

# W-Harmony

by peppermint

The Yenta is never who you expect it to be.

## Chapter One

Chapter 1 of 5

The Yenta is never who you expect it to be.

*Excerpt from "Changing the Tides: Modern Wizarding Business Practices" by Isobel Allen*

"...In the years following the second Voldemort war, the Wizarding world experienced a baby boom similar to the years following Grindelwald.

It became the fashion for witches to marry directly out of school and start their families right away, and Wizarding business leapt at the chance to accommodate them, with new child minding services, private primary schools, and charm-a-meal outlets opening weekly. Modern witches took the challenges of career and child-rearing in stride, and operating a Wee Wizards Playcare franchise was very profitable.

Matchmaking services also experienced considerable growth in this period, due to the number of younger witches looking for older husbands. The august and established firms such as Match-A-Mate International, Firespark, and Wand to Heart, had a resurgence of business. Several new services cropped up almost overnight, although most faded away within the first eighteen months. Some failed because of branding challenges, such as Bag-A-Bloke, owned by now-famous clothing designer Lavender Brown. Others simply produced unhappy couples. One new firm, however, continued to be quite popular, although the older firms dismissed it as a fluke.

Sadie Harbrenner, age 154 and head Yenta of Match-a-Mate International, remembers the day she found out who was behind this particular firm.

"Heard about him, hadn't we all? Wasn't he the one who had killed the headmaster up at Hogwarts and kept spying for You-Know-Who? And then You-Know-Who tried to kill him! And after all that, he comes along, bold as you please, and sets himself up in a profession that has belonged to witches since the beginning of time! It was a scandal, dearie!"

Madam Harbrenner speaks of none other than reformed Death Eater and spy for the Light, Severus Snape but Mr. Snape's involvement in the company did not come to light until he decided to expand into the Muggle world.

Snape, tired of teaching and potions, wanted a quiet desk job after his grueling years of service to Tom Riddle and Albus Dumbledore. Years of teaching Hogwarts' finest had given him a view into human psychology that few others could match. After careful consideration of his options, he threw his hat into the ring of new matchmaking services. First, people came out of curiosity about the name, W-Harmony, and the new methods used to match couples. Then, as word spread, people came to get the best service. Happy couples gushed over the twenty-nine dimensions of compatibility that W-Harmony used. The company began running splashy, full-page advertisements in mainstream publications like the *Daily Prophet*, *The Quibbler*, and *Witch Weekly*. The advertisements featured the love stories of actual happy couples matched by the W-Harmony service, complete with photos.

Soon, the company was poised to expand past where Mr. Snape could no longer both head the company and oversee day-to-day operations, forcing him to bring on a business partner to further his goals..."

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"Thanks so much for letting me stay at number twelve, Harry. I had no idea that Mme. Germain would kick me out of my apprenticeship housing the second I passed my Mastery exam!" Hermione said with a shake of her head, taking the keys from her friend.

"It's no problem, Hermione. There probably should be someone here full-time anyway. Kreacher gets lonely. He won't leave except to go to Hogwarts, and Pansy prefers the flat in Kensington, since it's near her mum."

Hermione nodded. "I never would have pictured you two together, but I guess W-Harmony really knows what they're doing. I've never seen you happier."

Harry blushed. "Thanks, Hermione. Stay as long as you like. Put Kreacher to work. And no, you may not pay me one Knut for rent. And if you ask Kreacher where he's getting the food, you won't get any answers."

"You know me too well, Harry," Hermione wryly quipped. "I'll be out as soon as I find a job. It shouldn't take too long."

Harry just rolled his eyes and pulled his cloak on. "I don't care if it takes a year, Hermione. You're family. Stop acting like a guest. And feel free to invite Neville down for a weekend," he said, wagging his eyebrows suggestively.

Hermione chuckled, waving, as Harry shut the front door behind him.

She made her way into the house, leaving her shrunken belongings in the hall. It was easy to see that Kreacher had been bored and lonely she'd never seen the place looking so bright and clean. Soon, she had a cup of tea, a roast beef sandwich with horseradish, and a pile of crisps. While Hermione ate, she perused the "help wanted" section of the *Daily Prophet*. There weren't many openings, but one tucked into the bottom of the last column caught her eye.

#### **Wanted:**

**Arithmancer with Muggle background or significant experience with Muggle computer technology to design and implement cross-culture services for established firm. Qualified individuals to reply to Professor Harmonious, Diagon Alley postbox 299, with C.V., letter of introduction, and salary expectations.**

'Oh, right. Like it could be *that* easy,' she thought to herself.

A snap of her fingers later, she had parchment and quill in hand.

An hour later, several drafts had been tossed on the floor, *Incendio'd*, turned into paper airplanes, and sculpted into a fetching paper model of the Tower of London in the case of a particularly bad version. The last draft was in front of her, the ink drying on her signature.

*Professor Harmonious:*

*Upon careful review of my qualifications, I believe I would be an excellent fit for your company. I have recently attained my Master in Arithmancy from Mme. Sophie Germain of Lyon, France, and I'm familiar with the latest research in Arithmantic applications and concepts such as chronomancy, telemancy, and the cross-culture discipline of compumantic science. However, my strengths lie not only in Arithmancy, as I hold NEWTs in five other disciplines. I am a Muggle-born witch and currently maintain a residence in a Muggle neighborhood, allowing me to effectively straddle the line between the Muggle and Wizarding worlds. I am comfortable around computers, extremely organized, and trustworthy.*

*The job description sounds like a large responsibility. It will likely require travel and significant effort beyond regular business hours. I will require at least 119 Galleons weekly, travel reimbursement and profit-sharing options.*

*An owl addressed to Hermione Granger will find me in London.*

*Yours,*

*Hermione J. Granger*

She attached her C.V., called her owl the affectionate Great Horned, Spock, had been a present from her parents and sent the letter off to Professor Harmonious. She knew she'd never heard of the professor before, but people used aliases all the time. A little mystery was good for the soul.

By the time Hermione had finished her correspondence, it was after eight. She brushed off Kreacher's offers of a full formal dinner and instead allowed him to unpack her trunk while she took a bath. Immersed up to her neck in scented bubbles, she was able to relax and assimilate the events of the past twelve hours.

She had read that damnable Apprenticeship contract twelve times before signing it and had never noticed it said anything about lodging after the Apprenticeship had been completed. In Hermione's opinion, it wouldn't have killed Madam Germain to give her a grace period to arrange new housing. Luckily, Hermione had Harry, and Harry's extra house. Personally, she thought Madam Germain was a little miffed at how easy Hermione had found the Mastery exams and testing. After all, she hadn't kicked Alain out, and he'd finished his exams the same day.

It was all water under the bridge now. The ink might be barely dry on the parchment, but she was a full-fledged Arithmancer with all the rights and privileges accorded to those of her rank. Unfortunately, that mostly meant invitations to dreary conferences where they hashed over the same tired theorems and equations in use since the time of Archimedes. Maybe she could infuse the membership with her fresh ideas if they took her seriously.

She clambered out of the tub with a sigh, wrapped herself in her warm blue bathrobe, and pulled the plug on the water.

She was tired. Changing the world could start tomorrow.

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A/N:

Mme. Germain was named for French mathematician Sophie Germain (1776-1831), an early contributor to calculus who formed mathematical models for vibrating strings and membranes, oscillating springs, and elasticity. She won a prize from the French Academy in 1816 for her paper entitled "Memoir on the Vibrations of Elastic Plates." Larson, Roland, Hostetler Robert, and Edwards Bruce. *Calculus*. Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath and Company, 1994, page 1114.

Chronomancy, I believe, was first used by ladyofthemasque in "In Annulo".

Prompt info:

I. Something Old

A. Oldies but Goodies

1. revisit a once popular challenge

2. Yenta Livery Company Challenge

# Chapter Two

Chapter 2 of 5

The Yenta is never who you expect it to be.

From "*Finding Your Footing: Career Advice for the Modern Witch and Wizard*" by Beatrix Adalbert

When applying for that perfect job to commence your adult career, there are a few important guidelines to keep in mind:

1. Put your best foot forward. Use high-quality parchment and non-smudging ink. Check your spelling and grammar carefully.
2. Be honest. An employer will be able to tell if you don't have the skills they need, and many employers, including the Ministry of Magic, may use Veritaserum to make sure.
3. Be positive. Nobody likes to work with a Negative Nellie.
4. Be prompt. Don't wait to send in your application or C.V.; do it right away. This makes you look like you're on top of things.

Following these four guidelines will help you get set on the path to your perfect career!

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"Pardon me, sir, I have the mail from the postbox."

Snape glanced up at his secretary from where he sat behind his stately mahogany desk and beckoned her in with a wave of his hand. "Many responses, Miss Richards?"

Agnes Richards stepped into Snape's well-appointed office, her heels clicking on the dark hardwood floors. She was a sensible, middle-aged woman, dressed in sensible business robes, with her hair pulled back into a sensible knot at the nape of her neck. She was efficient and unflappable, which was why she'd been hired. She also possessed a wicked sense of humor and a tendency to be amused by his bellowing, which was why Snape had kept her on.

She stood in front of the desk and leafed through the small stack of envelopes. "Seven. I'd say the number's auspicious, but this one in the middle smells like the sender rubbed it with the scent glands of a musk ox," she said with a grimace, separating the putrid pink envelope from the rest. "Shall I just *Incendio* it and save you the hassle?"

"By all means, Miss Richards. I do know how much you enjoy setting fire to offensive post. I should hate to rob you of the pleasure," Snape drawled.

Agnes just shook her head and handed Snape the envelopes. "Remember, staff meeting in an hour. Don't get too distracted, fantasizing about the scads of money a competent arithmancer will bring in," she said, closing his office door behind her.

Snape scowled, picking up the first envelope from the pile. "I may as well not postpone the inevitable," he muttered to himself. "Let's see what lack-witted miscreants have applied for the job."

Twenty minutes later, Snape had a well-lined rubbish bin, a pile of ashes, a rather fetching paper sculpture of Buckingham Palace, and one envelope left.

The envelope's parchment was ivory and smooth with a nice weight, proper for business correspondence. The sender had not used a Dictoquill, but his or her own round, neat handwriting. Already an improvement over the previous five applications, and he hadn't even broken the seal...the lavender wax seal, stamped with the symbol of the International Congress of Arithmancers. Finally! The other applicants had lacked a Mastery, and he needed someone who knew what the hell they were doing. He had no use for someone who couldn't tell an equation from an expression.

He turned the envelope over again to study the handwriting. It looked tidy. Capable. Familiar. Wait, familiar? He looked closer, studying the hook of the H in Harmonious, the ending R in Professor. Recognition niggled in the back of his brain like a Snitch just out of reach. He reached for his letter opener and slid it under the seal, popping the envelope open. He drew out the papers quickly, shaking them open, looking for the signature.

Granger.

Fucking Granger!

The little hand-waving, know-it-all, leaving-him-for-dead pain in the arse had gone and got herself a fucking Mastery in Arithmancy. He'd wondered why she hadn't come through the office looking for her life-mate after Potter and Weasley had used the services, and now he had his answer. She'd obviously been busy.

He was tempted to just toss her packet into the bin, but curiosity won out. His eyes swept over the cover letter. Well-written, well-reasoned, well within her rights to ask for that amount of money (as much as he hated admitting such). He was impressed with her C.V. as well, Outstanding NEWTs in Arithmancy, Charms, Transfiguration, Ancient Runes, Potions, and Astronomy. A summer internship at Hogwarts with Septima Vector, apprentice and journeyman studies with Sophie Germain. If he remembered Vector's stories correctly, Germain was not easy to get on with, especially if you were female.

Blast and damn. He was going to have to have Granger in for an interview. He only hoped that she'd given up her incessant hand-waving habit.

"Miss Richards!" he bellowed through the closed office door.

Agnes opened the door and peeked in. "Yes, boss?"

"Find me anything you can on Hermione Granger. I want to know what she's been doing with every second of her spare time since the end of the war. Boyfriends, girlfriends, husbands, divorces, affairs, what she's done on her summer vacations and where she shops for groceries. Any dirt you can find, I want it."

Agnes nodded. "What shall I do with this information once I've compiled it?"

"If she's clean, have her in to interview with Zabini. I want to know how serious she is about the job, or if she just applied on a whim. If there's a whiff of scandal..."

"Send the standard 'thanks, but no thanks' letter?"

"Merlin, no. Tell me. The girl spent six years of classes being a know-it-all pain in my arse. I deserve to know any dirty details," he said with a smirk, "and send the letter

myself."

"Boss," said Agnes, "some day you're going to come to a very bad end."

"I know. I look forward to it."

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Meanwhile, Hermione was enjoying the luxury of an unhurried breakfast. Kreacher had outdone himself with a varied spread laid out on the table in her bedroom. Sipping rich, black coffee in a plush chair with her feet up, a plate of *pain au chocolat* nearby, she was positive she deserved the relaxation after five years of getting up early to do the chores while Alain slept in. She wasn't sure if Madame Germain made a habit of sleeping with her male apprentices. All she knew is that it was fucking unfair, and she was going to enjoy having a house-elf for once. To hell with S.P.E.W., anyway. At least she knew her Mastery had come from her skill with calculations instead of her skill with cunnilingus. If she had any, of course.

She nursed a last cup of coffee and nibbled her third pastry...who was counting, really...while debating what to do with her first day of freedom in five years. She supposed she should be looking for a job, but that packet she'd sent off last night was surely enough to allow one day of skiving off. Hogwarts was still in session, so popping up to see Neville was out of the question. Going to visit Molly would only bring lamentation on her "still unmarried" state. Hermione was lost in contemplation of the frayed edge of her pajama top, running her fingers over the dangling threads, when Kreacher popped dolefully into her room.

"Missy Hermione is finishing her breakfast and Missy Hermione is going out."

Hermione eyed Kreacher. "I am?"

"Master Harry says Kreacher is to make sure Missy Hermione leaves the house and doesn't spend a year lost in the library, so Missy Hermione is going out. Maybe Missy Hermione should be buying new clothes?"

She glanced at her ratty, threadbare flannel pajamas and nodded. "Probably a good idea, Kreacher. By the way, how did you learn to make such good pastries?"

Kreacher's face took on a look of unholy glee. "Those pastries was Mistress Bellatrix's favorites."

Hermione resolved never to eat another *pain au chocolat* as long as she lived.

After showering and dressing (she really did need new clothes), she managed to raise Ginny through the Floo. Convincing her to go shopping didn't take much, and Ginny agreed to meet her at the Leaky in an hour.

Over lunch, Hermione grilled Ginny about W-Harmony and whether she thought Professor Harmonious had anything to do with the matchmaking company. It hadn't taken her long to put two and two together after thinking about Harry's luck with the matchmaking service and the application packet she had sent off the night before.

Ginny just stared at her. "You really have lived under a rock these past few years, haven't you? Yes, Professor Harmonious is who runs W-Harmony, but nobody ever sees him. Or her. Nobody knows if the Professor is male or female, and the way that W-Harmony matches people is a more closely-guarded secret than just about anything else in the Wizarding world!"

Hermione groaned. "You mean I just applied for a job with a dating service run by the Wizarding equivalent of Willy Wonka? I thought I'd heard the names in conjunction, but I wasn't sure."

"Oh, Wonka was a wizard. Well, sort of. Roald Dahl is a Squib, he based the character on Ambrosius Flume," Ginny blithely replied, stirring sugar into her tea. "Dahl made up the bit about him being an eccentric weirdo who kept pygmy slaves, though."

Hermione didn't dare comment on who the BFG may have been based on. Or why a Squib would write a book painting witches in such a horrible light. Then again, thinking of Mother Black, Bellatrix Lestrage, and other Dark witches she'd run across, perhaps it wasn't too far-flung.

"Never mind that, Ginny. I suppose I can see why a dating service would need an Arithmancer, but what was the "cross-culture services" bit about? You don't think this Harmonious character is going to try to take over the Muggle dating world too?"

Ginny shrugged. "Why not? There's probably money to be made, people to be helped, that sort of rubbish."

Hermione put her head down on the table and sighed. What had she got herself into?

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A/N:

My apologies to Roald Dahl, Robert Heinlein, and Aaron Sorkin.

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## Chapter Three

Chapter 3 of 5

The Yenta is never who you expect it to be.

"Never presume to know what your direct supervisor is thinking. He is likely busy with thoughts far above your level of understanding. Be ready at a moment's notice to fetch anything he may need to assist in his work, be it a cup of tea or a new quill. Be discreet, rarely seen and seldom heard, unless you are called for. If your supervisor is female, do not presume to be friendly with her. She requires the same consideration a man does in being able to do her job without distractions.

Arrive to work early so you are ready to serve when your boss comes in. Have his tea or coffee piping hot and waiting for him as he walks by your desk. Be cheerful, but not annoyingly so..."

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Agnes tucked the last of the papers on her desk into a large envelope and quickly jotted down a memo to her boss. It'd taken her the better part of a week to hunt down the information on Hermione Granger, and she was impressed. Either Granger had friends in high places or she really was as spotless as she seemed.

*Inter-Office Memo*

*To: Harmonious*

*From: A. Richards*

*Boss,*

*Granger's Arithmancy mistress describes her as "competent and ethical." She does have a beau, Hogwarts Herbology professor Neville Longbottom. She has booked a ticket on a Muggle airline to Australia for the past four summers, spending two weeks in Canberra and then flying back to her apprenticeship in France. No history of trouble with the law or other deviant behavior.*

*Why do I have the feeling you're going to be disappointed there's nothing unsavoury?*

The dossier was thick, owing to the mountain of press clippings available on Hermione Granger, War Heroine. Snape wasn't fooled. Why had she gone to ground after taking her N.E.W.T.s, mere months after the end of the war? The girl he remembered had always had her hand in the air, wanting recognition and attention. What had spooked Granger so badly that she had run away to France? It could have been academia, but there were Arithmancers in Britain to apprentice under: Septima Vector, for starters. Granger had done an internship with Vector; why didn't she stay?

As he leafed through the papers, a glossy, candid photograph slid into his lap from the middle of the stack. He gave it a quick glance, intending to set it aside...he knew what the girl looked like, after all...but what he saw came as a surprise. It was a Wizarding photograph, taken at what looked to be a sidewalk cafe in Diagon Alley. At first, he wondered if they'd photographed the wrong person, but upon careful study, he was sure it was Granger. Her hair was different, cut short and tamed into a glossy cap of ringlets reaching just to her jawline. She looked older, more sure of herself. She looked bloody remarkable. The photographer had caught Granger laughing at something, and it made her come alive. When he caught himself wistfully stroking her glossy, black-and-white jawline, he opened a drawer and thrust the photograph inside, slamming the drawer shut for good measure. She was a know-it-all. She had left him for dead. The sight of her laughing could not, would not, leave him feeling any positive emotions whatsoever.

He stuffed the papers back into the envelope. Best to just turn Granger over to Zabini.

"I've only acted like a lovesick mooncalf once in my life, and I will not be repeating the exercise!" Snape insisted to his closed desk drawer, before penning a note to his human resources manager.

*Inter-Office Memo*

*To: B. Zabini*

*From: Harmonious*

*Enclosed is a dossier on Hermione Granger. Have her in for an interview for the Arithmancer position. Be charming. Scaring her off is my job.*

He cast a medium-strength Sticking Charm on the memo and slapped it onto the dossier. Rising from his extremely comfortable and well-padded leather executive chair, he stalked to the fireplace, pinched a bit of Floo powder, and sent the Life and Times of Hermione Granger through the Floo to Zabini's office down the hall.

Snape sat back down at his desk and read over Agnes' memo again. It was only then that he noticed the mention of Longbottom, Terror of the Potions classroom and (he added grudgingly) slayer of Nagini. Granger was dating Longbottom? Granger didn't deserve him. Even if she was nearly *pretty* these days, she was a harpy of the highest order. Poor, henpecked Longbottom. They obviously weren't suited at all. They ought to come in and take advantage of his services... There were many services he could provide to Granger, and not all of them profession... er. That photo! It was bewitching him! He wrenched the drawer open, scrawled a "forgot this" on the back of the photo, and sent that through the Floo as well. Let Zabini be bewitched by Granger and her excellent jawline, glossy, short curls, and graceful laughter.

"Miss Richards!" he bellowed through the closed office door.

Agnes, out at her own desk with a very comfortable chair, inspected the "Siren Red" toenail varnish she had just applied and sighed in frustration. Drying charms always left ridges. She'd have to do it all again later. She Vanished the varnish instead and slipped her feet back into her very sensible low-heeled pumps. Agnes tucked the bottle of nail varnish into her desk drawer where she kept her personal belongings, like the smutty romance novels she read when Snape didn't have anything for her to do and the box of Honeydukes milk chocolate toffees for when she had successfully navigated her boss' minefield of temper when he was in a particularly prickly mood. It was almost lunchtime on Friday...maybe she could convince him to eat before he launched into whatever subject had provoked his ire. There was no managing Severus Snape, of course. There was only guiding.

Agnes loved working for Snape, and she was quite fond of him in a very aunt-ish way. When he was in a pleasant mood, she wanted to slip him extra pocket money with which to buy sweets, and when he was difficult and prickly, she wished she could send him home to his mother to have his bottom paddled. Before she had answered the *Daily Prophet* ad for "reliable, competent assistant wanted for demanding executive," she had been a middle-level secretary at the Ministry of Magic. Working for Snape did not only offer more lavish benefits and better pay, it was a hundred times more entertaining than filing reports on cauldron bottom thickness and other useless twaddle for forty hours per week. Plus, she only had to answer to one boss, not several middle-management wankers who got off on sneering down their noses at the clerical help.

She plucked the folder containing the takeaway menus from her bottom desk drawer before standing and making her way to Snape's office door.

"Yes, boss? Are you ready to order lunch?"

Snape looked up from the memo he'd been perusing. "Lunch?"

"Yes, sir," explained Agnes, shaking the menu folder in her hand, "lunch. It's a meal taken traditionally in the middle of the day to stave off hunger and make for a productive afternoon. You ought to try it sometime; it might sweeten your disposition."

Favored with a glare from Snape, which she made a show of ignoring, Agnes opened the folder and shuffled through the menus. "Indian today? Or perhaps Thai? No greasy pub grub, the Leaky can do without your patronage one day a week. Or I could pop over to that deli in Charing Cross and procure sandwiches."

Snape was sure he had something else he needed to ask Miss Richards, and a very good reason for glaring at her (other than her cheeky impertinence), but the mention of lunch made his stomach grumble and his mouth water, and he couldn't remember just what that reason was. "Indian, if that suits. Aloo mattar and makkani murgh for me,

and lots of naan. Ask Zabini if he has lunch plans, and if not, order for him as well. We'll eat in the conference room, I want both of your opinions on the Granger file."

Agnes nodded, placing the menu for Curry Be Any Hotter atop the stack in her folder. "You know Zabini's going to claim that all he wants is a half-order of veggie pakora. Then he'll try to get you to give him your makkani murgh while making not-quite-rude comments regarding the need for expansion tailoring of your trousers under the guise of care and concern."

Snape grimaced. "Never mind; we'll meet at teatime. He can watch me demolish half a Victoria sponge instead. Let's go to the restaurant rather than ordering in. I need some fresh air."

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Friday noon found Hermione at a table at Curry Be Any Hotter, perusing the *Daily Prophet* for job advertisements once again. A week of sitting around waiting to be owled hadn't been very productive, even if it had been fun. Unfortunately, the "help wanted" section was lacking anything but advertisements for shopgirls and waitresses. She didn't mind working in a shop if she had to, but she'd rather avoid it. It didn't seem as though she could put her Mastery to much use behind the counter at Flourish and Blotts.

The server had just set her lunch in front of her when the opening of the door caught her attention. A shorter, middle-aged woman in a sensible tweed skirt suit stepped in, followed by a tall, dark-haired man in a crisp black suit with a vest and a green silk tie. He had a bit of grey at his temples, and his nose was rather large. Had she encountered him in the Wizarding world, she'd think he was a dead ringer for Professor Snape.

"There's a free table just there, Miss Richards. Shall we take it?"

Even his voice sounded like Snape's. Hermione glanced down at her plate, then looked up again through her eyelashes...it wouldn't do to be caught staring. Suddenly, her chair was jarred from behind.

"Terribly sorry about that! It's this gigantic handbag of mine!" the tweed-suited woman apologised.

"It's all right," Hermione said with a smile. "I imagine I've done that any number of times with a stuffed-full bag myself."

"You!" growled the dark-haired man. "What are *you* doing here?"

A/N: Many thanks to Anonymous\_Plume for the ridiculous name of the Indian restaurant. Pyjamapants first looked over this chapter about two years ago when I first wrote it, and kittylefish did the more recent beta. They are both fabulous.

## Chapter Four

*Chapter 4 of 5*

The Yenta is never who you expect it to be.

Excerpt from *Acing the Interview: From Apprenticeship to Workplace*, by Wynn Farnstad

"...Dress conservatively. Dark robes are a must.

Even if the environment is casual, dress to impress. Your school cloak is not impressive.

Witches should wear a modest amount of makeup and be sure their hair is tastefully styled.

The interviewer is sure to ask about your worst traits. Make sure the worst thing you can say is that you show up early.

Outline your accomplishments and best traits, but don't boast.

Above all, relax and speak slowly..."

---

Hermione gasped. "Professor Snape?" she sputtered, then scowled and gestured to her lunch. "As I expect would be obvioussir, I'm having lunch. Keema samosa and masoor dal, to be specific."

Snape found himself gobsmacked. "Miss Granger, I har..."

"Miss Granger!" Agnes exclaimed. "Oh, it's good to meet you!"

Caught off guard, both Snape and Hermione stared at Agnes.

Hermione was first to regain her composure. "I expect Snape still complains about me being a know-it-all in his classes?" she remarked dryly, extending a hand to Agnes.

Agnes smiled and shook Hermione's proffered hand. "Agnes Richards. I'm Mr. Snape's personal assistant. It's a pleasure."

"You must have nerves of steel," Hermione said admiringly. "Unless he's changed a vast amount since apparently returning from the dead," she remarked pointedly.

Snape sputtered, "Miss Richards not only has nerves of steel, she's remarkably competent and highly reliable. And I was never dead, I just like my privacy."

Hermione laughed and turned her gaze on Snape for a moment before smiling at Agnes. "Must be a change from classes full of recalcitrant students and scheming elder wizards. I've never heard him pay such a compliment before...Merlin knows how he hated my know-it-all, hand-waving ways."

"I did not say that, Miss Granger," Snape replied, taken by the spots of pink on Hermione's cheeks and the sparkle in her eye.

"Forgive me, sir. I'm still only used to you as my strict professor who favored his own house at school. We've all changed since the war," she said, motioning to a waiter to pack up her lunch. "Please, don't let me keep you from your meal. It was nice to meet you, Agnes."

Agnes waved as Hermione made her way to the door.

"She's feisty!" Agnes said with approval. "It would be fun to have her in the office."

Snape put his head down on the table and muttered, "The two of you will conspire to send me to an early grave, I just know it."

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Hermione made her way back to Grimmauld Place and had just tucked into her rewarmed lunch when an owl soared through the open kitchen casement. It landed near her plate, and she offered it half a samosa while she untied the letter it carried.

*Master Granger,*

*Thank you for your interest in our company. We believe you may be an excellent addition to our staff. Please attend an interview on Monday at 10:00 am. We are located at 17 Diagon Alley, Suite B. Please owl with regrets only.*

Yrs,

*B. Zabini, Human Resources*

*P.S. Granger - love the new hairdo.*

*P.P.S. Longbottom? Seriously?*

She chuckled when she read the postscripts. Blaise had been aloof at school, but they had worked on a NEWT-level Charms project together in their re-done seventh year, and he had been nice enough...almost congenial. Hopefully that would work in her favour in the hiring process. Hermione set the letter aside and began to tuck into her lunch with gusto...her stomach was rumbling.

She was halfway through her dal when she realized that something wasn't right.

If Blaise knew she and Neville had been dating at all (even if it was just during the summers in a half-arsed fashion), that meant the company had done some serious background checks. She had expected a minor check...schooling, previous employment, criminal record...but why was it important to know who she was dating? And "new hairdo?" Was this 'Professor Harmonionus' a weirdo who was having her followed? Hermione shivered, despite the warm summer afternoon. She had never been happier to live in a Secret-Kept location and was glad Harry hadn't listened to her when she gently suggested that the need to keep Grimmauld Place under a Fidelius Charm had probably expired.

It had been a weird day already, and it was just barely noon. Running into not-dead Snape at a Muggle restaurant and having him treat her like a human being was one thing...she might have recovered from that with a Floo-call to Ginny or Luna...but being followed by a potential employer was downright *creepy*.

*Nothing for it, she thought, packing away her half-eaten lunch. Weirdness of this magnitude can only be solved by a long, hot bubble bath and a smutty novel.*

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At 9:15 on Monday morning, Blaise Zabini departed his comfortable primary office in the Secret-Kept W-Harmony corporate headquarters. He wanted plenty of time in the front office to prepare for his meeting with Granger. The boss said he should be charming, so he'd be charming. He had his favourite suit on...black pinstripes, with a pale lavender shirt, silver tie, and matching pocket-square. Dress to impress. Maybe he could get a date out of it...he couldn't believe Granger would be all that serious about Longbottom.

He slipped through the door to the street-front of the business and unlocked his secondary office. It wasn't as well appointed as the first, but since all he did was interview potential employees there, it didn't need to be. Still, one didn't run across an Arithmancy master like Granger very often, and he was pretty sure Snape wanted her for the position...they weren't interviewing anyone else. Blaise spent a few moments casting some housekeeping charms to improve the room's air and made sure the coffee service was ready and waiting.

Granger arrived at 10:00 on the dot.

"Blaise! How nice to see you again!" Hermione exclaimed, stepping forward to shake his hand.

"Hermione. Welcome to W-Harmony. Please, step into my office. Could I pour you a coffee or tea?"

Hermione settled herself into the very comfortable chair in the office. Blaise might have said "his," but the space was too clean and impersonal for it to be his regular office.

"Coffee please, two sugars. So, is this just the public front, and your real office is in the back? Your boss pulled a full background check, since you knew about Neville and my shorter hair, and an employer who does that much pre-interview investigation doesn't have all their secrets out on display."

Blaise took his time fixing the coffee. Two minutes into the interview, and she already had the better of him.

"Guilty as charged. The front office is where we interview new employees and potential clients come in to do initial paperwork and questionnaires and have initial match meetings."

Hermione nodded. "And I imagine the back office is either under a dizzying array of wards or Secret-Kept," she mused, watching his mouth fall open in shock. "No, don't tell me. I'd imagine you'd have to Obliviate me, and I don't much fancy that. Now shall we get on with it?"

Truth be told, it took a moment (and a discreet adjustment of his trousers) for Blaise to compose himself enough to begin the actual interview.

Hermione talked about her apprenticeship, special projects, and computer skills. She inquired how they planned to host a massive webserver in conjunction with a highly magical place of business and was not satisfied with Blaise's answer of 'we'll sort it out.' She made it clear that in no way would she spend her work week crammed into what used to be a supply closet with a massive amount of hot machinery.

When Blaise finally sent her on her way two hours later, his head was spinning. He stumbled back to his office and sat down heavily behind his desk to pen a note.

*Boss,*

*Granger is without a doubt more shrewd and calculating than Salazar himself. Hire her if you like, but she's a bloody barracuda. To think I hoped I might get a date out of that - I'm afraid I'd lose my bollocks.*

*Traumatized,*

*BZ*

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Hermione set off for home with a spring in her step. There had been no other candidates waiting, nor had Blaise mentioned conducting other interviews...so she had felt safe raking him over the coals for information. She still didn't know who this Dr. Harmonious character was, but he wasn't going to pull one over on Hermione Granger!

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Snape scowled as he read Blaise's note. More Slytherin than Slytherin? What a ridiculous concept. Granger was as Gryffindor as they came.

*Zabini,*

*Have her in for a second meeting with Harmonious. Find me a Muggle to Polyjuice as.*

SS

"Miss Richards!"

Agnes poked her head in the door with a smile. "Sir?"

"I'm going to hire Granger if she can keep it together for a meeting with Harmonious. Have Malfoy at our firm check over the interview contract to be sure it's watertight. I don't want her to find even the tiniest loophole to exploit. I don't know if we can trust her yet."

Nodding, Agnes wrote down the request. "Shall I ask Mr. Malfoy to have the Muggle side of the firm look it over as well?"

"Absolutely. What would I do without your quick thinking, Miss Richards?" Snape replied quite seriously.

"I imagine you'd still be running this company out of that derelict two up, two down in Manchester, with public meetings in that poky little office space in Hogsmeade, sir," Agnes replied.

Snape glared. "No doubt, no doubt. Find out if Zabini needs a Cheering Charm, will you? Granger ate him for elevenses."

Agnes closed the door and went snickering to herself down the corridor.

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*Master Granger,*

*Congratulations. You have passed to Stage Two of the interview process. Dr. Harmonious would like to meet with you this Thursday afternoon at 2:00, to discuss a formal offer, job expectations, salary requirements, and other factors of negotiation. Please be advised that you will not see Dr. Harmonious's real face. He enjoys his privacy and requires all Stage Two candidates to bring a signed, notarized copy of the enclosed Interview Confidentiality Contract to this meeting.*

*Please owl if you refuse these terms. Otherwise, we shall expect you Thursday at 2:00 pm.*

Yrs,

*B. Zabini, Human Resources*

## Chapter Five

*Chapter 5 of 5*

The Yenta is never who you expect it to be.

Excerpts from Landing Your Dream Job, by Branwyn Tipplehoff

...There are very few situations in which it is recommended to take time off from a current job to interview for a new position. Above all, be discreet. Don't perpetuate office gossip just say you are taking a personal day, which is all anyone needs to know...

...Always be sure your potential employer knows your interest goes beyond the first interview. Send a thank you card through the post right afterward. You'll be perceived as thoughtful and well mannered. Even if they don't hire you now, they may remember you when positions open in the future...

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Later that afternoon, Hermione was curled up on the sofa in the drawing room, a dog-eared paperback of *Dune* in her right hand and a fragrant cup of tea in her left. Engrossed as she was in the book, Ginny's head appearing in the Floo was a surprise.

"Hermione!" Ginny called in a tearful voice, "Are you home? Can I come through?"

"Ginny? Of course!" Hermione replied, setting her book and tea aside just in time to have them replaced with an armful of sobbing witch instead. "Gin, for goodness' sake! Whatever is wrong?"

Ginny pulled back and threw herself on the sofa with a scowl. "Well, you're looking at the latest casualty of Morrison's reign of terror over Magical Games and Sport," Ginny said. "Stupid wanker fired me for going to the Harpies trial."

Hermione bit her lip, torn between wanting to tut at Ginny and ask what she expected for skiving off work or offering a vat of ice cream.

"I had someone to cover for me and everything, and it's nothing half the blokes in the office haven't done, with less consideration from them, mind you!"

Ice cream it was, then. Possibly two vats. And sprinkles.

"Chauvinistic pig. Going to appeal it?" Hermione asked, sitting beside her.



"Not worth the trouble. I have about three months' expenses saved, so I've plenty of time to find a new job or hear an affirmative from the Harpies. No more nights out, but at least I'll eat and pay rent, hey?"

Hermione nodded. "So the trial went well?"

Ginny beamed. "Oh, Hermione! I know you don't follow or particularly care about Quidditch, but it was *fantastic*. I even got shots in on Gwenog Jones. GWENOG JONES, Hermione! They had me chase the snitch, just in case, and I was able to show off some of the fancier maneuvers Krum taught us during my seventh year at Hogwarts!" She was bouncing on the couch in glee.

"Ohhh," Hermione replied with a sly grin, "You mean the wonky-faint?"

"Wronski fei..." Ginny began, but Hermione just dissolved into giggles. Before long, Ginny was laughing too. "Ron will never believe you just made a Quidditch joke. It'll be the highlight of his year."

"Well, I hope you hear from dear Gwenog as soon as possible," Hermione said. "As for me, I had a strange day involving a wizard whom I thought was long dead."

"What, did you meet the ghost of Salazar Slytherin and lambaste him for his anti-Muggle-born agenda?"

Hermione snorted. "No, I saw Snape at an Indian restaurant in Muggle London. Yes, Severus Snape, in the flesh and looking pretty good for supposedly being dead."

"Fuck me," Ginny breathed, "Harry *swore* Snape was dead! And he was gone when you went back to the Shrieking Shack to check, wasn't he?"

"I always thought the Malfoys or someone had taken his body away for some reason. Turns out the jammy bastard wasn't dead at all. So, you didn't know he was alive? I figured maybe I'd missed something while I'd been in France. I always felt bad about just leaving him there to rot."

Ginny shook her head. "No. I would gather somebody knows he's alive Kingsley, or maybe Professor McGonagall. And I doubt he blames you, Hermione even if you could have helped him, you had other things on your mind right then."

"Ginny," Hermione said with an exasperated air, "it's Snape. How could he not blame me?"

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Hermione stumbled into the kitchen, bleary eyed, at 10:00 the next morning. She and Ginny had been up until 3:00, drinking wine, eating chocolate ice cream, and roundly verbally abusing the men of their acquaintance after they had finished tearing Ginny's ex-boss to metaphorical pieces. It had been remarkably immature, ridiculously catty, and extremely enjoyable. Now she wanted nothing more than a very large cup of coffee and a stack of bacon sarnies. She sat at the head of the table and blinked at the sunlight streaming in through the high, narrow windows.

"How is Kreacher helping Miss Hermione this morning?"

"Miss needs a pot of coffee to start with," Hermione replied, cracking a massive yawn. "And Ginny will want something when she wakes up, as well."

"Coffee is being ready; Miss wants pastries?"

Hermione shook her head, thinking of the Bellatrix-special *pain au chocolat*. "Bacon sarnies. A stack of them. On white toast."

Kreacher brought the coffee to the table. "Miss is drinking too much last night. Master Harry is wanting coffee and bacon butties after drinking with Master Ron, always," he nattered on as he set the creamer and sugar bowl down. "Kreacher is thinking drinking too much is not for nice young ladies like Miss Hermione and Miss Ginny."

"Miss Hermione is thinking she has a headache and just wants her breakfast," Hermione said pointedly, stirring a heaping spoonful of sugar into her coffee.

Kreacher shuffled away toward the stove, muttering to himself about just trying to help and young misses these days. Hermione ignored him in favor of the cup of Tanzanian euphoria cradled in her palms. The first sip was always the best. She had just raised the cup to her lips, anticipating the quick and painless mind-unfogging to follow...

"SQEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE!"

...and splashed hot coffee down the front of her pajama top, causing her to yelp with shock.

"Hermione! Hermione! Look at this letter I just got. LOOK! LOOK AT IT!" Ginny squealed, shaking a square of parchment in her hand and shoving it under Hermione's nose.

Looking forlornly at her coffee, Hermione cast a quick drying spell on her top and took the letter from Ginny with a sigh. "What could possibly be so important that I can't even drink my coffee first?" she asked, unfolding the letter.

*Ginny,*

You're in. The official offer and contract should show up later this morning, but I thought you'd want to know right away. Congrats, and welcome to the Harpies!

Gwenog Jones, Captain

She set the letter down and beamed at Ginny. "You're right, coffee can wait for that kind of news! Congratulations, Gin! Looks like your gamble paid off."

Kreacher brought Ginny a cup of coffee and set a platter of bacon butties on the table. "Miss Ginny is wanting this breakfast?" he asked.

Ginny nodded. "Though I'll be a good girl and have some fruit as well, Kreacher," she replied, sliding into a chair next to Hermione. "This is unbelievable. Un-bloody-believable."

Hermione took a long sip of her coffee and sighed contentedly. "Now, if I could just hear that my interview yesterday went well, we'll be two for two this morning," she said, nabbing a sandwich and taking a large bite.

"Oooh, that's right! Did you meet the ever-elusive Professor Harmonius?"

"I did not, but I met his HR director one Blaise Zabini who is looking remarkably fit, by the way. I'm fairly sure they aren't interviewing anybody else, so unless I completely cocked up the interview, I should hear from them soon. It was nice to see Blaise again. I'd enjoy working with him."

Ginny smirked. "You'd enjoy working with him, or *under* him?"

"You're terrible. What would Neville say?"

"You can't make me think you're at all serious about Neville. Have you even seen him since you got back from France?" Ginny asked.

"Well, no. But it's still term time at Hogwarts, and..."

"And nothing. If you were as fond of him as you want to think you are, you'd have gone directly there, not come here and started looking for a job. I think you and Neville have been pleasant diversions for each other in the summers and on holidays, but maybe it's time to cut him free," Ginny said gently. "And I only say this because you're both my friends."

Hermione sighed, putting her head down on the table. "I know," she said, her words muffled by the heavy wooden surface. "There was never any spark, but he was comfortable and comforting and familiar to come home to on breaks," she explained, glancing up at Ginny. "And can you blame me for wanting that?"

Ginny reached out and laid her hand on Hermione's arm with a sad smile. "No, I can't blame you for wanting that, but it's time to move on," she reasserted, sitting back. "I should probably go to the Burrow and let my mum know the good news about the Harpies. Come for dinner?"

Hermione groaned. "If you can promise to defend me against your mum's inevitable questioning of when I'm going to settle down like Ron and Harry, yes."

Giggling, Ginny nodded. "We'll be a united front for single, self-sufficient females everywhere, I promise," she asserted, going back to her breakfast.

Shaking her head in amusement, Hermione also returned to her coffee. The rest of the meal passed in comfortable silence, and Ginny departed for the Burrow soon after, leaving Hermione to her own devices, waiting for the post.

Now, on a normal day, Hermione took very little notice of the post whether it came all at once or there were urgent owls. She hadn't gotten many letters during her apprenticeship; Harry and Ron were still terrible about regular correspondence, although Ginny had been good for a letter every week full of homey gossip and Luna sent occasional updates. But this was a day when she was expecting a letter. A "you're hired" or "come for another interview" letter. First, she tried going back to her book, but about four pages in, it occurred to her that she ought to send Blaise a thank you note. Well, not Blaise, but his company. Crossing to the desk in the corner, she selected an ivory card with a tastefully embossed border and deckled edge for her correspondence, professional without being fussy.

*Dear Mr Zabini,*

*Thank you for the opportunity to interview with your firm. I appreciated the chance to sit down and discuss my career options. I look forward to hearing from you soon.*

*Hermione J. Granger*

There. That ought to make sure they knew she was really interested. She glanced at the clock. Barely noon, but she let herself out into the garden and called for Spock, who came gliding in, a letter already in his talons. She took it with steady hands and broke open the pale green W-Harmony seal.

Scanning the letter, she squealed with joy, then scowled. Con-fucking-fidentiality agreement? For a second interview with a matchmaking firm? Harmonious truly was a suspicious weirdo. Still, she knew her curiosity would get the best of her, and she signed the forms after reading them carefully, even though they would be binding in the Muggle world as well. She was actually pretty impressed with the legal jargon: no loopholes to speak of and dire consequences for blabbing. She hoped the information trade would be worth it but doubted so. That much boilerplate for an interview meant she was getting involved with a boss who was likely paranoid, insecure, and more than garden-variety distrustful.

She tucked the thank-you card back into her pocket and folded the forms back up. She'd stop by Gringotts and get them notarized later.

*Bring it on, Harmonious,* she thought, watching the owl disappear into the midday sun.