

Take a Bow

by JTBAB

Ron thinks that apologising publicly will win Hermione over, but Hermione turns to someone she really trusts in her time of self-doubt...

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Ron cleared his throat as the large crowd of witches and wizards clambered to be at the front. Enchanted Quick-Quotes Quills were hovering over their heads, inching towards the podium he clutched with white knuckled fingers. The country's magical media, poised to take in what the war hero would have to say. Flashes went off, taking photos of the clean-cut, ginger sidekick of the great Harry Potter.

He rubbed his right hand over his face and blinked out at the crowd. If anyone had been observant enough they would have seen the slight shake of his left leg. "Wizarding Britain." Silence washed over the crowd as they held their collective breath, eager to hear what the great Ronald Billius Weasley had to say. "Wizarding Britain... I've asked you to gather here today for one reason, and one reason only." He glanced nervously at the Quills scribbling furiously, an emerald green one causing him to gulp slightly and a bead of sweat ran down his temple. "I've called you all here today to offer a public apology for my behaviour over the last couple of months... years, if I'm completely honest."

A murmuring rippled through the gathered crowd, as heads turned to those next to them, lips whispering questions on what the wizard could be talking about.

"My partner, Hermione Jane Granger, has been let down. By me." Ron closed his eyes, and his grip on the podium tightened. "I cheated on her multiple times, and yet she has always forgiven me." The crowd's whispering rose, the curious tones edged with anger. A few of the younger wizards giving Ron a discreet thumbs-up. "And again I have let her down. I will not name names... that is not the purpose of this. I'm offering a public apology that once again, she will forgive me. Take me back... that the thought of my being completely open with not just her but the entire country will mean that she will be able to trust me again."

Those in the crowd began looking for the heroine of the last Great War, their eyes searching those that they stood with. Narrowing at any with the slight hint of a curl. Suddenly, the doors to Diagon Alley's bookstore burst open, and out stormed a very, very angry witch.

The crowd parted, giving her a wide berth as Hermione Granger stormed through them and up to the stage. "Ronald Weasley, enough! You embarrass me, you make a mockery of our relationship and then you air it for the world to see and read."

"But, Hermione, I wanted to be honest... after... after last night..." Ron gulped and took a shaky step back from the podium.

"Last night? Last night!" The emotional witch flicked her wrist, allowing her wand to shoot into her hand. She pointed it at her supposed fiancé. "Last night you were supposed to be working late... last night you were meant to be with your brothers... last night you were meant to come home to a candlelit dinner." Hermione shook her

head, her eyes beginning to water despite her anger. "Last night was your last chance. It's over. *Immobulus!*" Ron tried to dodge the red sparks shot his way, but he was quickly brought to a halt. Pulling the hideously over-stated ring off her finger, she threw it at him.

Leaving him to suffer the likes of Rita Skeeter's questions, Hermione stormed back to her quaint bookstore, before finally allowing the tears to fall. Her sobs could only be heard by the lone occupant who had been far more interested in acquiring a new book than of listening to what an idiot like Weasley had to say. War hero or not.

"What has he done this time, Miss Granger?"

Ignoring the silky tones of her ex-Professor, Hermione ran through to the back. She wanted no witnesses to her emotional reaction or display and it was only a matter of time before the press came after her looking for quotes. Thankful her wand was still in her hand, she flicked it over her shoulder and locked the doors to her beloved shop.

Sinking into the furthest corner of her stock room, she allowed the tears to fall freely, her sobs ripped from her chest as she fought to swallow down her anger.

"Miss Granger, you appear to have locked me in here to listen to your squalling. I would be most delighted if you were to allow me to leave. Or at least give me the option."

"If you had bothered to attempt to leave, you would have noticed no difficulty." Hermione sniffed, resisting the urge to wipe her snot filled nostrils along her sleeve. She rummaged in her pocket for a tissue and swallowed thickly as she tried not to continue sobbing.

"He is not worth your tears or heartbreak, Hermione, you know that." Severus slipped back into the friendly tone she was more accustomed to in the hopes that it would calm her emotions.

"Oh, Severus, I can't help it." Rubbing furiously at her eyes, she glared up at him. "I hate failing, and now the whole of Britain, the world is going to look at me as a failure. As a girlfriend and as a fiancée... unable to keep her man from straying." Dissolving again into sobs, she allowed her head to drop onto her knees and then wrapped her arms around them.

Severus moved forward and kneeled awkwardly next to her. "He'll be looked on more poorly than you shall." Resigned to the fact she wouldn't listen to reason any time soon, he sank to the floor and let his arm fall around her shoulders. "Anyone that knows you will know in truth that you are no failure."

Twisting under his arm, she wrapped her arms around the dour Potions master and clung tightly, her body still shaking from her deep cries. "I can't help it, I just can't. I'm the failure everyone accused me of being. A fraud." Turning her face into his chest she squeezed her eyes tightly shut as she attempted to calm herself. "I hate this."

Sighing, Severus rubbed his hand up and down her back. This was not the first time he'd had to comfort the witch over the ginger idiot, and although it had helped them to trust each other, Severus was not great with tears. With no words left to say, else he repeat himself, he wrapped his other arm around her and let her cry herself out.

~HGSS~

Hermione had been partially correct. There were a few papers that had ripped her apart, showing pictures of her with Ron when he was clearing paying attention to other girls. But on the whole, the world was looking at Ronald Weasley as being the very worst of Wizarding Britain.

Business in her shop had increased ten-fold and Hermione had finally been able to hire enough staff that she could enjoy having some time off without feeling guilty that she was leaving someone else alone with the stress of running the shop.

And Severus Snape had become an increasingly loyal customer over the past few weeks. Coming in every day just before her lunch break and enquiring after her.

~HGSS~

Hermione glanced up at the clock. She knew she should be enjoying her time working the shift just before the new term at Hogwarts, but lately seeing the children rushing through she had become morose, and increasingly broody though she hated to admit it. She absently brushed a hand across her stomach, failing to think about how this may look to anyone who just so happened to be watching her actions carefully.

"Well, well, well... if Hermione Jane Granger isn't studying she's been doing the nasty... and to think... before she's even wed. Consequences, dear, something you obviously forgot about."

Hermione cringed as the sucrose voice skittered over the counter and made her look up. Rita Skeeter grinned manically back at her.

"So is it a witch or wizard?" A sudden sheen brightened up her eyes and a Quick-Quotes Quill and parchment shot out of her bag. "So is your cheating ex-fiancé the father, or were you cheating too? Perhaps you had a lover waiting in the wings... waiting for poor Weasley to falter again... publicly so you could push him aside."

Hermione's face became blank as she stiffened up and attempted to still the shaking in her hands. "Miss Skeeter, you are not welcome in my shop. I wish for you to leave immediately."

"We can't all get what we wish for, can we, Miss Granger? I imagine that's what you're after... business was a little slow before this fiasco... did you plan this to extort money from poor Mr Weasley? Did he know you were just a money-grabbing Muggle-born, eager to snap-up anything a Pureblood could offer?" Rita giggled. Her high-pitched humour was like nails down a chalkboard. "Do you know what they'll call you? It's not appropriate in Wizarding society for an un-wed witch to be in such a condition. Tut, tut... perhaps you should go back to your Muggle society where such depravity is acceptable."

"Enough!" A hand clamped down on Rita's shoulder, causing her to visibly shrink in stature. "I believe you have been banned from this shop, Miss Skeeter, and you have been asked again to leave." Instead of wilting under the menacing glare of Severus Snape, Rita giggled again.

"I see, so the lover in the wings is an ex-Death Eater." Her gaze swept over him before returning to Hermione. "How very... apt." Smirking, she stepped around the Potions master, shaking off the hold he had on her shoulder, and rushed from the bookshop her Quick-Quotes Quill and parchment following her, still scribbling furiously.

Severus watched after her. "I'm sorry I was late today. I could have stopped her sooner."

"It's not your fault," Hermione sighed. "Besides, she would probably have come up with a much juicer story about the two of us if you had arrived earlier." Pushing her hair back from her face and into a bun she finished gathering up her papers and walked around the counter. "Shall we?" She slipped her hand around his arm and allowed him to escort her from the shop to their destination for lunch.

As they rounded the corner to make their way into the Leaky Cauldron, the bright flash of a camera blinded them both.

"Say 'cheese', darlings. You're going to make the front page." Rita grabbed her photographer's arm and sauntered off down the street, ignoring the shocked and outraged faces of the two people they left behind.

"Severus! I'm so sorry!" Hermione pulled her arm from his and stepped away. "I can't believe this is happening... I'm sorry." Pulling out her wand, she turned and Disapparated, leaving a stunned and angry Severus behind.

~HGSS~

Hermione paced the floor of her flat, her hair falling from its hastily thrown bun and her face wet from tears. Wishing she had Crookshanks to comfort her, she stifled down another sob.

Glaring at the red envelope parchment on her coffee table, Hermione fell onto her sofa.

Molly Weasley. The Queen-of-Jumping-to-Conclusions, herself, had sent Hermione a howler. With false laziness, she flicked her wand at it, and let it begin;

"HOW DARE YOU BRING UTTER SHAME ONTO OUR FAMILY? RONALD WAS NEVER ANYTHING BUT KIND TO YOU... HE LET YOU CHOOSE TO WAIT ON A WEDDING DESPITE HIS OWN FEELINGS! YOU DISGUST ME AND THE ENTIRE WEASLEY FAMILY BY ALLOWING YOURSELF TO BE IMPREGNATED BY THAT DISGUSTING EXCUSE OF A WIZARD! AND BEHIND MY RONNIE'S BACK TOO! YOU NO LONGER EXIST, HERMIONE GRANGER, YOU'RE NO LONGER A MEMBER OF MY FAMILY AND I NEVER WISH TO HEAR FROM YOU AGAIN." The scarlet-screamer ripped itself up and burnt to ash, before tumbling down to the glass coffee table.

Although she had been expecting something terrible, the idea of being rejected by what had been her own family within the magical world brought on a fresh wave of morose depression. Never normally one to throw hate out to the world, this time she couldn't find the silver-lining to the day's events, especially knowing it could only get worse once the Prophet published the article.

~HGSS~

The sound of pots and pans crashing about in her kitchen had Hermione leaping sleepily to her feet. She flicked her wrist calling her wand to her hand, and crouched in a defensive stance. Allowing herself the chance to gain her bearings, she began to creep forwards.

She reached out and slowly put her left hand on the door handle, easing it down with a slow pull. Gaining a small crack of sight, Hermione paused in her movements. It was very strange for someone to break in and be making a noise in her kitchen, but then normally she would be at work and there would be no-one home. Listening carefully she tried to figure out who, or what it was that had caused such a racket.

"Would, Miss, be liking her breakfast now?"

Hermione screamed and spun round, stubbing her toe on the slightly opened door. Her eyes scanned the room as she struggled to control her breathing.

"Miss, are you alright?"

Hermione's eyes finally rested on the house-elf standing in front of her and she lowered her wand. "Oh!"

The house-elf grinned. "Master said you would be surprised."

"Who are you?"

The house-elf muttered something under his breath and nudged Hermione out of the way of the door. "Come, Master said you should eat. He said you would forget. He also said he would be round later."

A small smile flittered onto Hermione's face, and it felt like a weight had been lifted off her shoulders. So Severus hadn't blamed her... at least she had somebody that still liked her. Rolling her eyes, she slid onto a seat at her kitchen table.

"Your *Master* should also know that I do not appreciate the use of house-elf slavery."

The flurried movement of the sprite house-elf froze. "I is not a slave. Twiglet enjoys her job."

"Yes, you are. You're ordered to do something and you do it. For no money."

The house-elf turned slowly, till he could make eye contact with Hermione. "Miss, you is misunderstanding house-elves."

"You are trapped, are you not?"

"We bind willingly." The house-elf turned a little purple and stamped a foot. "Twiglet has no need for money. Food and shelter... Miss, food and shelter... and getting to do what we love; work and serve!"

Hermione sighed. "Perhaps for some of you."

"For all of us. You's a nosy one, Miss. Don't you meddle."

And then as if they had been having a perfectly ordinary conversation, the house-elf returned to serving her breakfast, before flouncing off around the flat dusting and polishing.

Hermione dug into her food. The smell of the fry-up the mysterious house-elf had provided had stirred up her hunger to the point it could not be ignored. Once Twiglet appeared to be happy with her work and with the amount of food consumed, he left her to continue alone, disappearing with a soft POP!

~HGSS~

A few hours later, Hermione was showered and in fresh clean clothes, allowing herself to lounge around in her chair to read. The Daily Prophet appeared to have realised that Skeeter had gone too far, and although a retraction hadn't been written, there was an entire article with interviews with her friends that highlighted how very out-of-character it would have been for her to be pregnant and not have it all planned out.

A knock on her front door garnered a hint of annoyance as she was finally coming to terms with the last few months' events, but she was in no hurry to interact with anyone, especially knowing that Severus would be arriving by Floo. But, heaving a sigh, she quickly pulled her hair back into a ponytail and made her way towards the front door.

A tingling of fear rose in her chest as she noticed the door vibrating slightly, as if someone was trying to force their way in. Making a slashing motion with her wand she began creating an extra layer of wards around the front door. There was no way that anyone was going to be forcing their way into her home.

Satisfied with her results, she pulled open the door to find a smartly dressed Ronald Weasley looking very angry.

"Hermione! Why can I no longer get into our flat? I've been trying to get in for the whole weekend. What are you hiding in there? Who are you hiding?"

She glanced down at his clenched fists and unconsciously stepped back a little. "Ron, this flat has never been yours. I live here; you just slept here... occasionally." She tried to muster up some anger to throw back at him, but those feelings were no longer there. Molly had seen to that. She had no energy to yell at someone who wouldn't listen and didn't really care anyway.

"But I *loved* you, Mione. I still love you." Ron sank to his knees. "Marry me. Marry me and I promise never to cheat again... bloody hell, I even promise not to look at another woman."

"That is quite ridiculous, Ronald. You work with women; that'll never work."

"But the offer is there, Mione. I love you. Take me back. Don't let someone who's not good enough for you take my place."

Hermione closed her eyes and clutched the door. This was the worst thing she hated about being part of the Golden Trio. They were all so close... so supportive... so Her

eyes flashed open. "What on earth are you talking about? I don't believe you were good enough for me, so *anyone* should surely be better than that."

"Just because I cheated, is no excuse to shack up with a Death Eater, Hermione! Think about your reputation!" Ron attempted to step closer, but was pushed back by her wards.

"No. Just, no, Ron, I have to stop you there." Hermione shook her head and muttered a few curses under her breath. "Severus is a friend; a very good friend. He's been here for me whenever you gallivanted off with those other women. I trust him."

The tips of red-haired wizard's ears turned pink. "He's got you under some spell! You always take me back, Hermione. Please! Come with me; we'll get you tested." He held out his hand and smiled. A childish sense of urgency had his arm slightly shaking.

"You must be dense to not understand the words I've said to you. I will not be pushed into something so stupid. Listen very carefully, Ronald." Hermione tried very hard not to allow her voice to screech. "You put on a very nice show to the whole of Wizarding Britain... so good in fact that some people are taking your side and saying I should take you back. Lots of respectable wizards have taken mistresses on, after all. And we're not even married yet so why should I care what you get up to as long as you return to me in the end. But you know what Ron? I can't do that. I'm Muggle-born and I love the fact that I want to be with someone that loves me just as much as I love them... to the point that the very idea of being with someone else is quite frankly sickening. How can you possibly say you love me and only want me when I know you leave me alone at night to be with someone else! That doesn't even make sense... you in a sense choose someone over me when you do that. Is there something wrong with me? Am I so repulsive that the idea of touching me some nights is just too much?"

Ron shook his head. "But, Hermione, I "

"NO! I'm talking, Ron, I'm going to tell you exactly how I feel so that you will finally understand I hope and just... well, bugger off!" Hermione took a deep breath to try and calm herself. "Why do you think it was acceptable to do it... are you willing to take an oath to say you'll never touch anyone again? We know you won't, so why go there. You'll throw excuses saying you'll do it after we're married, and then there'll be more excuses... but you know what? I've wised up, Ronald; you're not going to cover my eyes again." She looked him up and down. "And some marriage proposal that was, where's the ring?" She put her hands on her hips and waited for him to answer, but he just looked back at her with a blank look on his face. "Well? Do you have it or not?"

"Um, well..." He ran his hand through his hair and rubbed the back of his neck. His cheeks tinged with pink. "I didn't see the point in buying one... you already had one. And well, I kinda gave that ring away to someone."

Hermione may not have been particularly angry at this point, but now she was positively steaming. "You gave my ring away?! And then you have the cheek to come back and ask me to marry you again without that ring or *even* a replacement?" Shaking her head, she dropped her gaze to the floor. Shuffling her feet, she looked back up at his ashen face. "I've said it once, Ron, and I'll say it again. You have the emotional range of a teaspoon; I will not marry you. I refuse to discuss being in a relationship with you, and quite frankly, the very idea of being friends with you disgusts me right now. Leave me alone and please, at least remember this; do not come back here again!"

As she closed the door she listened out for the tell-tale sound of him Disapparating before she slumped against the door and allowed the tears to come. "How could he be so... stupid? How could I have been so stupid?"

And that was how Severus found her when he Flooed in a couple of hours later she had moved to the sofa, but was still upset and had lain in a foetal position staring at the flames in the hearth as if they could answer all her problems.

He knelt beside her and took her hand in his. "Hermione?" She raised her eyes to look at him, and he had to clear his throat to not become choked with her expression. "Are you okay? Twigs said you had eaten and seemed fine when he left."

She shook her head. "Am I repulsive, Severus? Does touching me cause you to shudder in disgust?"

"What? Of course not! Whatever makes you think that it would?"

"Ron asked me to marry him again." She dropped her gaze. "Am I boring?"

"You're asking very silly questions, love. Mr Weasley is a poor excuse for a wizard and never deserved you. You could have anyone you wanted."

Hermione narrowed her eyes before looking back at him. "That was not what I asked. I must be a complete bore who no one could possibly contemplate marrying without a mistress waiting in the wings." She launched herself up and began pacing back and forth. "Come on, Mione, just this once." She whined. "You'll enjoy it this time I promise." Hermione huffed and threw her hands up. "This match will win you over! The Cannons are at their best!" She glared at Severus and continued pacing in front of the fireplace. "Am I actually that boring that anything I say or interests I have are completely forgotten? Am I the one in the wrong here? Severus?" She turned to face him again only to be stopped by a swooping of black material as his hands reached out and gripped her shoulders. "Severus? What is wrong with me?"

His black eyes stared down at Hermione, making a show of looking her up and down. He reached into her chocolate-coloured curls and tilted her head back, forcing her to keep her eyes locked on his face. "Nothing. Absolutely nothing is wrong with you." And as he spoke, he slowly lowered his head till their lips touched. Pulling back slightly, he smiled when she raised herself onto her tiptoes.

"Nothing?" she whispered, her eyes fluttering closed.

He pulled her into his arms and lowered his lips to hers again. "Nothing."

Finis

AN: Thank you to my beta, sbrande. Also, thank you, cybrokat, for your awesome set of prompts to choose from!

SS/HG Exchange 2011 prompt by cybrokat: #1 Ron has been cheating on Hermione. She has taken him back before, but after his public apology, she is publicly done with him. (Think Rihanna - Take a Bow, don't ask me why. Whenever I hear it, I picture Ron getting b*tched out.) Snape wants to be her 'good guy'. What does he have to do to win her over?