The Auror department should know about a situation which has recently come to my attention...."

"Very well, please, have a seat."

Harry watched as she reached her small gloved hand out across his desk towards him. He eyed the hand with disdain, but knew he had to take it. Even though he knew he wouldn't feel the potion's effects, knowing what she was trying to do seriously irked him.

He shook her hand as he needed to and watched her seat herself comfortably across from him.

"Ms. Skeeter, I..." Harry trailed off, trying to mimic the proper facial expression of a person under the influence of her potion.

"Never you mind, Harry. I'll be leading this interview," she said giddily as she took out her Quick-Quotes Quill, parchment and recording device.

"Now, Mr. Potter, isn't it true that while on the run from the Dark Lord, you were with your two friends Hermione Granger and Ronald Weasley?"

"Yes..."

"During that time period, weren't you engaged in a romantic relationship with the two of them at the same time?"

Harry stared at Rita, dumbfounded.

She's got to be kidding. Is she actually implying that I was trying to defeat the Dark Lord by having a threesome with my best friends? I have to agree to this?

"We were very close..."

"How close, Harry? It's absolutely understandable. You were scared, and you were with them all the time. Plus being teenagers and having a readily available female friend to help relieve the stress you were under..."

Harry could feel Severus becoming agitated with this line of questioning, but he had to play along.

"Yes, she did help me a lot..."

"Very good, Harry. Now, did you and Ronald share her at the same time or separately?"

"We were always together, we had to stick together..."

"Now, what was your relationship with Ronald? Were you in love with him too? Is that why you married his sister, because you couldn't have him?"

"Ginny has red hair too..."

"There have been rumors of you meeting a blonde in the dark corners of Knockturn Alley. Isn't that Ron in disguise?"

"Ron and I get together for lunch...."

I don't know how much longer I'm going to be able to keep this up. She's really pissing me off.

Rita continued for a few more minutes until there was a knock on the door.

Harry stared at the door, wondering how cognizent he was supposed to be of his surroundings while under the influence of the potion. He watched as Rita spun around to stare at the door also.

"We're going to have to continue this later, Harry," she said sweetly.

Rita stood up and stared into Harry's eyes. "You aren't going to remember any of what we've talked about. I simply came over to discuss a break-in that occurred at the *Daily Prophet*."

She drew her wand and began to cast a spell on Harry.

"Oblivi... ahhh!"

Rita hit the floor with a crash as six different spells hit her at the same time from all angles of the office.

Hearing the ruckus going on inside the office, Hermione burst through the door.

"Harry, are you..."

She stopped speaking as she took in the tableau in front of her.

Four Aurors...one of which was Ronald, Harry and her husband stood over the body of Rita Skeeter.

The occupants of the office stared at her in return; Harry was the first to try to explain.

"Hermione! Hi, ummm... what's up?"

"I was wondering if you wanted to have lunch... I... Is she dead?" Hermione said while staring at the reporter lying on the floor.

"No, she's not. She tried to Oblivate me, though, so my comrades here took her down."

"Oh..." Hermione looked to her husband, expecting some kind of explanation for his presence in the room.

She watched as Severus leaned over and spoke quietly to Harry. Next, he gave a slight nod to the other members in the room and walked towards her.

"Severus, what is going on? Why are you here? What..."

"Let's go home, Hermione. I'll explain everything."

"But..."

"Let's go, now."

Hermione found herself being led away from the Ministry and into her living room in record time.

"What the hell just happened, Severus?"

Severus paced the floor in front of the fireplace, trying to figure out the best way to explain the situation to his irate wife.

"Hermione, please sit down."

He watched as she heaved a suffering sigh and walked over to the couch, sitting in her normal spot.

"I'm waiting," she said in a sing-song voice.

Severus stopped his pacing to face his wife.

With a final deep breath, he started from the beginning and told her the entire story.

When he finally finished, he waited for the tirade that was sure to follow his revelations.

"So, to summarize, Harry and you went off and caught Rita in a dirty plot to smear everyone's reputations in an effort to gain writing notoriety? Then you didn't find any time to tell me, even though I was originally the wronged party? And if it wasn't for me being as upset as I was, you never would have gone to her office in the first place? Honestly, Severus, why didn't you tell me?"

"I wanted to protect you from it. You had been through so much with this woman already. If it all went badly, I wanted it to come down on me, not you."

"All right, Severus, we're probably going to talk about this again later. I really should go back to work since I'm only on my lunch break right now, and I do believe you have a class to teach at two-thirty."

"As you wish," he responded as he gladly received his goodbye kiss.

He watched her walk towards the fireplace, but before she disappeared into the green flames she turned and smiled at him.

"I love you."

"I love you too."

Hermione readied herself to return home. Her day had been much better than the previous one. At least she'd made it through her shift! In truth, though, all the whispering the day before had disappeared. There was much to do in a hospital the size of St. Mungo's, and when people had not had time to chatter, it seemed that they had moved on to other topics. She had been glared at by Miriam Strout when she passed her in the hallway, but Severus' words to her the day before allowed her to brush it off with a laugh instead of sorrow.

Now as she straightened her desk and put away the charts she'd been working on, she gazed at the evening paper that sat at its corner. The *Prophet* was quick to report Skeeter's downfall, claiming to be innocent of any knowledge of her insane scheme. Evidently, Skeeter had sung like a bird, confessing her partnership with Lavender Brown.

Hermione frowned. Skeeter claimed that it had been Lavender's plan all along. She highly doubted that Lavender could come up with such an involved scheme. The whole thing reeked of Skeeter's sneakiness. Hermione had felt satisfied, though, that Lavender had been apprehended and charged with conspiracy.

Lavender had been released pending trial, but Skeeter was reported to be incarcerated under careful watch so that she didn't change into her Animagus form and escape. It seemed that Rita Skeeter's little secret had finally come to light, all because of her greed.

Hermione tossed the paper into the wastebasket and stood to leave. She felt a bit depressed once again. This time it had little to do with her coworkers and her treatment the last couple days. This solely centered on Severus. She was deeply troubled that he'd hidden everything about Skeeter from her. She understood his reasoning, but still it made her wonder what else he'd kept from her to *protect* her.

Rising, she made her way out of her office and to the Floo. In no time she emerged in her living room. She brushed herself off and looked around. Severus didn't seem to be home. She checked the lab, but he wasn't there. Neither was he in the bedroom. She debated what to do.

All she really wanted to do was curl up in bed and sulk; however, that wasn't a very productive use of time. Perhaps preparing dinner would help.

She wandered to the kitchen. She pulled out some vegetables, deciding to prepare a pasta primavera. The chopping and preparing of everything would be therapeutic. Soon, she was lost in the precise slicing and dicing of zucchini, yellow squash, morel mushrooms and onions. She didn't notice when Severus came home, nor did she hear him approach her. It wasn't until his arms went around her that she dropped the knife and gasped in surprise.

"I still have it," Severus mused as he kissed the back of her neck.

She turned and hugged him, but didn't say a word. Burying her face in his neck, she nuzzled him lightly.

"How was work?"

"Better."

"I'm glad."

She turned and resumed chopping. Severus moved beside her, but she ignored him. He eventually cleared his throat, which caused her to look at him.

"You're still upset with me," he stated quietly.

She put her knife down once again and took his hand in hers. "Come sit down," she directed as she led him to the sofa. She looked down and gathered her thoughts before gazing into his expressive eyes.

"I'm more hurt than angry, Severus." She frowned. "I thought you trusted me."

"My love, of course I trust you."

"Then I really don't understand. Why didn't you tell me? What else have you been keeping from me for what you feel is my own good? How can we truly have a solid relationship when we are not truthful with one another?"

He gave her a pained look. "Hermione..."

She clasped his hand in hers. "I love you and want to share everything with you. I guess I just find it disheartening that you don't feel the same."

"You're wrong. Every evening I cannot wait to see you so I can tell you about my day. When you are not with me, I long for your return so we can spend time together. This just... you were so shattered by all of the gossip and lies." He pulled his hand from hers and caressed her cheek. "To be honest, I wondered if you would hex her before we'd had a chance to get her to confess to anything."

Hermione frowned. "You know..."

"Love, the things she insinuated... they made me furious. It took everything I had not to hex her in the middle of her questioning. I knew ahead of time what she might say, but actually being there and hearing it..." He shook his head. "I couldn't have you hear them, and I know you would have insisted that you were there. After everything else, I didn't want you to have to deal with that."

"I could have kept myself under control," she countered.

"I thought that of myself as well, but I was barely able to do so." He pulled her to him and kissed her. "It's not that I don't hold your abilities in high regard. Far from it, my formidable witch. Perhaps more the opposite. I was afraid there would be nothing left of Skeeter when you were through with her."

Hermione couldn't help herself; she giggled.

"I'm supposed to be very upset with you, you know. Don't be all sexy and coy with me."

He pulled back and gazed into her eyes, pleading with her with only a look. "Forgive me?"

She gave him a slight grin. "I will if you promise never to do it again."

"I promise."

"Now, you've just admitted to being afraid of my abilities. You do understand the wrath you'll have to deal with if this ever happens again?"

He nodded. "I shudder to think what might happen."

She waved her wand, and a set of handcuffs appeared. "I forgive you, but don't think that you won't get away without punishment. Let this be a warning to you not to cross your formidable witch."

Severus' eyebrow rose. His face filled with mock fear. "No, please, you mustn't punish me. Besides, I thought you were preparing dinner."

She rose and grasped his hand, pulling him up as well. She gave him a seductive look. "Dinner can wait."

The End

A/N: This story was written as a gift for the wonderful *ladyinthecloak*.

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