

Machynlleth

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Chapter 1 of 1

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All characters belong to J. K. Rowling.

'Muggle trains are unreliable and maddeningly slow; we'd be better off walking the bloody distance!'

'Well, I'm sorry but we'll *have* to go by train! Neither of us has ever been to Macha... Machyn... Whatever, before'

'You can't even say it,' commented Snape snidely.

'And you can? Oh yes, silly me; I'd forgotten you were fluent in Welsh! As I was saying, neither has ever been to that... place before so we cannot Apparate, nor create a Portkey, and I am most certainly *not* flying. Unless you want to pass up this lucrative contract, I suggest you listen to me when I say we are getting the train!'

Merlin's arse, it was like talking to a child sometimes. Still, from the look on his face, she'd finally got through to him. He had no rebuttal.

'Fine,' he spat. 'But, I'll have you know my mother was Welsh.*Machynlleth*; there.' Even to Hermione's untrained ears, the pronunciation sounded perfect.

She stared at him, and he raised an eyebrow in challenge. Was he pulling her leg again, as he was wont to do? She'd never forget the time he'd gravely told her what a fan of the Weird Sisters he was, and she'd believed him. How cringe inducing it had been presenting him with a Weird Sisters' compilation for his birthday, only to have him burst out laughing.

'She wasn't.'

'She was! She used to sing *Land of my Fathers* to me when I was a boy. Do I not seem very Celtic to you?'

Hermione narrowed her eyes; what did she know about Celts? 'Yes, well; we'll leave at eight o'clock tomorrow morning.'

Snape smirked; his mother had been no more Welsh than an English breakfast.

'And, Miss Granger, I pay you to take orders from *me*, not the other way round!'

His door was firmly slammed shut.

'Come on, then. Don't just stand and stare.'

'Come on, what?'

'Well, get the bloody tickets! We *are* getting on this train, are we not?'

Hermione glared and stalked off towards the ticket office, muttering under her breath.

'Two singles' to Mack... Mackun'

'*Machynlleth*.'

'Shut up and stop smirking,' she hissed at Snape, who was hovering at her shoulder. 'Here you are.'

Hermione slapped the little orange card into his hand and walked off towards the platforms.

'And could you have tried looking a little less *wizard-like*? You look like you've stepped straight out of a Dickens novel.'

'What do I care what the Muggles think? I have a Muggle coat on, what more do you want, you insufferable'

'All right! Stick your ticket in the machine to open the barrier.'

'I'm not a complete simpleton, Miss Granger; I could have deduced such an action for myself.'

'If you say so....'

They stepped onto the bustling platform and Snape grimaced as they manoeuvred their way down the concourse.

'Muggles,' he hissed. 'Always in a bloody hurry....'

Hermione purposefully ignored him until they came to relatively quiet spot in which to stand and wait. She glanced up at the departure board and frowned.

'Um, okay, don't be angry but the train is delayed by half an hour.'

'What? Half an hour?'

'Yes, and, uh, we could end up missing our connection at Shrewsbury.'

Snape's eye blazed. 'You're telling me we have to get *two* of these wretched things?' He flung his arm out indicating the stationary train opposite them.

'Well, of course.'

'I'm not hanging about here for half an hour'

'Oh, just have some patience, *for once*, would you?'

'I have exceptional patience, Miss Granger! I put up with you on a regular basis, do I not?'

'Oh, yes, I am quite wrong. I forgot your sainthood was in the post.'

'Sarcasm does not befit you; now if you will excuse me I am going in search of sustenance, seeing as you've dragged us here at such an inexcusable hour.'

'What if the train comes in early...? Oh, fine, and, no, I don't want anything,' she muttered as he disappeared from view. What an utterly infuriating man. She was the one with a sainthood owing, not him!

'Excuse me?'

Hermione turned her head to see a young man in a suit looking at her. 'Yes?'

'I don't suppose you know what has happened to the train, do you? It's definitely coming?'

'As far as I know, yes,' offered Hermione with a smile.

'Oh, good; it's my first ever business trip down South and I can't afford to be late!'

'No, I would imagine not.'

'Are you off to work?'

Hermione blinked at his eagerness to talk to her. 'Um, well, yes. I'm going to see a client in north Wales.'

'I see, what do you do? If you don't mind me asking?'

I run a Potions business with the most insufferable man on the planet. 'I, ah, work in P.R.'

They didn't have fancy terms like that in the wizarding world, but it was apt enough.

The young man nodded. 'I'm Philip, by the way.'

'Hermione.' She smiled, almost blushing when he offered her his hand to shake.

'What a lovely name!'

'Thank you.' She was sure she did blush this time.

'Do you live in Manchester or...?'

'No, my boss... Well, the company is located in Manchester. I do a lot of working from home.'

She could hardly tell him she Apparated to work every day.

He smiled at her and Hermione could not deny that he had a very pleasing countenance, and if the way he was looking at her indicated anything, then Hermione would assert that he actually seemed *interested* in her. Suddenly she was a bit unsure as to how to act.

'Bloody trains, huh!' she blurted in the end, shaking her head.

'I know!' he laughed. 'My boss is going to kill me, I think.'

'Oh, I don't think so,' giggled Hermione, a vague part of her cringing at the fact that she had, indeed, giggled. 'Um, whereabouts are you traveling to? London?'

Philip nodded. 'Yes, the company headquarters we're an I.T. firm...' He smiled self-consciously. 'I've got an important presentation to make.'

'Ah; nervous?'

'Well, I was...'

Hermione found herself on the receiving end of a large smile and suddenly her cheeks were very warm.

Severus Snape meandered back onto the platform, making for the spot where he'd left his troublesome companion. He caught sight of her curly hair amidst the crowd ahead of him and he paused.

Who the bloody hell was she talking to?

They were both standing with their backs to him, and he stealthily walked up to them, listening as hard as possible to make out what they were saying. By the sound of it, the conversation was winding down.

'Oh, here's the train, finally!' said Hermione. 'You might just make it on time.'

'Let's hope so. Um, it's been really nice talking to you. I think, well, I wonder if you would like to meet up for a drink sometime? I could give you my number and'

Severus had heard enough.

'Come along, Miss Granger,' he said briskly, grabbing onto her arm. 'Let's get on this blasted train.'

The Muggle was looking at him with wide eyes.

'Severus! Hang on, I'm just'

'On the train, I said,' he ground out firmly, and as the train had come to a halt, he all but shoved her into it. He slammed the carriage door shut behind him and through the small window he could see the Muggle looking at him in a daze. When he moved to open the door, Severus discreetly charmed the door to lock. Turning around, he almost reeled backwards at the glare he was receiving.

'What, in the name of arse, do you think you are doing?'

'Be quiet and go and sit down.' He began nudging her into the aisle.

'No, you let him on the train first! What is your problem?'

'Merlin! If he wants to get on the train so bad he can pick a different door!'

'Take the charm off the door.'

Hermione was jostled slightly as a woman entered the carriage, dragging a suitcase.

'Will you keep your voice down? You might as well brandish your wand to the whole bloody train!' Snape hissed.

Hermione scowled deeply and threw herself into a seat, tapping her hand against her leg in aggravation.

'What do you think you are playing at, anyway?' she accused when he sat down beside her.

He remained silent and Hermione huffed loudly.

'I hope you realise the significance of what you've just done! Do you know how often it is that I get chatted up? For all I know, he might be the one I'm destined to be with, and now you've come wading in and spoiled my one chance at happiness! We'll know whom to blame when my declining years are full of bitterness and loneliness, won't we? You!'

Snape was staring at her as if he'd never seen her before.

'You don't really believe in all that piffle, do you?'

Hermione fought not to laugh; it was good to tease him for a change. 'Of course!' she sighed, turning to look out of the window so he couldn't see her bite her lip. '~~Sh~~Thank you, Severus Snape, for potentially bugging up my life! My one opportunity for happiness'

'He was a Muggle; he wouldn't'

'So? There's nothing wrong with Muggles! What gives you the right to decide who I speak to?' Hermione stared at him, some of her humour now forgotten.

'I took an executive decision, all right?'

"" *Executive decision?*"" scoffed Hermione. 'That's funny, I must have fallen asleep and missed hiring you to run my life!'

'Oh, stop being so melodramatic! It was only some Muggle!'

""Some Muggle?"" He was a very nice, kind Muggle, thank you very much. How rude he must think I am to just leave him standing there like that!'

'I was doing you a favour, you ungrateful girl! If you're so upset by it why don't you bloody go and find him? Though I patently fail to see why you need to run off to meet random Muggles when you can have all the attention you want here'

He broke off suddenly and Hermione blinked. The words *with me* hung unsaid in the air between them. She ventured a sideways glance at him and could see the tension in his posture as he sat utterly still.

'And, what if I don't want to be... here?' she asked quietly.

Immediately, Hermione felt spiteful for saying such a thing, and when she saw how his face paled, any lingering resentment she felt at his presumptuousness dissipated.

He cleared his throat after a moment of prolonged, awkward silence. 'Well... that is your prerogative, indeed, I'm...'

Hermione felt a smile creep over her face and she reached out to link her arm through his, running her hand reassuringly down his forearm. He looked at her in surprise.

'Maybe this'll teach you to think twice before you manhandle me onto a train like a sack of potatoes, again. And don't you dare say a sack of potatoes would have been easier to lift!' Hermione sent him a warning look.

'It never crossed my mind!'

'Okay, I'll believe you thousands wouldn't.'

The train began moving. 'Here we go then, back to the Land of your Fathers, or Mothers, in your case.'

'Quite,' said Snape, just about managing to hide his smirk. He sobered. 'Look, I'm ah, well, I didn't mean to offend you. You ~~can~~ go and find your Muggle, if you really want to.'

'Don't be silly. I was much more intrigued by *your* behaviour than I was by his. Do you really think I could not have undone that locking charm myself?'

'Well, it's easy for you to say that, now you don't have to try and undo it.'

Hermione shook her head. 'You know, I bet Philip would be much nicer to me than you ever are.'

Snape made a noise of disagreement. 'Don't be so sure about that. Look, I bought you a Twix from the café. I bet ~~Philip~~ didn't get you one.'

Hermione looked at the shiny gold chocolate bar he produced from his coat pocket and laughed.

'No, indeed; he was not Slytherin enough to charm me by exploiting my weakness for chocolate.' She raised her eyebrow at him and he let out an exasperated huff of air.

'Can't do anything right...' he muttered.

'Well, here's an idea; how about you give me some of that attention you were talking about just now?'

He stared at her with raised eyebrows until her next words, which brought a scowl to his face.

'Come on, chat me up.'

'What?'

'Philip complimented my name, if that helps'

'It does not!'

Hermione laughed heartily at his thunderous expression. It died in her throat when he suddenly clasped her hand and stroked his thumb along the inside of her wrist. He leant towards her and his voice was low.

'That wasn't *quite* the attention I had in mind.'

'Oh, um, that's all right,' breathed Hermione, her throat suddenly dry and her eyes magnetically drawn to his lips.

On reflection, it was one of the more pleasurable train journeys they'd endured. Indeed, Severus didn't even bat an eyelid when they got to Shrewsbury to find their connecting train had been cancelled.