

A Reputation to Uphold

by Saltfish

Rita Skeeter is at it again, and sometimes even Hermione needs a helping hand. This a one-shot story with a touch of romance and humor.

One-Shot

Chapter 1 of 1

Rita Skeeter is at it again, and sometimes even Hermione needs a helping hand. This a one-shot story with a touch of romance and humor.

A/N: Much thanks to WickedlyWanton for beta reading.

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Monday, August 21, 2004

Strolling along a sun-warmed beach was not what Hermione Granger was meant to be doing today. Today she was meant to be testing a new variation on Veritaserum with her protégé, Max Miller; today she was meant to be writing a report to submit to the Minister on ways to counter the abuses of lust potions; today she was meant to be putting the finishing touches on the documentation accompanying her new potion. Today she was not meant to be holding a pair of sandals in one hand and a copy of the new release romance, *The Sound of Love* in the other. But that was, indeed, exactly what she was doing.

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Daily Prophet Headline, Monday, August 13, 2004.

EXCLUSIVE!

Brazen Hussy At It Again!

Miss Hermione Granger, supposed war hero and friend to the Savior of the Wizarding World, Harry Potter, was seen by this reporter, once again, canoodling with an unnamed Muggle in a trendy London nightclub. She was pictured (see left) drinking copious amounts of alcohol, and while in that drunken state, was groping yet another male. This follows the pictures in this publication last week of Miss Granger drinking a line of Butts-Fizz's...a drink she not only invented but has now made fashionable among many young witches...not to mention the number of pictures of her snogging various wizards, although I will not reduce myself to naming names. Does this girl have no shame? Does the bushy-haired harlot manipulate men with lust potions?

The call from the community is simple: when will this young woman stop her appalling behavior?

The demented old fool, Albus Dumbledore, hushed me up when I told of the heartbreak of the young Harry Potter at the hands of that Jezebel, Hermione Granger, during the Triwizard Tournament. I ask you, who do you believe now?

Rosmerta, the esteemed manageress of the Three Broomsticks in Hogsmeade, claims that Hogwarts students as young as fifteen are requesting this dangerous drink, Butts-Fizz! "They all want what Hermione's having, so they say," said Madam Rosmerta.

Recipe of the Month...The Hermione Granger Butts-Fizz

Take three measures of Firewhisky and pour into pint of Butterbeer, drink in one hit.

Note: The Three Broomsticks have the Butts-Fizz as their monthly special for September. Buy one, get one free!

(See Letters, page 12, for reader comments on the latest Granger revelations).

LETTERS

You wouldn't see a pureblood witch behaving like that. She is awful...such a tart!

S Scuttlebutt, Didsbury.

I demand her Order of Merlin be returned this instant! What else can one expect from a Mudblood. My grandchildren are imitating her, and if they ruin their lives and end up in Azkaban, or marry a Muggle, it will be all her fault.

B Sogood, Bournemouth.

I knew she was a bad egg. Thank you, Rita Skeeter, for telling the truth yet again.

D Rathbone, Warwickshire.

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It had been a difficult few months, but Hermione had finally finished the potion she had been working on. As a research manager in the Department of Magical Development, Hermione would oversee research and test the efficacy of new spells and charms for official Ministry validation. The potions research she was conducting, however, was her private pet project.

She had spent the last twelve months devoting every spare minute to what she called 'Magica Augeo,' a potion to strengthen magic, especially for young children and babies. Studies from St Mungo's indicated that there had been a thirty percent increase in illnesses, lowering the magical abilities of children since the war. The Ministry were ignoring the findings and not releasing information to the public. The medical community was not so complacent, and the statistics mysteriously landed on Hermione's desk.

Someone knew who to send the research to, that was certain, for Hermione tore at it with nary a thought about repercussions. She analyzed, she picked; she sniffed out every scrap of flesh on that meaty bone that had been tossed her way. She was nothing if not thorough.

She had help, though. This was not a job she could have done on her own. A mystery correspondent also had all the relevant research. He...Hermione was quite sure it was a he...provided her with information even the Ministry didn't appear to have. This person called himself her Helper, and worked with Hermione, anonymously, developing the potion.

While she did wonder who her Helper was...Hermione certainly put enough thought into it...in the end it was the potion that was most important, and she was sure that her mystery man would reveal himself...eventually.

Of course, that all changed, courtesy of Ms Rita Skeeter.

Hermione's position at the Ministry became unworkable after the latest batch of headlines. She wasn't even able to owl normally with her inter-departmental staff without Howlers slipping through condemning her on her "disgraceful" behavior, despite the redirection charm she had placed on her external post.

"Hermione, I realize the reports may be a little exaggerated, but you do have a reputation to uphold. And the Ministry expects certain standards of all its employees, even decorated war heroes."

"Am I the only one from this office at the Crown on Fridays, or the Nightbeam on the odd occasion? Because if that's the case, *sir*, then I'm hallucinating most weeks, since I thought it was usually Ministry employees I was going out with!" Hermione threw the offending paper down on the desk, not knowing who she was more disgusted with: Rita Skeeter, or her boss.

She strode across the room to the door and, before flinging it open, added, "And for your information, it was none other than Draco Malfoy who came up with that disgusting drink. I would never waste good Firewhisky on sickly sweet Butterbeer. But picking on the pureblood *male* lover of Harry Potter isn't quite the same as a Mudblood witch, though, is it!"

The Ministry, the potion, the Prophet: it all seemed too hard in the end. Those eighty-hour weeks were appearing to be all for naught. Rita Skeeter had finally won and beaten Hermione Granger at her own game.

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Hermione had made a plan when she left Hogwarts. Some day, she'd told herself, she'd visit dear old Aunt Bea and treat herself to a nice couple of weeks at Aunt Bea's empty beachside hut in Fiji. Only 'some day' was hastened forward to right now.

The invitation from Bea, which conveniently arrived during the ruckus, was accepted and executed. Hermione went home, packed a small bag with her bikini, a towel, a few casual clothes, and within three hours, she was lying on a Fijian beach sipping a cosmopolitan...her actual preferred mixed drink, if one had to mix spirits at all.

Dropping her towel under a now-favorite palm tree, Hermione knew she was in paradise. The mile upon mile of near-empty beach and perfect sunny days were as far from the gray London skies, and the wizarding world, as she could find. Or so she thought.

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"Travis and Felicia came together, their bodies meeting, melding, it was a communion of abandonment, a feast of wild passion. His rod of lust met her hot, wet folds as he thrust into her. It was the ultimate act of completion."

"Oh, bloody hell, who on earth reads this garbage!" Hermione threw the book onto the table in disgust. In the heat of the midday sun she'd managed to make the move from under the palm trees to a nearby beach-side restaurant for a bit of lunch. She'd made the obvious mistake of thinking *The Sound of Love* might make a good accompaniment to the char-grilled octopus. "If they're going to write love scenes, at least make them believable, or at least write them so I don't..."

"Looking for tips on sex are we, Miss Granger? I thought...if the latest headlines are to be believed...that was something you had mastered."

She hadn't been expecting anyone to come after her as though she were a petulant child who'd run off in a snit. And if anyone had come, she'd expected it to be Ron; as

an adult, he'd grown quite good at reading her moods, which surprised her no end. Who would have thought Ronald Weasley could become sensitive...it's a wonder what growing up does for a man.

Yet that the someone who had followed her to the other side of the world *washim*...well, that was cause for a good deal of thought.

There was only one person who could make Hermione Granger still feel like a schoolgirl, and that was the man standing in front of her...Severus Snape.

Somehow, he never seemed to notice that she'd become a woman of nearly twenty-five years of age; or that she'd achieved a level in the Ministry more usually accorded to men (for they were normally men) twice her age. He hadn't ever seemed to acknowledge her role in providing the spell that substantiated the evidence given by the portrait version of Dumbledore, which led to the dismissal of the murder charge against him. This had been no small feat; especially since the non-human evidence had been ruled inadmissible before the Wizengamot in 1364.

No, Professor Snape would always see her as an annoyance to be borne. She sighed, and without lifting her head, she said, "Very funny. This is my conscience I'm hearing, isn't it, and not the actual dulcet tones of Severus Snape?"

"I suppose you could now have a new career as a book critic for bodice rippers, if this is your taste in literature. Perhaps the Prophet could employ you?" He walked over and picked up the book off the table. "*The Sound of Love*, sounds delightful." He didn't bother disguising the mocking tone, nor the obvious delight he received from his own little joke.

Hermione looked up sharply and was immediately unsure how to construe the smirk on his face. "I prefer the term pot boiler to bodice ripper, for the sake of accuracy; bodice ripper sounds... a little too animalistic for my tastes. And, as a practical woman, I prefer my wardrobe intact. Isn't Fiji a little out of your territory, Mr Snape; or do you always travel thousands of miles to check on your ex-pupils' reading material?"

He didn't explain himself or even seem to notice the question that she asked. He simply said, "May I?" and helped himself to a spare seat at the table.

"What do you want, Snape?" Hermione took a steadying sip of chardonnay from the wine glass on the table.

"Tut, tut, Miss Granger. Drinking again, I see. Where are the photographers from the Daily Prophet when you need them?" He leaned back against the timber seat and grinned at her.

Taking the chance to study him under cover of the wine glass, Hermione realized that he hadn't changed, not really. His temper may have mellowed a little, but in all else Snape was as he had always been: a complicated man. His hair remained that same stern black; his eyes held the same unrelenting glare as the day she first walked into his dungeon classroom. But he was a little different. It could have been the change of clothing: casual white linen shirt rolled up at the sleeves, and the equally casual taupe linen trousers.

She then realized what it was. It was like looking at a mirror-image...Severus Snape in reverse-video. Where old Snape sneered, this one smiled, laughed even. Where old Snape was dark, this one was light, or perhaps sepia-toned; muted, like those old photographs of great grandfather Granger on the mantelpiece at her parents'.

"So, what are you really doing here?"

He leaned farther back in the chair and motioned to the waitress for an extra glass. "If you don't mind?" He didn't wait for an answer, if the question was there at all, and poured his wine. "I thought that would be obvious. I came looking for you."

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Travis took a furred nipple into his mouth, sucking it deeply. He palmed the other with his hand, nimble fingers twisting and teasing the hard nub. Felicia groaned in appreciation, bucking her hips toward his in an unspoken plea.

Hermione groaned as well. A furred nipple? It sounded more like origami than sex. And just the idea of Travis pawing and twisting her breasts in such a ham-fisted manner, never mind all that sucking, she couldn't help but shudder. It reminded her of her first few dates and that awkward process of getting past the snogging part and moving on to stage two of foreplay. Her breasts still remembered the slobbering.

Casting the book aside, she lay beneath the palm tree and watched the play of the shafts of each frond, bouncing around in the breeze. The sky looked the same as it had earlier that day, and the day before: deep blue, dusted with an occasional puff of a cloud. The only real change occurred at sunset, when the temperature dropped and the sun ignited the horizon.

She woke, startled, as a long shadow obscured the sun.

"You ran out on me yesterday."

She didn't need to open her eyes to know whose shadow owned the resonant voice.

"I don't have anything you want, Snape."

"Hermione, why are *you* here?"

"You know why I'm here, Snape. My reputation is in tatters because of that insect of a woman. My employer refuses to have me back until I can...what was the word he used...rehabilitate myself." She snorted and sat up, wiping sand from her legs. "You'd think being instrumental in bringing down the Dark Lord and spending my working days helping people would be sufficient to uphold a reputation, but obviously not."

"Such a typical Gryffindor. You expect fair play at all times, or at least when it suits you. Wizarding politics is no more forgiving than Muggle, Hermione. Now you have a taste of what has followed me around for the past twenty years."

Her head dipped in shame, not wanting to remember how she and her friends had treated him: *It was so much worse after the incident with Dumbledore, even after he had been cleared of murder charges.*

"I'm not trying to rub salt into that particular wound, Hermione; merely stating a fact. I'm still *persona non grata* to some. You know that."

He tossed a copy of the Daily Prophet onto the sand beside her. "This will be in tomorrow's paper."

Monday, August 28, 2004

EXCLUSIVE!!

War Heroine Saves Children!

Our Hermione, Our Hero!

... saved by a ground breaking potion developed by decorated war hero and Ministry employee, Hermione Granger. The Minister himself has insisted on a special medal

being struck for Services to the Wizarding Community. "This potion will save thousands of children each and every year. We are eagerly awaiting Hermione's return from her well-deserved holiday," said the Minister.

Miss Granger, currently on a break in a secret location, has also been supported by best friend, Harry Potter, while she was under fire from scurrilous reports of her misbehaving. "She was set up," claimed the tragic hero. "She never even drinks Butts-Fizz and hasn't had a boyfriend for months and months."

(See Letters, page 12, for reader comments on Our Hermione, Our Hero).

Hermione burst out laughing. "Bloody hell! They are good, aren't they?" A frown crossed her brow. "Hang on a minute. How on earth did this happen? No one knew about that potion except..."

Snape coughed and turned toward the water. "You'd have to walk out at least fifty feet right now to get even neck deep in water. Not like the beaches further south, is it?"

"Snape."

"Not had a boyfriend in months, eh? That's a shame. Frightened them off with your alarming intellect?" His tone sent a spike of electricity down her spine.

"Snape, what have you to do with this?" she said, gesturing at the newspaper.

But she knew. It suddenly became quite clear. Who had organized Harry to speak to the papers; who had instigated the sudden holiday in Fiji; who had leaked information of her research. All along, it was he. Snape had been her Helper in more ways than one.

Looking down at the newsprint, tears suddenly sprang to her eyes as the events of the past two weeks began to catch up with her.

"But why?" It was the only thing she could ask, a swirl of thought and emotion streaking through her body.

She wondered if she'd imagined a whispered, "because I need you." When she looked up from the paper, he was gone.

It was as if he'd never been there at all.

An excerpt from The Daily Prophet, Monday, 18 September, 2004. Page 3.

Noted researcher, Hermione Granger, has been seen dining at the fashionable eatery, Caldron, with none other than notorious Potions master, Severus Snape. Snape, accused murderer of Albus Dumbledore, has not been seen in public since his acquittal.

Witnesses say the two looked 'like lovers,' sharing intimate touches and holding hands across the table. Apparently, they left together...

The End

Additional A/N: Thanks for reading my little one-shot. I can see a possibility for a follow-up if there is any interest. Please let me know.

And Hermione was originally holding Birkenstocks in the first paragraph, but Shiv tells me they are not common in the UK. Thanks, Shiv, for the impromptu pick.