

An Allowable Deduction

by StormySkize

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Author's Note: The moderators of The Petulant Poetess have graciously granted me Validated Author status. I am grateful and humbled by their faith in me. In an effort not to 'blow it', I would like to ask my readers to let me know if they find any spelling, grammar, punctuation, or Canon errors that slip by me or my beta. I hope there won't be any, but if there are, and I am notified, I will correct them as quickly as possible. Thanks so much!

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An Allowable Deduction

Hermione Granger sat behind her desk at the Office For Urgently Collecting Knuts (or OFUCK, as it was affectionately known to the over-taxed citizens of the wizarding world) and glared at the wizard sitting in front of her.

"You've deducted over one-thousand-eight-hundred-seventy-five Galleons for items you purchased at Madam Malkin's as a business expense," she said.

"I was informed by my accountant that the cost of the clothing one wears in the performance of one's employment is an allowable deduction," he replied.

"Well, it is, of course," Hermione conceded, "but don't you think that's a rather excessive amount? I don't think I've spent that much on clothes in the last ten years combined."

"I never would have guessed," he murmured as he looked down his nose at the frumpily dressed witch sitting behind the desk.

"And you've deducted nearly four-hundred Galleons for am I reading this right hair care products?"

A thin, elegant hand lifted to smooth back the long, flowing, golden locks.

"I have an image to maintain," he drawled. "People expect me to *look* a certain way. It's not easy to keep my hair healthy and ...*tidy*."

He seemed to be smirking even more as Hermione lifted a hand to her own bushy hair. At the moment, it was pulled back in a messy knot on her neck, her wand stuck into it to hold it in place.

"Still, four hundred Galleons?"

"My line of work demands that I always look my best," he insisted.

"What exactly *is* your line of work, Mr. Malfoy?" Hermione asked. "I've been working for the Ministry since the end of the war, and I've never heard of a ... a Personal Interrelations Management Professional."

"I own and operate an establishment where lonely, selective witches and wizards can meet and mingle with other, like-minded witches and wizards."

"You run a dating service?"

"Nothing as *crass* as that, Miss Granger, I assure you. I open my home and invite people to come and meet other people. My clientele are rigorously screened. They are well-placed, socially adept, and highly discriminating."

"Pure-bloods, in other words," Hermione said with a scowl.

"Very few of my clients are pure-bloods," the man said. "Although pure-bloods do tend to be socially adept and highly discriminating, these days most are lacking the number one quality I look for in a client."

"And what might that be?"

"Money, of course. The fortunes of most pure-blooded families went down the loo when the Dark Lord fell, as you very well know."

Hermione smiled at the memory. The S.H.A.F.T. (Settlements, Handicaps, Atonements, and Forfeitures Tax) had been her brainchild. The war had been a long, messy, and expensive one. When Hermione, newly-employed by the Ministry and one of the heroes of the war, had suggested that the well-to-do followers of the vanquished Dark Lord be made to pay for their crimes through their pocketbooks (and their Gringotts accounts) the Ministry had jumped at the idea.

The convicted collaborators were given two choices: pay restitution and reparation, or spend the next hundred or so years in Azkaban. In was no surprise that most chose to willingly, if not gleefully, sign their accounts over to the Ministry.

"And whatever pittance the Ministry left me, Narcissa took when she divorced me," Malfoy said petulantly.

"Which bothered you more, the loss of your money or your wife?" Hermione asked.

"Women are ever so much easier to obtain," he replied. "I don't even have to work at it. I am, however, forced to work very hard for my income these days."

"Oh, yes, it must be wearying to have to host all those parties," Hermione said.

"You have no idea." With a languid hand he brushed a non-existent piece of lint from the front of his impeccably tailored robes.

Hermione looked down at the form in front of her.

"You seem to do very well for yourself," she said. "You grossed well over fifty-thousand Galleons last year."

Lucius snorted softly. "A mere trifle. Have you any idea what the Malfoys were worth before the Ministry confiscated our wealth?"

"Actually, I don't nor do I care. You picked the wrong side, Mr. Malfoy, and you paid the price for your bad judgement."

"You, of course, chose the *right* side," Malfoy said with a bitter twist to his otherwise perfect lips.

"Of course," Hermione agreed.

"And as a reward for your good judgement, you also received a sizable settlement," the wizard said.

"Spoils of war and all that," Hermione said with a smile.

"Indeed," the man agreed. "Even my former *friend*, Severus Snape, the traitor, received a large number of Galleons, among his other rewards."

"Severus Snape was never a traitor, Mr. Malfoy," Hermione replied, her eyes blazing. "He joined the Death Eaters on Albus Dumbledore's orders some months ~~after~~ he joined the Order of the Phoenix."

"That may very well be true, Miss Granger, but it doesn't negate the fact that Snape is now living in Malfoy Manor, sleeping in my bed, and drinking the wine in my wine cellar!"

"It's called Snape Estates now, and you forgot to mention that he's also screwing your ex-wife."

"Yes, well, Narcissa always did know how to land on her feet even if she had to do it by lying on her back. Besides, she'll bore him to tears eventually. She hasn't an active brain cell in her head, you know."

Hermione was a bit surprised by Lucius Malfoy's assessment of his ex-wife's intelligence. He'd married her, after all. What did his statement say about his own judgement?

"And why are you defending him?" Lucius continued. "Didn't he toss you over for Narcissa?"

"I guess it's my innate sense of fair play. Severus Snape was many things arrogant, sarcastic, and abrasive, just to name a few but he was not a traitor."

"Yes, well, I'm sure that by now, you've found someone more suited," Malfoy said.

"Actually, I'm not seeing anyone right now," Hermione said in a near-whisper.

"Why ever not?"

"Most wizards are *intimidated* by me," she admitted with a bit of reluctance.

"You just haven't met the right sort of wizard. You need someone who will appreciate your unique qualities."

Although she knew better, Hermione couldn't help but be flattered by Lucius Malfoy's remarks.

"And what might those qualities be?" she asked.

"You're rich, aren't you?" Malfoy said baldly. "And you hold a position of some authority in the Ministry."

Hermione laughed. "All true."

"Power is ... *attractive*, Miss Granger," Lucius said, dropping his voice to a low purr.

"Are you coming on to me, Mr. Malfoy?"

"I'd like to offer you the opportunity to attend one of my soirees," he replied. "You'll find it fascinating."

"And how much would it cost me to attend?" Hermione asked.

"Why don't we have dinner tonight and discuss the particulars?" Lucius invited.

Hermione bit her lip.

"Really, Miss Granger ... Hermione ... it's only dinner."

"You're right ... Lucius. I'd enjoy having dinner with you," she said.

She stood up and came around the desk. Lucius also got to his feet.

"I'll call for you at seven o'clock. Wear something ... slinky," he said as he ran his eyes up and down her body.

"As it happens, I have a little black dress I've been looking for an excuse to wear," she said.

"Lovely. Till this evening then," he said, bowing slightly. Then he tossed his long, silky hair over his shoulder and turned toward the door, his walking stick swinging at a jaunty angle.

When she heard the knock on her door that evening, Hermione took a deep breath before she opened it. She had taken great pains with her toilette. She had pulled her hair back off her face, and it cascaded down her back in a long fall of bouncy ringlets. She wore sheer silk stockings and strappy sandals with four inch heels. Her little black dress lived up to its name it plunged into a deep vee, exposing the top swell of her breasts, and it ended about six inches above her knees.

Lucius's eyes widened. "You look ravishing, my dear," he murmured as he took her hand in his and kissed her knuckles.

"Don't look so surprised," Hermione grumbled. "I know how to present myself when I've a mind to."

"I'm pleased you had a mind to this evening," Lucius replied.

"You look quite dashing yourself," Hermione said. "But then, you always do. I'll bet it comes as naturally to you as breathing."

"What can I say? It's both a blessing and a curse." He chuckled, and a moment later, Hermione joined in.

"Are you ready to go?" Lucius asked politely.

"Yes," Hermione replied as she picked up her evening wrap.

Lucius took it from her and dropped it over her shoulders.

"Will you trust me to Apparate us to our destination?" he asked.

"Of course," she said.

Lucius held out his arm. "Hold on," he said.

Hermione took his arm and closed her eyes. She felt the familiar compressed feeling of Apparition, but it only lasted a moment. When it eased, she opened her eyes, and Lucius steadied her.

"In spite of its rather mundane name, *The Sorcerer's Table* is one of the finest restaurants in the wizarding world. They serve an exceptional Dover sole here," Lucius added as they approached the maitre d'.

"Your usual table, Monsieur Malfoy?"

"Oui, s'il vous plait, Henri," Lucius replied.

"Please, sir, madam, follow me."

The maitre d' led them to a small table near the centre of the restaurant.

"Merci," Hermione said to Henri as he held her chair for her and then shook out her serviette and draped it across her lap.

"You speak French, Hermione?" Lucius asked.

"A bit. I used to vacation in France with my parents when I was a child."

"You're just full of surprises."

Dinner progressed quite pleasantly. Hermione discovered that Lucius had been right about the Dover sole; it was delicious. And the chocolate soufflé was almost sinfully good.

The wait staff was attentive and deferential. It surprised Hermione to discover that Lucius was gracious and polite to them without being condescending. She'd seen the way he'd treated his house-elves and hadn't expected him to treat the hired help here any better.

"They make referrals," Lucius explained when Hermione commented that his attitude seemed to have mellowed.

"I never bite the hand that feeds me," he added.

Although Hermione had suggested they skip the after dinner cordial, Lucius had been insistent.

"It's uncivilised not to have one," he said.

"I have to go to work in the morning," Hermione protested.

"It's not that late. Besides, when's the last time you called in sick?"

"Never!"

"My point exactly. You certainly deserve a day off. And since you 'never' call in sick, no one will be suspicious when you do."

"You're such a Slytherin," Hermione said, but she was smiling.

"Why, thank you, Hermione," Lucius replied.

They were sipping their cordials when the maitre d' escorted a couple to the empty table next to theirs.

"Well, well, what a surprise," Lucius drawled as he got to his feet.

It was only then that Hermione realised that the couple at the next table was Severus Snape and Narcissa Malfoy.

"Lucius," Snape said as he nodded almost imperceptibly.

"Narcissa, you're looking radiant," Lucius said as he leaned down and placed a chaste kiss on Narcissa's cheek.

"I believe you know Miss Granger?" Lucius said as he turned towards Hermione and nodded.

"Good evening, Severus," Hermione said. She nodded at Narcissa. Narcissa pretended not to see and buried her haughty, aristocratic nose in the over-large menu.

"Will you excuse me for a minute, my dear?" Lucius said to Hermione. "I need to see a wizard about a Thestral."

As Lucius walked away, Snape stood and came to stand over Hermione.

"I thought you had better taste," he sneered.

"I thought so, too. Until you decided that Malfoy Manor and its mistress were more attractive to you than I was."

Snape flushed slightly. "I had my reasons," he said.

"Yes, I know about two million Galleons worth of reasons," she replied.

"It wasn't about the money," he protested.

"What was it about, then?"

"You ... I ... you deserved more than I could offer," he finally said.

"I never wanted anything but you," she said in a quiet voice.

"I am not a very ... likable ... person. You would have realised that eventually," he said.

"So, you dumped me before I could dump you? Is that what you're saying?" Hermione asked.

"Well, I wouldn't have phrased quite that way, but I suppose that's correct."

Hermione got to her feet. Her brows were drawn together, and her hands were on her hips. She thrust out her chin.

"How dare you presume to know what I thought of you or how I felt about you!"

"Hermione, please, you're making a scene," Snape hissed.

"Just answer one question honestly and I'll leave and never bother you again."

"What is it?" he said with a sigh, seemingly resigned to having his personal life become the subject of idle gossip among the wizard folk who were pretending not to be listening to every word he and Hermione said.

"Did you send me away because you stopped loving me?" she asked.

"Hermione ..." he began.

"It's a simple yes or no question, Severus," she said.

Snape looked at the witch in front of him. She was so intense, so passionate, and so much more than he deserved.

But it seemed she loved him. In spite of his homeliness, in spite of his bad temper, in spite of his chequered past, and in spite of his overwhelming stupidity, she loved him.

"I've never stopped loving you," he said simply. He reached out his hand and lightly stroked her cheek.

Hermione lifted her hand and covered his, leaning into his touch.

"We need to talk, Severus," she said.

"I'd like that very much," he replied.

Lucius arrived back at the table just in time to hear Snape declare his undying love for Hermione. He smiled broadly and took a moment to smooth back his hair.

"I'll see Narcissa home, old boy. No need to concern yourself with her."

"Thank you, Lucius," Snape said, although he never took his eyes off Hermione.

Narcissa snorted in a very unladylike and undignified manner.

"Bastard," she muttered.

"Now, now, Narcissa," Lucius said in a soothing tone of voice. "We should be happy that true love has found its way for our old friend Severus."

"Come, my dear, and I'll see you home."

He held out his hand. Narcissa stood up and took it.

"The peasants deserve each other," she muttered. Then she looked up at Lucius and smiled, almost shyly.

"I understand that your business is doing very well, Lucius," she simpered.

"Passably so, my pet, passably so."

Epilogue

Hermione sat behind her desk and glared at the wizard seated in the chair across from her.

"You've got a deduction listed here for twenty Galleons for dinner at *The Sorcerer's Table*. Isn't that where we went the night you took me out? And wasn't that on the twenty-third of last month?"

"No wonder you've risen to such great heights in the Ministry, Hermione. Nothing gets past you."

"You can't take a deduction for a personal dinner, Lucius," she said.

"How are you and Severus getting along these days?" Lucius asked.

"We getting along fine, and don't try to change the subject. A date is not a legitimate business expense."

"If I hadn't brought you to that particular restaurant on that particular night, you and Severus might not have gotten back together, isn't that right?"

"You set us up," Hermione said with sudden insight.

Lucius merely smiled. "Draco did happen to *mention* that Severus and Narcissa had dinner plans for that evening ..."

"Why would you care if Severus and I got back together?" Hermione wanted to know.

"As much as I hate to shatter your rosy illusion of me, Hermione, I must confess that I don't give a Niffler's arse that you and Severus are back together again. I do, however, care greatly that Narcissa is once again warming my sheets," he concluded.

"You were trying to make Narcissa jealous? With *me*?"

"Guilty as charged," he said.

"You said that Narcissa is an airhead," Hermione said.

"Oh, she is. She indisputably is. She is, however, *my* airhead."

"You were jealous of her and Severus," Hermione said with a grin.

"I was. I thought to make Narcissa see me in a different light. Severus's jealousy turned out to be simply a serendipitous side effect in more ways than one."

"What do you mean?"

"It was my intention to reunite Narcissa and me, not to reunite you and Severus. But, ~~that's~~ what happened. And since bringing people together is what my business is all about, I would say that the cost of that dinner is an allowable deduction, wouldn't you?"

Hermione laughed, and then she initialled the form in front of her. How could she argue with that?

~Mischief Managed~

Author's Note: This little ficlet was written for shiv5468 as a thank you gift for her hard work during the Live Journal Winter Severus/Hermione gift exchange.