

Hermione's Cinderella Adventure (Or a Facsimile of One)

by blackeyedlily

Written for the SS/HG Summer 2007 Exchange, which was prior to Deathly Hallows.
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surprises she would find there.

Prologue

Chapter 1 of 15

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Hermione Granger awoke to the sound of giggles. She opened one sleepy eye to the bright sunshine of her bedroom. Standing by her bed was Molly Potter, a vivacious five-year-old, with a head of bright red curls and startling green eyes.

"Get up, Auntie Hermie," she pleaded. "I want to go to Disney World."

Hermione rolled onto her back and groaned. "What have I got myself into?"

As the Wizarding world had expected, Harry Potter married Ginny Weasley after the war had ended. Harry had been quite surprised to actually find himself alive. For so long, he had been sure that Voldemort's demise would spell his own. It took a little getting used to the fact that life would go on and that he could plan for a future. Indeed, it seemed that the whole Wizarding world could now move forward without fear.

Once Harry had realised he was going to live after all, he got very busy. In fact, it seemed that he was trying to make up for lost time. He took a job with the Ministry as an Auror and married Ginny post-haste. Within a year they were the parents of twin boys – James Sirius and Evan Remus – named for Harry's parents and their best friends. Then two years later, they were blessed with Molly Rose, a fact that made Grandma Molly Weasley ever so proud. After Molly's birth, Ginny said that that was enough children for the time being. She was in no hurry to compete with her mother over who could contribute more to the Wizarding world birth rate.

Harry felt that it was very important that his children were as comfortable in the Muggle world as in the magical one. He and Ginny bought an old farmhouse close to Godric's Hollow. The Hollow was a small rural community where Wizarding families lived anonymously among Muggles. This allowed enough privacy to live a magical lifestyle, instructing the children in magic without the prying eyes of close neighbours. Yet it was close enough to the Hollow to let the children attend the local public school with the Muggle families. All in all, Harry thought it was perfect, and he and Ginny christened the farm Potter's Place.

While Harry had ploughed full speed ahead with after-war life, Hermione's life seemed perpetually on hold. Nothing, not even the war, had been able to prevent Hermione from sitting for her N.E.W.T.s on schedule. With record-breaking scores in hand, she had her pick of apprenticeships. Charms, Arithmancy, Potions, or Astronomy, the choices made her dizzy. Hermione chose not to choose and took a position with the Ministry reviewing experimental magical patents. She reasoned that this position kept

her abreast of advancements in several fields until she could decide her own true calling. She just couldn't believe that six years had passed since she had joined the Department for Experimental Patents. Where had the time gone? She was no closer to deciding which direction to take. The decision seemed so important to Hermione that fear gripped her every time she thought of making a decision she would later regret.

On the personal front, Hermione had fared no better. Her sixth- and seventh-year romance with Ron Weasley had gone nowhere. They were just too different. The finer points of Quidditch would always escape Hermione, and Ron's desire for a family life similar to his own was not even in her forecast. In the end they had gone their separate ways amicably. Ron went on to secure a plum position as Keeper for a reserve Quidditch team, and the golden trio remained the best of friends.

Hermione had dated a bit, and she still kept up her correspondence with Victor Krum. Yet no one ever gave her that weak-in-the-knees feeling she was looking for. Sometimes, she wondered if it was purely a fantasy that she sought. Then she would catch Harry and Ginny looking at each other, when they thought no one was watching, and she knew that true love did indeed exist. She comforted herself by thinking that if she just stopped focusing on it, then love would find her when she least expected it. Yet she couldn't stop the nagging fear that she was just not destined for true love.

Every summer, the Potters took a Muggle vacation. Auntie Hermie usually joined them for the fun. That way, if Harry was called away on urgent Auror business, Hermione could help Ginny navigate the Muggle environment and behave as a typical Muggle family. This year they were headed for the world capital of familydom, Walt Disney World. They were leaving that day and would travel as Muggles to Florida on a trans-Atlantic flight. With a tremendous sigh, Hermione rose to face the day.

Chapter 1 Departure

Chapter 2 of 15

Hermione prepares for travel with the Potter family to Disney World.

Hermione followed a bouncing Molly Potter down the staircase to the heart of Potter Place, the oversized farmhouse kitchen. Just like the kitchen at the Burrow, where Harry had first experienced a loving family environment, this room provided a warm feeling, despite its size. Molly was still carrying on a one-sided conversation, telling Auntie Hermie about all the wonders they would soon see in the Land of Mickey Mouse.

"Hermione, good, I'm glad you're up," greeted Ginny. "We need you to charm those marbles for Molly. Harry will take Nibbles to the Burrow before we take off for London." Nibbles was Molly's beloved pet rat, and Molly had thrown a full-blown temper tantrum when she was told that Nibbles could not visit Disney World with the family.

"Nibbles wants to meet Mickey Mouse!" she had wailed. In the end, Hermione had saved the day. After a thorough discussion of why pets could not visit Disney World, Hermione had offered to charm two glass marbles, which would act in a similar way to the mirrors Sirius had once shared with Harry. One marble would be placed in Nibbles' cage. The other marble would travel with Molly. Whenever the child missed her pet, she could pull the marble out of her pocket and peek at him, safe in his cage at the Burrow. This solution appeared to satisfy Molly; she liked the idea of her own little window into Grandma's.

Hermione helped herself to a large mug of steaming hot, black coffee from a pot on the stove before joining the family at the table. Harry grinned at Hermione. "Are you ready for this?" he questioned.

"As ready as I'll ever be," Hermione teased in return.

"Dad, how long will it take to fly to Florida?" asked Evan.

"About twelve hours. We have to fly across the Atlantic," responded Harry.

"Why do we have to take a stupid plane?" James groaned. "I want to fly my broom." Both boys had inherited their parents' love of flying.

"Believe me, James," Harry smiled indulgently. "You'd be wishing for a dry, safe plane after an hour or two of flying over an ocean on a broom. Besides, you know how Auntie Hermie feels about flying." Everyone but Hermione joined in on the laugh.

"Go ahead and laugh, we all have our own talents, and I never claimed that mine included riding a broom," Hermione quipped.

"Speaking of your talents, if you'd charm Nibbles' marbles, I'll be off to the Burrow. I've already loaded everyone's luggage in the car. If you girls get everyone loaded, I'll be back in a flash," Harry stated.

Hermione took Molly aside after breakfast and placed the charm on her two glass marbles. They placed one strategically in Nibbles' cage, and Molly tucked the other in her pocket. Still, it was a tearful Molly that took the cage to her father.

"Cheer up, Molly." Harry knelt down and spoke solemnly to his daughter.

Hermione loved the way Harry respected his children's feelings. He would never belittle Molly's attachment to her pet. "You know Grandma will take excellent care of Nibbles for you."

The child nodded and gave the cage a quick hug. "I'll say hello to Mickey for you. Be a good boy for Grandma," Molly ordered. Then she was off, her attention elsewhere, as her pet was forgotten in the excitement of leaving.

"I'll put the wards in place after you've left, Harry. We'll get everyone loaded, and you can meet us at the car." Since this trip involved crossing the Atlantic, the Potters had chosen to secure their home in a different way than they normally did. The wards Ginny was about to put in place would alert Arthur Weasley if anyone but a Potter passed through them. Should this occur, Arthur's wand would glow red, alerting him to a possible intrusion at Potter Place.

Once Harry was off and the wards were set, Ginny, Hermione and the children went outside to load up the family vehicle, a Ford Focus, for the drive to London. Like Arthur in years past with the Anglia, the inside was magically enlarged to comfortably fit the family and their luggage. With a vague smile on her face, Hermione enjoyed a pleasant reverie back to those earlier years.

Chapter 2 Travel

Chapter 3 of 15

Hermione and the Potter family travel by plane to Disney World.

The trip to Orlando, Florida was as uneventful as possible for any party of six travellers that included three young children. Once on board the plane, the children proceeded to do all the ritualistic things children must do on their first flight. They visited the cockpit, where they had a million questions for the pilot. "What do all those buttons do? How do you know which way to fly? What spells do you use to keep the plane in the air?" Upon which Ginny and Hermione ushered the kids back to their seats.

Next, the children proceeded to adjust their seats to every position possible, play with their tray tables and try out the headphones.

"Mum, why can't I hear you?" Molly squawked over the sound of the radio emanating full blast from her headphones. Ginny removed the headphones and Molly rubbed her ears. "That's better," she said, blinking really hard. After a snack of soda and airline pretzels, James and Evan got bored, which resulted in Molly being found crying in a locked washroom.

"Well, I think it's time for the children's Dreamless Sleep Draught. The village Healer assured me it's perfectly safe for occasional use and may help them recover better from the jet lag and continental time change," explained Ginny.

"Plus, the rest of us can have a bit of peace and quiet," added Hermione. "Sounds good to me. Is there any extra?"

The boys were eventually settled into their seats next to Harry, while Molly was tucked in a seat between her mother and Hermione. Once the kids were sound asleep, Harry busied himself reading reports. Hermione turned around in her seat to ask him, "Any news from the Front?"

"No new Dark Lords on the rise, if that's what you mean, but there's always enough nutters to keep us busy," Harry replied. "What about you 'Mione? When are you going to leave the patents office? It's a waste of your talents."

"I know you're right, Harry. I always seem to find a reason to turn down opportunities that come my way," Hermione offered.

"Nothing will ever be perfect 'Mione, but you're wasting that brilliant mind of yours, waiting for perfect to come your way," Harry offered in a solicitous tone.

"I know, I know, and I swear I will do something before the year's end," she replied.

"How about the romance department?" Harry continued. "Are you waiting for Mr. Perfect there as well?"

Hermione glanced at Ginny who was quietly watching the exchange between her and Harry. "No, Harry. That's totally different. When it comes to men, Muggle or Wizard, I will never lower my standards. All I have to do is look at you and Ginny, and I know I don't want to settle for anything less than what the two of you have. The problem is, no one has ever made me feel like that, and I'm not such a desperate girl that I need a man just to make me feel whole. No, I'll settle back and wait, and hopefully The Fates will see fit to grant me love. Until then, I have my family, great friends and Crookshanks. That will just have to do. Are you done playing busybody yet?"

Harry caught Ginny's eye and they shared a smile. "You're right, 'Mione, don't settle for less. It'll be well worth the wait. And you know I only ask these things because I love you like a sister, and I want to see you happy."

Harry returned to his reading, and Hermione noticed a faint blush grace Ginny's cheeks. Her hands were in her lap and she was admiring her wedding ring. It pleased Hermione to think that even with a few years of marriage under the bridge, Harry and Ginny's love appeared stronger than ever. After all, if anyone deserved happily ever after it was Harry Potter.

"Well," Ginny began, breaking the introspective silence, "I've been giving some thought to my own future. Even though Harry would be happy to have several more children, even the proverbial Quidditch team, I really don't want to follow in my Mum's footsteps. Don't get me wrong. I love being a mother," she explained, as she glanced at Molly Rose with a smile. "I just think three children are enough, and I'm ready to think of my own career, after James and Evan start Hogwarts. Do you realize that's only four years away?"

"Four years! That's amazing. Have you decided what you'd like to do?" Hermione tried not to appear too surprised by her friend's news.

"Yes," Ginny continued, "and you're the first person I've discussed this with, besides Harry, of course. I've been thinking about starting a school to teach basic flying and Quidditch skills to pre-Hogwarts age children," Ginny explained.

"That's brilliant! You'd be perfect for that," Hermione added. "What does Harry think?"

"Oh, he loves the idea. And just think, with the famous Harry Potter available for some advance tutoring, the school is sure to be a hit. Plus, Ron can't play professional forever. Even though I haven't discussed it with him, I'm sure he'd like the prospect of something to keep earning gold after his pro-Quidditch days are done," Ginny added.

"Indeed," Hermione replied. "Would Harry quit working as an Auror?"

"Oh no. He loves the excitement too much. This would just be to help me make a name for the school, having him available for some private lessons. However, Harry does like the idea of an alternative to the Ministry. If Ministry politics get too crazy, he could walk out the door without a second thought," added Ginny.

"I just love this idea, Ginny," Hermione gushed. "Plus you, Harry and Ron working together. It's brilliant. I, however, won't ever be working for you. Unless you need a crack administrator, but I think you more than have that covered." Both girls shared a laugh at Hermione's last statement.

"Why wait until the boys are at Hogwarts?" Hermione inquired. "As much as James and Evan love flying, I think they could live at a flying school."

"That's true," Ginny replied. "I'm going to move ahead with the planning straight away, but it is so much easier to parent one child round-the-clock than three. I just can't envision opening the school with all three underfoot."

"Fair enough," answered Hermione. Since the plane was less than full, no one had sat directly adjacent to their seats. Nevertheless, they were gathering their share of odd looks. Hermione wondered which Wizarding words had reached the ears of their Muggle co-passengers. She decided it would be good to have some quiet time of her own. To pass the time in peaceful bliss, Hermione pulled out her dog-eared paperback version of 'Hogwarts, a History'. She had carefully covered up the book in a plain brown wrapper to create anonymity. With a warm feeling of familiarity, brought on by her well-loved tome, she felt herself relax and was soon well on her way to sleeping for the rest of the flight.

Chapter 3 Arrival

Chapter 4 of 15

Hermione and the Potters arrival at there destination - Disney World.

Finally, the plane's arrival was imminent. The children had awoken just before land became visible through the clouds upon their descent to Florida. Evan had swapped seats with his father and was watching out of the window, fascinated, as the tiny images of homes, roadways and cars became larger and larger.

"This is just like magic!" Evan whispered in awe.

Hermione smiled as she thought about how different her seven-year-old self's frame of reference to the word 'magic' had been from Evan's.

It was a relatively smooth process getting through customs. The adults had carefully stored their wands up their sleeves in specially designed wand pockets and were careful to not carry any items which might set off alarms, resulting in closer scrutiny.

After acquiring a rental car, they braved the American highway for the short drive to Disney World.

"It feels so odd, driving on the wrong side of the road," remarked Harry. "It's a bit like trying to use my wand with my left hand."

"Dad, why do they call Disney World the 'Magic Kingdom' when its not part of the Wizarding world?" asked James.

"Well, for Muggles magic has a different meaning than it does for us," explained Harry. "You know that Muggles don't believe magic is real. When they describe something they think is a fantasy, or make believe, they say it is like magic. Also, when they have a really special experience, something really out of the ordinary, they might call it magical. For most Muggles, Disney World is just like that."

"I was just thinking about this when we were landing and Evan said it was like magic. If Muggle passengers had heard him, they wouldn't have thought it an odd thing to say, yet I knew that Evan meant it was like other magical experiences he has had, maybe like flying his broom. Your father and I grew up in Muggle households, and magic meant something very different for us as children than it does for us today," Hermione added.

Just then Molly erupted with, "Look, look, it's Mickey Mouse!" as Disney billboards began to appear. From that point on, the children were consumed with excitement as they discussed what they already knew of the theme parks.

Everyone whom Harry had spoken to about their trip had advised them to stay on site at one of the Disney hotels. This provided many benefits and would make life easier during their stay. They had chosen the Disney Animal Kingdom Lodge. The Lodge was built on the edge of an enormous wildlife reserve full of exotic African animals. Their suite included a balcony with a view that made them feel like they were looking out across the African Savannah. The suite was very well appointed and designed in an African motif. Harry and Ginny had the master bedroom with a private bathroom and balcony. Hermione shared the other bedroom with Molly. It too had a private bathroom. The boys would camp out in the main living area, which included a sofa sleeper and had the largest balcony facing the reserve. On this first day, they would not venture into any of the theme parks.

"We need to adjust to the new time zone and figure out where things are," Ginny had told the protesting children. However, once they saw the hotel and got a view of the fantastic pool area, they decided they could live with the adults' scheduling idea.

After they unpacked and had a light lunch from room service, the Potters got ready to head to the pool.

"I can't wait to try the slide," exclaimed James. Due to Harry's own lack of swimming instruction while living with the Dursleys, Harry had made sure that his own children learned to swim as early as possible.

"Do you want to join us, 'Mione?" Harry had inquired.

"No, you lot go ahead. I want to explore some shops," Hermione had replied.

Once the Potters had gone, Hermione freshened up and headed down to the main lobby. As she walked through a covered walkway toward the lobby, Hermione admired the riotous colours of plants in the grounds around her. The main lobby itself opened up with several stories overhead. The attention to detail in every part of the architecture was phenomenal. The majority of the workers were from one African nation or another. Many were students. With their brightly coloured uniforms and the sights, sounds and smells in the lobby, Hermione felt transported to the Dark Continent in a way that was not unlike magic. She spent some time browsing in various shops and reading the menus outside restaurants.

After some time had passed, Hermione decided to return to their suite. While heading down one particularly long corridor, she heard a voice that made her stop short. She knew that voice. She would never forget that voice. Even now, she felt a thrill of fear as she heard the unmistakable voice of Professor Snape.

Hermione determined that the voice was emanating from a guest room where the door was cracked open. As she crept closer, the door slammed shut. She almost went up and pressed her ear to the door before she collected her thoughts. What was she doing? She couldn't go eavesdropping at another guest's hotel room door. Plus, the more she considered it, the more ridiculous it sounded. Professor Snape at Disney World? The mere thought was crazy.

The last she had heard, Professor Snape had moved to Paris after the War. She occasionally saw signs of his research in the patents office. It must have been some other man with a deep, silky baritone behind that door. She must be more tired from the journey than she had realized. Her feet began to move again, and she proceeded back toward her room with a determined pace.

Chapter 4 Magic Kingdom

Chapter 5 of 15

Hermione and the Potter family take their first trip into the Magic Kingdom. Hermione slips off on her own and runs into someone she would never expect to see there.

The following morning found the Potter family, plus Hermione, breakfasting on their balcony while watching a grazing herd of giraffes breakfasting as well. They had discussed the various parks (the Magic Kingdom, Epcot, MGM Studios, and Disney's Animal Kingdom) the previous night and had decided to start with the Magic Kingdom.

"We need to go and meet Mickey Mouse straight away," said Ginny. "Then Molly will be much more agreeable to other suggestions."

The boys voiced a bit of objection, wanting to appear too old to be interested in Mickey.

"There's plenty of time for all of us to do what we really want. Remember, it's our first day," Harry stated.

"But why does Molly get to choose first?" questioned James.

"Because she is the youngest and has the least amount of patience. You big boys are old enough to understand that," Ginny replied.

"Maybe, but it doesn't mean we have to like it," Evan added, which earned him a reproachful look from Harry.

"You'll never believe who I thought I overheard yesterday," Hermione said, to change the topic. She had felt so silly about the incident that she had not mentioned it yesterday when the Potters had returned from the pool.

"You ran into someone you know?" asked Ginny, who was confused by Hermione's odd statement.

"No, I overheard a voice that was eerily familiar," Hermione tried to clarify.

"Okay, I'll bite. Who did you think you heard?" Harry asked.

"Well, I was walking down the corridor on this very floor, and there was a door ajar just enough to hear conversation." Harry and Ginny were looking quite puzzled by Hermione's lengthy description. "Out of the blue I heard a voice that stopped me dead in my tracks. I swear, I thought I heard Professor Snape," she finished. Harry and Ginny looked at each other and then back at Hermione. For a moment or two they appeared speechless, and then they both broke out in hysterical laughter. The children didn't know quite what to make of this, as they had no idea what was so funny. Hermione sat there, red-faced, as she waited for Harry and Ginny to regain their composure. When they stopped laughing, tears were running down their faces and Ginny had the hiccups.

"That's a good one, 'Mione," Harry uttered. "I've never heard of anything more ridiculous. Imagine, Snape at Disney World."

"You have to admit, Hermione," Ginny added, "the chances of that are slim to none."

"I know," Hermione agreed. "That's why I didn't say anything about it yesterday. Yet, whatever anyone thinks of Professor Snape, he possesses a very distinctive voice."

"True," admitted Ginny. "It was his one redeeming quality."

"What's that supposed to mean?" Harry asked with a degree of horror. "That man has no redeeming anything! I couldn't care less about irrefutable evidence. That man will always be evil through and through, as far as I'm concerned."

"Who are you all talking about?" Evan asked.

"Just a mean, old professor who used to teach at Hogwarts when the three of us went there. You lot are lucky. He won't be there when you go to school. If he was, I might consider sending you all to Beauxbatons," Harry finished. Ginny proceeded to roll her eyes at her husband's pronouncement.

"As if you would ever consider anywhere but Hogwarts for our children. Well, let's get going. We don't want to keep Mickey waiting all day," Ginny added, smiling.

To get to the Magic Kingdom, they hopped on a bus to the Grand Floridian Hotel and then took the monorail to the park entrance. As Cinderella's Castle began to grace the skyline, the children's level of excitement rose. Once inside the park, they headed straight to the area called Mickey's Toon Town Fair, and the resident home of Disney's top celebrity. Due to their early morning arrival, the lines were still amazingly short, and in no time at all they were face to face with the main Mouse.

"Mickey, Mickey," squealed Molly as she ran forward and threw her arms around the person dressed in the enormous plush costume, Harry dutifully filming it all on his video recorder. "I couldn't bring Nibbles (he's my pet rat) but I can show him to you. This is a magic marble," Molly explained as she produced the marble from her pocket. "If you look inside you'll see Nibbles in his cage. He's back home with my Grandma Molly. I'm named after her." The child continued to ramble on as the person in the suit nodded and tried their best to inspect the marble the child was holding out.

"That's enough, Molly," Ginny interceded. "Mickey has to have time for everyone now." They all posed for various shots with Mickey and then moved on.

"I think Mickey liked Nibbles," Molly remarked as she patted her pocket where the marble resided.

"I'm sure he did," Hermione answered, hoping the person in the suit was used to all sorts of odd comments from small children.

The remainder of the morning was spent on rides in Fantasyland. This was the oldest part of the park and contained rides familiar to most guests. They rode the spinning Tea Cups twice, went on Peter Pan's Adventures, took Mr. Toad's Wild Ride, and to the horror of all but Molly, rode It's A Small World. When they decided to move on to Tomorrowland, Hermione had an idea.

"You lot carry on. I'm going over to Cinderella's castle. There's a shop there that carries a line of crystal my mum collects. I'll meet you all in two hours. How about at that pub in Liberty Square? We can have lunch, and then head over to the Haunted Mansion."

"Okay 'Mione," replied Harry. "Just keep an eye out for Prince Charming at the castle." Hermione waved in reply and headed off.

As she traversed the park, Hermione found she was truly enjoying herself. The park was beautiful, and it was fun to watch all the wide-eyed children amazed at their surroundings. Crossing the moat, she entered the castle. The walkway that crossed the ground floor was surrounded by beautiful murals from the fairy tale, made up of intricate tiles. As Hermione stood admiring the murals, a door opened from the passage that led to a restaurant at the top of the castle, and out stalked Severus Snape, in all his glory.

Hermione stood transfixed to the spot as Professor Snape exited the doorway, surrounded by six members of the Disney staff, judging by their uniforms. Two staff members were scribbling furiously on clipboards, while the group's leader was speaking to Snape in an imploring fashion. It was obvious to Hermione that Snape was not listening to a thing the young man was saying, but from the sneer on his face, and glint in his eyes, Hermione could tell that Snape was enjoying whatever was going on. As his eyes swept over the mostly vacant walkway, they alighted on Hermione. For a moment, an odd expression passed over his face, a mixture of recognition and confusion. Hermione thought she must look like the proverbial deer in the headlights. Snape turned and spoke to the young man at his side.

"I believe I will continue to tour on my own now. You can tell your employer that I will meet him in his office at 3:00 p.m. sharp. You're dismissed." At this pronouncement Snape's entourage left at lightning speed. He turned to watch them retreat with a look of satisfaction, then turned back to Hermione. Hermione found that she was still rooted to the spot as she watched Snape approach. "Ms. Granger, what an unexpected surprise," Snape uttered as he reached her side.

"I believe the surprise is more mine than yours, Professor," Hermione replied as she found her voice. "Whatever are you doing here?"

"A matter of private business, Ms. Granger, and may I enquire the same of you?" Snape snapped.

"I'm here for the most obvious reason, Professor. I'm a tourist."

"All alone, Ms. Granger?" he inquired with a raised brow.

"No. I'm travelling with Harry, Ginny and their children," Hermione replied.

"Still attached at the hip to Potter, and now his brood as well? Does that mean the esteemed Mr. Weasley is lurking around here somewhere as well?" Snape's features had arranged themselves in a look of distaste, which Hermione's memory associated with Snape's distinct hatred of Harry.

"No, Professor, Ron plays Quidditch for England these days, and none of us are attached at the hip," Hermione replied with the hint of a challenge in her voice. Snape appeared slightly startled by the sharpness in Hermione's tone. Whatever had transpired between Professor Snape and his students, whether at Hogwarts or during Order of the Phoenix business, Hermione had always maintained at least the appearance of respect toward the professor.

"Pray tell, what vocation is the pride of Gryffindor involved in these days?" Snape queried. This was a question Hermione really did not want to answer. She did not want to admit to Snape of all people that she was little more than a glorified clerk.

"I'm currently employed by the Ministry," Hermione offered with a great deal more bravado than she was feeling. Snape appeared to ponder her response as if he were considering something.

"How long will you be staying in the Walt Disney World area?" he asked.

"We arrived yesterday and are here for an entire week," Hermione answered. The response appeared to please Snape, as he nodded thoughtfully before continuing.

"Would you consider joining me for a drink this evening? It seems that my meeting you here is somewhat fortuitous. I'll elaborate on my business, and then seeing that you will be here over the next few days, you may be interested in assisting me in the matter. I would certainly compensate you adequately for your time and effort."

To say that Hermione was stunned by this invitation was an understatement. However, she was equally intrigued. After her brain had processed what had just occurred, she responded with hands on her hips, "On one condition, Professor. If I meet with you, I do not want to put up with any insults, veiled or overt, directed at me or my friends."

Snape folded his arms over his chest, and after a lightning quick, wry smile, he replied, "I believe I can concede to your request. You, however must stop referring to me as Professor. It has been several years since I deserved that title. We are both adults now and have been acquainted longer than I care to remember. Please call me Severus."

"Alright then, but you must call me Hermione. When and where would you like to meet, Sev ... Severus?" Hermione stumbled over his name.

"Are you familiar with the Epcot part of this monstrosity?" Hermione nodded and Snape continued. "Epcot is divided into pavilions they want people to believe are representative of different nations. In China, they have created a supposed replica of the Temple of Heaven." The tone in Snape's voice left Hermione no question what Snape thought of Disney's version of the Temple of Heaven. "Meet me in the front of the Temple, on the bridge over the Koi pond, at 7 p.m. Any questions, Hermione?" Snape apparently had no trouble with her given name.

"Yes, I do have a question. Are you staying at Disney's Animal Kingdom Lodge?"

This time it was Snape's turn to look unnerved. "How did you know that?"

"Let's call it a hunch. We're staying there as well. I must be going then. I'm supposed to meet the Potters for lunch. Until this evening then, Severus."

With a sly smile of her own, Hermione turned on her heel and walked off. To have actually got one up on Severus Snape was priceless, and she had to savour the moment.

Chapter 5 Temple of Heaven

Chapter 6 of 15

Hermione prepares to meet Severus for drinks.

Hermione met up with the Potters at the Liberty Tree Tavern for lunch. Designed to resemble a Colonial American tavern, it was a nice alternative to the various cantinas around them. "Auntie Hermie, you missed Space Mountain. It rocked!" greeted James.

"Yeah, it's almost as much fun as Quidditch," added Evan, which earned him a pointed look from Ginny. "Sorry, Mum. Mum says we can't talk about Quidditch around strangers," explained Evan in a conspiratorial whisper. Hermione placed her order of a garden salad and iced tea with the waitress, who was dressed in Revolutionary garb.

"Did you find something for your Mum, Hermione?" Ginny queried. Snape had driven crystal shopping clear out of Hermione's head. She mumbled an excuse about having to try later as Ginny's question reminded her of the errand.

"Was Prince Charming hanging around the castle?" Harry continued to tease.

"No, but I did run into Professor Snape," Hermione responded, recovering her composure and her bravado.

"Really, Hermione, enough already. You're not going to wind me up about Snape. It was funny yesterday, but if you think I'm going to believe Snape is at Disney World, you're getting daft in your old age."

"Alright, whatever you want to believe, but I'm meeting him for drinks this evening," Hermione quipped back, while mentally deciding it would be a whole lot easier if Harry and Ginny thought she was making it all up.

"Well, I'm not sure why you're trying to take the Mickey out of me, but if you need some time on your own, you just need to say so," Harry continued in a good natured tone.

"Yes, Hermione, if you have your own plans for this evening, don't feel like you have to tag along with us. We're heading back to the hotel after lunch to swim and relax. Then we'll come back here later for the night parade and fireworks. Just be careful, whatever you do," Ginny cautioned.

"Oh, don't worry. You two know I would never let my guard down around Snape," Hermione continued to tease, which caused Harry to roll his eyes at her and Ginny to giggle at the two of them.

After returning to the hotel, Hermione decided that a swim, followed by a short nap sounded perfect. When she joined the Potters at the pool, Hermione was again impressed by the level of luxury and attention to detail at the lodge. The pool area was a tropical paradise, complete with a long and winding water slide, to the children's endless delight. After cooling off and romping a bit with the younger Potters, she returned to the room by herself and drifted off to sleep, completely relaxed in her luxurious guest bed.

When she woke a little later, Hermione could hear that the Potters had returned. However, Molly was not in their room and must have been playing with her brothers. Suddenly, Hermione remembered what her evening plans entailed. This whole thing was so surreal. Yet her encounter with Snape had left her so curious; she would not miss this for anything. If she was totally honest with herself, life had become a bit boring lately. She missed the excitement of working with the Order of the Phoenix; not the fear, death, or pain that were also part of war, but the excitement that came from doing something with great risk and reward. Plus, her opinion of Professor Snape (how was she going to manage to call him Severus?) had never matched Harry and Ron's. Sure, he could be brutally unpleasant, and much of the time his expectations were nearly impossible. Yet she admired his brilliance along with the way he had challenged her.

While showering, Hermione puzzled over what she would wear to meet Snape at the Temple of Heaven. Such an exotic name added to her intrigue for the evening. In the end, she settled on a linen sundress with a batik print. The dress had put her in mind of the tropics when she had been shopping for the trip to Florida. She added a pair of Italian leather sandals. Heels were out of the question for getting around Disney. After she had fixed her typically unruly hair into a casual twist, she inspected her appearance in the mirror. Only those closest to her would recognize the confident young woman in the mirror as the same awkward child she had been when she'd entered Hogwarts. She tucked her wand into the specially sewn pocket she had added to the side seam of her dress. It was then that she noticed that the bedside clock read 6:15 p.m. So she grabbed a lightweight silk shawl to guard against the evening chill and, with a deliberately vague explanation to Harry and Ginny, ran out the door.

Hermione had decided that since she would be alone, she could chance travelling by Apparation. After studying a tourist map of Epcot, she chose a quiet, out of the way corner and closed her eyes to concentrate. When she opened them, she found herself in a small alcove behind a ladies' washroom. After a quick peek in the washroom mirror, to make sure her hair had survived the trip, she headed out, walking briskly toward the Epcot World Showcase.

Chapter 6 The Nine Dragons

Chapter 7 of 15

Hermione meets Severus for drinks and learns his purpose for being at Disney World.

As Hermione entered the Showcase, she saw that pavilions for various countries were set up around a large lagoon. Surveying the skyline, she recognized a building that had to be the Temple of Heaven. Walking past Mexico and Canada, she came to China. With a glance at her wristwatch, she saw that she had about ten minutes to spare. She located the koi pond and came to rest on the bridge, where she could watch the graceful koi swim among the lotus plants. She was enjoying the meditative quality of her surrounding when a voice right next to her made her jump.

"Right on time. I do appreciate your punctuality, Ms. Granger."

"You startled me Professor..." Hermione began, only to be interrupted.

"Severus, remember."

"Right then, Severus, it's Hermione to you."

"I've already spoken with the hostess at the Nine Dragons, and she is securing us seating," Snape explained while indicating a pathway toward the restaurant. As they walked the short distance through a beautifully landscaped garden, Chinese lanterns were turned on to signal the approaching dusk. Hermione felt the Disney magic sweep over her again, and she felt as if she and Snape had been transported to China.

The Nine Dragons was the premiere restaurant in Epcot's Chinese Pavilion. The hostess led Hermione and Snape to a private seating area adjacent to the bar. Ornate screens gave total privacy to each table.

"I expect your boundless curiosity needs to make sense of these unusual circumstances," Snape began.

Hermione marvelled at how Snape could utter 'boundless curiosity' in such a manner that she was not sure whether he was insulting her or not. She felt the need to maintain her dignity in this situation, as she was no longer his student, and she had meant it earlier about not putting up with his typical attacks or insults. At the same time, she did not need to blow Snape's dry sarcasm out of proportion by being oversensitive. She could feel the tension rising and knew she had to stay on her toes.

"As I stated earlier today, I believe it is fortuitous that our paths have crossed, Hermione. Since you are a former member of the Order of the Phoenix, as well as a former student, I've had to rely on your discretion in the past. Therefore, the fact that I am still alive and here speaking to you demonstrates that you can be trusted, in some small measure. However, before I proceed with further information, I must ask you to perform a wand oath that the information I choose to divulge to you this evening will go no further."

Snape's eyes bore into Hermione's in a manner that made her feel that he was trying to invade her mind. As if on autopilot, Hermione felt herself blank everything from her mind. Snape's eyes spoke approval of her action. With a quick flick of his wrist, he cast a temporary shield that would prevent their servers from moving the privacy screen. Vine met ebony, and Hermione's wand gave off a soft glow as she promised her silence.

Almost the moment their wands were again out of sight, a waitress entered to take their order. She wore a traditional Chinese dress, known as a qipao, and her nametag denoted the Guangdong province of China. Snape ordered a Laphroaig neat, while Hermione ordered a margarita.

"You know that old adage, when in Rome..." Hermione ventured.

"Isn't a margarita a Mexican drink? I thought we were in Florida, or is it China? I find it quite confusing to remember where I'm supposed to be with all this make-believe,"

quipped Snape as he gestured around the room for emphasis.

"Well, a margarita is tropical," Hermione explained. "And I've found Disney World enchanting so far." She found she was avoiding using Snape's given name.

"Indeed!" Snape raised one eyebrow to this statement. Once the waitress had reappeared and left their order, he took out his wand again and uttered, *Muffliato*," creating a barrier to eavesdroppers.

Snape took a long drink, then leaned back and closed his eyes. He sat this way for a moment or two, as if relishing the peace, and then with a sigh, he opened his eyes and began to tell Hermione his tale.

"Most likely you have grown up knowing all about Walt Disney, or at least you thought you did." Hermione nodded in agreement. "What is not widely known is that Walt Disney is in fact a wizard. Something I would never expect a Muggle-born, like yourself, to know. Indeed, due to his American birth, most half-bloods, and many purebloods, from our country would not know that he is in fact a distant cousin of Dumbledore's. Which is the only reason I am involved in this entire mess." Snape's voice had switched into perfect lecture mode.

"I'm rather confused. You're talking about Walt Disney in the present tense," pointed out Hermione, who was still avoiding the necessity of calling Snape Severus.

"Yes, well, have some patience, and I'll get to that. Walt Disney always was a true blue, dyed in the wool, Muggle-loving Wizard. Just like Arthur Weasley. It became his life's work to bring some of the wonder of magic to the Muggle world, and especially Muggle families. Of course, everything had to be accomplished without breaking any Wizarding laws related to Muggles and magic.

"It turned out that everything he touched turned to gold. From Steamboat Willie to these mega-amusement parks, everything was a complete success. It seems he filled an unmet need in the Muggle world. Eventually, like any true genius, Walt became bored with success. He desired to move on to new challenges. So he drew up a blueprint for the future of his dynasty and left his brother, Roy Disney, who is incidentally a Squib, in charge of implementation. Then he faked his death and left the identity of Walt Disney behind him."

"Are you telling me he's living under another identity?" Hermione asked in fascination.

"He'd become obsessed with magical plants and their healing properties. In order to pursue his new obsession, he moved to the Amazon rainforest, where he's been studying and cataloguing plants for years now. His research is published under the name Jose Raton. I've had the occasion to benefit from his research in my own work," Snape continued.

"Fascinating as this is, I still don't understand..." Hermione began.

"If you would allow me to finish," Snape interrupted. "I believe everything will become clear. Senor Raton has remained in isolation from civilization for many years. A situation I admit to finding enviable. Nevertheless, this past year he came in contact with some American tourists. Apparently, they were on some sort of extreme vacation adventure. During their interaction, they related how much their vacation was a welcome alternative to the highly commercialised, homogenized, and money-extorting world of Disney, where so many people went these days. Apparently, it was a bit of a shock to the old man. He is very concerned about what his brother Roy is up to and why he isn't sticking to the plan."

Snape paused in his story to take a drink, but Hermione decided to keep quiet. She didn't want to be chastised yet again for her impatience, and she was intrigued by the tale, especially as delivered in Snape's hypnotic voice.

"Senor Raton decided he should investigate. He did not want to confront his brother without some facts and evidence. All he really had was the report of potentially biased Muggles. He tried to get in touch with Albus and ended up reaching Minerva instead." With the mention of Dumbledore, Snape's face took on a shuttered look, as though he was willing himself to remain impassive, and he paused to drink again. Once he continued speaking, it was apparent that Snape would make no further reference to Albus' death.

"It seems that the former Walt Disney was quite fond of Minerva as a young girl," Snape added with the sly grin of one relishing the moment. "He had spent some time in England and is much closer to Minerva in age."

"Really!" Hermione interjected.

Snape overlooked this interruption and added in a conspiratorial voice. "It seems he gave her the pet name Minnie."

"Are you telling me that Minnie Mouse is named after Professor McGonagall?" Hermione could not contain herself at the incongruousness of it all.

"Apparently, and I don't mind sharing that bit of information in the least, for all the trouble she's putting me through," Snape uttered half to himself as he looked into the depths of his drink. "And that brings us to the heart of this entire matter. Minerva told Walt Disney she had just the wizard to help him. Then she contacted me in Paris, to remind me that I was still indebted to her for her testimony and she now expected me to repay her by helping Walt." It was clear to Hermione that Snape felt Minerva's transfer of her debt to Walt Disney was, at the very least, inappropriate.

"Walt went on to secure me letters of introduction from the American Ministry of Magic to Roy Disney. According to a contract, the Ministry provides an oversight function for Walt Disney, Inc. and its subsidiaries because of the ties to the magical community since its inception. It appears they are overdue for an audit," Snape offered with an evil smirk.

Chapter 7 The Theory

Chapter 8 of 15

Severus explains the ideas behind the reason that brought him to Disney World.

"Once I arrived with the letters of introduction, Roy Disney met with me. He did not seem too happy about the situation. He seemed flustered by my appearance, and it was obvious that the American Ministry had been slack in their oversight. He quickly passed me on to the office of Disney's CEO, Michael Eisner, and it was clear that he is the real power behind Disney."

Hermione was becoming mesmerized by Snape's voice. She was only too happy to sit back and listen to the tale.

"Meeting Eisner was the breakthrough I needed. From there pieces of the puzzle started to fall into place. If you look at the Disney history you can see that the company began to struggle as soon as Walt left. With Mr. Eisner's arrival the company experienced a new "golden age". During his tenure, Disney has expanded into markets around the globe and has once again become a top draw at the theatres and in television."

"Tell me, Hermione, what does the name Michael Eisner mean to you?" Snape queried.

"Well," Hermione reflected, "very little. I guess I've heard of him in relation to Disney news. The name seems sort of familiar, but I don't follow the Muggle business or entertainment world very much."

"Yes, it is all somewhat ironic. Wizards outside America would not typically know that Walt Disney was a wizard, and wizards who live in America are probably not familiar with the name Eisner. Eisner is an old European wizarding family, but not with ties in Great Britain. As you are Muggle-born, I wouldn't expect you to have heard the name," Snape explained.

"A number of years back, prior to Voldemort's first rise to power, the family was involved in quite a scandal. They moved to America to escape the social censure. The Eisners were always involved in wizarding finances. They had very close relations with the goblins. Then Michael Eisner's grandfather was caught up in a scheme in Berlin that ended his good reputation. In Muggle terminology, it would be called money laundering. They tried to keep the whole thing quiet, and it was never determined to what degree the goblins were involved. Nevertheless, the family emigrated to America and lost connections with wizarding Europe," Snape finished.

"What a strange story, and now Michael Eisner is Disney's CEO. You think he is violating Disney's contract with the American Ministry?" Hermione asked.

"The coincidence of the company's rise in fortune once Eisner came to the helm is more than suspicious," Snape replied.

"Couldn't he just be a brilliant businessman?" Hermione suggested.

"While one has to remain open to all possibilities, I believe there is more than meets the eye to their worldwide success," Snape responded. "Having spent several days touring the parks and offices, I'm certain that I feel the effects of latent magic everywhere. I have attempted various diagnostic spells to reveal it, but to no avail. They have gone out of the way to cover their tracks, which makes me more suspicious. I have my theories, but at this time that is all they are."

Chapter 8 The Invitation

Chapter 9 of 15

Severus has an invitation for Hermione.

"What I require is tangible evidence. I'm quite certain that the Disney contract with the American Ministry of Magic is being violated. Yet regardless of my instincts, I want to have something concrete before I report to Walt, and I believe I know how to go about securing it." Snape smirked.

Before he could continue their server returned. As Snape ordered another round, Hermione took the opportunity to take a really good look at him while his attention was not fixed on her. During her time at Hogwarts, Snape had been capable of producing terror in all but the bravest or most foolhardy of students. As a student herself, Hermione had a healthy respect for his power. Looking at him today, Hermione felt the raw power that he still emanated. She felt a responding jolt in her gut, which she could not deny as anything other than pure, physical attraction. "Well, this is unexpected," she told herself.

"In an attempt to impress their 'auditor', Roy Disney and Michael Eisner have invited me to attend a gala event, which will conveniently be held at their corporate headquarters. If my instincts are correct, I should be able to find the type of evidence I need there. My success will most likely depend on the amount of time I manage to have alone in Michael Eisner's office. While I was quite prepared to undertake this operation alone, your appearance today suggested that I could increase my odds of success."

Snape paused at this point, giving Hermione a most serious expression, which nevertheless held a hint of mischief. "The gala is scheduled for the evening after next. My invitation allows for two attendees. Hermione, would you accompany me as my escort?"

It was lucky for Hermione that her experience with men at the ministry had allowed her to learn to school her expressions for the unexpected. Otherwise, she would certainly have goggled at Snape slack-jawed.

"You would like me to come as your escort?" Hermione asked, in a voice that she hoped hid her very real surprise.

"Yes, that is the general idea. I've always found that reconnaissance operations are made somewhat easier with assistance," Snape replied. "You can cover my absences and alert me if there is any risk of discovering my actions. Simple, really, and we should be able to avoid any real danger, especially you. Compared to missions during Voldemort's era, this will be a walk in the park."

Hermione noticed how Snape now uttered Voldemort's name with a careless ease. It put her in mind of how vehemently he had once chastised those who had dared to utter that name. In truth, she was realizing many subtle, yet pleasing changes in the man she had previously known as her professor and fellow Order member. She was finding the contrast quite fascinating.

While not receiving an immediate response from Hermione, Snape continued to explain. "The gala includes a presentation on planned Disney projects in the Asian market, followed by an evening of dining and dancing. Apparently, the purpose is to impress their top stockholders, and I believe they think it is an opportunity to get me in their pocket as well," Snape finished.

"Yes, of course I will help you," stammered a flustered Hermione, who hoped that Snape did not notice her odd behaviour. "I'm behaving like a silly schoolgirl," she admonished herself.

Then an ugly realization dawned. "I have brought nothing on this trip that would be appropriate for a formal occasion," Hermione blurted out without thinking.

"Ah, the proverbial Cinderella; merely an inconvenience, I assure you. Walt has provided a generous expense account. Please feel free to purchase anything you require for such an event. You have all of tomorrow and the next day to acquire what you need. Just bill any expenses to my room, and they will be approved."

Then Hermione noticed Snape giving her an oddly appraising look. "Generous as my expense account is, I'm afraid I cannot authorize gemstones, but I do want to see that you blend in with the other attendees. If you will trust my taste in this matter, I think I can arrange the loan of some gems to complete the Cinderella transformation."

"I'm sure whatever you arrange will be more than adequate, Severus." There, she had finally managed to get his name out of her mouth. She treated Snape to her most

triumphant smile.

It was now Snape's turn to become flustered. For the briefest of moments, he stared at Hermione, as if seeing her for the first time. Then he regained his composure and reverted to type, managing to produce his trademark sneer. "I'm afraid the resemblance to a fairytale will end with your attire. You can be quite sure that no one will confuse me with Prince Charming."

For the first time that evening, Hermione understood that the man sitting across from her was still the same Professor Snape that she had always known. She wondered why his disposition had changed so dramatically and so quickly.

"It would be advantageous to brief you before the gala," Snape continued. "If we met in my suite at 7:00 p.m., we would have ample time to prepare. Could you meet that schedule?"

After finalizing their plans, Snape and Hermione exited the Nine Dragons. While Snape offered to escort Hermione back to the lodge, she had made other plans. "The Epcot fireworks display is going to begin in half an hour. I believe I'm going to stay and watch it, but you are welcome to join me," Hermione offered.

"Thank you, but I have some things that I would like to attend to as soon as possible. If you require anything prior to the gala, just call my room. I do appreciate your willingness to attend the event with me, Hermione. Good evening." And with that, Severus Snape turned on his heel and disappeared into the night.

Hermione sought out a good vantage point to watch the fireworks. She decided that she could definitely use some time to process the evening before returning to her room with the Potters. "What exactly have I got myself into?" she wondered.

Chapter 9 Preparations

Chapter 10 of 15

Hermione makes preparations for a big evening and spends time with the Potter family enjoying the sights.

After watching the glorious fireworks at Epcot, Hermione returned to the Animal Kingdom Lodge and her suite with the Potters. She found that the children were sleeping while Harry and Ginny were enjoying a glass of wine on the balcony.

"Hermione, you're back. How was your evening?" Ginny inquired.

"Very nice. In fact, unexpectedly pleasant in a number of ways," Hermione replied.

"Any time that someone could find Snape pleasant would be unexpected," teased Harry.

"Did you lot have a good evening?" Hermione asked.

"The children adored it, and I adored watching them light up at all their favourite characters. We got back in time to have a good view of the night parade and the fireworks. At the end of it all, Tinkerbell flies off Cinderella's castle. The kids got all excited and wanted to know how she was flying without a broom and why they were allowing magic in front of Muggles," said Ginny.

"I didn't want to spoil it for them by letting on that Tinkerbell was on wires. So, I just told them that Muggles have their own ways for making things magical. They seemed to buy it," explained Harry.

"What are the plans for tomorrow?" Hermione asked.

"Since we took care of meeting Mickey Mouse today, we thought we'd begin in the Animal Kingdom tomorrow. The safari ride is supposed to be worthwhile, and they have many animal exhibits we'd all enjoy," said Ginny.

"I know that I'm here with all of you, but I hope you don't mind my breaking free for the evening the night after next?" Hermione said, while hoping to avoid too much scrutiny.

"Are you having a holiday romance, 'Mione?" quizzed Harry.

"I don't think I'd call it that, but I have an interesting invitation, and I'll need a bit of shopping time tomorrow, to prepare as well. It's a formal event, and of course I haven't packed for anything like that," Hermione explained.

Harry and Ginny looked at each other, a bit puzzled. "Hermione, you're free to do what you want. You don't need to feel obligated to be part of everything we do, but it would make us feel better if we knew who you were really with. This Snape story is funny and all, but you don't expect us to believe it, do you?" Ginny replied.

Hermione looked at her friends' concerned faces. She wasn't sure she wanted them to know that it really was Snape. Harry wouldn't like it, and she didn't want to stir up old angers, or potentially ruin her chance for the night out with Snape. For reasons she wasn't at all sure she wanted to admit, she was really looking forward to more time with him.

"I love you two, and it is so sweet to know you care," Hermione began. "I assure you that I can take care of myself just fine, and I'll be with a perfect gentleman, whom I know I can trust."

"Well, that makes it final, then. No one would use that description for Snape," Harry retorted.

Hermione just rolled her eyes and said, "Good night to you two. I'm truly knackered now."

She entered the room she was sharing with Molly Rose and noticed that the child had a new Mickey Mouse doll clutched to her as she slept. Her enchanted marble was lying on the bedside table.

"What I would give for the simple innocence of youth some days," she thought as she drifted off to sleep.

The following morning found Hermione in the lobby talking to the concierge about where to shop. When she explained what she needed the dress for, the young woman, with an impeccable French accent and a nametag denoting her country of origin as Cote d'Ivoire, exclaimed, "Every Presidential Suite within the Magic Kingdom is

occupied by dignitaries here for that event. Mademoiselle must have the perfect dress. I will send you to Francis at the Victoria Boutique in the Grand Floridian. They have some lovely gowns direct from Paris. There is no better place to find an evening gown in the Magic Kingdom."

Hermione gratefully accepted her help and soon found herself being driven to the Grand Floridian, a Victorian era inspired resort that gave the impression of perfectly manicured wealth and privilege. Once there, Francis was only too eager to help. "Most of the women at these corporate functions are far older than you, my dear. We must find you a gown in which you can shine," Francis pronounced.

"No, Francis!" begged Hermione. I really don't want to stand out. I just want to look like I belong there.

Francis gave her an appraising look and, in a conspiratorial tone, murmured, "Well, let's see what we can do."

After a number of trials, Hermione found her gown. She had worried over colour and in the end decided upon a basic black.

"Well, Severus shouldn't find fault with the colour," Hermione mused to herself.

The floor-length gown started with a scooped, sleeveless neckline. A gauze ruffle accented the neckline on an otherwise plain bodice. A cinched, belted waistline called attention to Hermione's small waist. The skirt consisted of a cascade of chiffon ruffles, which provided a trim and attractive silhouette, yet nevertheless appeared ethereal. As Hermione faced her vision in a mirror, she was pleased with the picture she painted, as a little voice inside her head whispered, "What will Severus think?"

Francis helped her to complete the outfit with simple, yet elegant, black heels and a matching clutch, along with all the necessary undergarments. He talked her into an exotic Asian scent. "You aren't completely dressed without perfume." And finally a deep blue and green peacock coloured silk shawl. "You must have a splash of colour." When he asked about jewellery, Hermione told him that her escort would be providing that, to which she earned a raised eyebrow worthy of Severus himself.

After the outfit was complete, Francis helped her book appointments back at the Animal Kingdom Lodge Spa. He talked Hermione into getting a massage before her hair and nail appointments. She decided to indulge since she wasn't going to put the beauty regime on Severus' bill. "I would have ended up doing something like this for myself during this vacation anyway," she told herself.

Once Hermione was sure that she had accomplished everything she needed to for the next evening, she joined up with the Potters. They spent the rest of the afternoon touring exhibits and taking in shows at the Animal Kingdom. Hermione's favourite was a theatrical production based on the Lion King. The Potters too, adults and children, enjoyed the vivid costumes and talented performers.

For the evening, the group took the monorail to Epcot. It was the Potters' first visit to this park. They dined at the Moroccan Pavilion, where the whole family enjoyed the experience of dining sans utensils. Hermione thoroughly enjoyed her couscous. Then they found themselves a good spot for enjoying the fireworks display that had enchanted Hermione the night before. Hermione was surprised at how much her mind was wandering. She kept thinking back to the night before and ahead to the next night. She couldn't help feeling an excited tension about it all.

Interrupting her reverie during the fireworks, little Molly Rose muttered, "I love Disney World," as she clutched her new Minnie Mouse doll to her. Hermione leaned over, and after lifting Molly up, she held her tight.

"Yes, I love it too. Especially because I get to be here with you," Hermione replied and then gave the child a kiss on her chubby, sticky cheek.

Whatever came from this strange encounter with Severus Snape, Hermione knew that the friendship of Harry and Ginny, plus their wonderful children, was a constant in her life that she could always count on.

Chapter 10 The Big Night

Chapter 11 of 15

Hermione and Severus meet prior to the gala to discuss strategy.

When the big night arrived, Hermione found herself standing outside Snape's suite at the appointed hour. She drew a deep breath, gathered her courage and knocked. The door flung open, as if Snape had been waiting on the other side. Snape took in Hermione's appearance from head to toe. She felt oddly self-conscious under his scrutiny and stuck out her chin as if daring him to find fault.

"Right on time, Ms Granger," greeted Snape as he opened the door wide to admit her.

As Hermione entered the room, she noticed that Snape was dressed in a Muggle tuxedo. It was the first time she had seen him without any vestige of his wizarding wardrobe. Due to the unusual environment that Disney provided, his wizarding robes had not looked amiss during their previous encounters. While swirling black robes were part of the Snape mystique, Hermione found that the black tuxedo also suited Snape in a different way. There was still something about his appearance; that wiry physique, those penetrating eyes, and the way he held himself, spoke of danger. The tuxedo enhanced the total package, in a 007 manner, just as much as the wizarding robes did.

"Is something amiss, Hermione?" questioned Snape. The question made Hermione realize she was staring at him.

"No, Severus." Hermione had told herself sternly that she was going to say Severus as often as possible, until it no longer felt as though his name became bottled up in her throat as she tried to get it out. "I've just never seen you without your wizarding robes. The tuxedo suits you." She hurried to get out this last statement in order to prevent Snape from thinking she found his appearance wanting.

With an odd expression on his face, as if he didn't know what to make of her words, he replied, "Thank you. You look very nice as well. You should have no trouble blending in tonight." His own words sounded as if he was unused to complimenting another on their appearance. Hermione realized it was doubtful he'd ever had much practice at that sort of thing.

With these pleasantries exchanged, Snape turned to the business at hand with a sense of relief. Hermione took a seat at a small dining table, where Snape had laid out a set of blueprints.

"These are the plans for Disney's Corporate Headquarters here at Buena Vista. Once we arrive I expect we will be under a bit of scrutiny. I will introduce you, and we will join those assembled for the presentation. After dinner should be the easiest time for me to slip away. After studying these plans, I have decided on a route to Michael Eisner's office that should keep me from encountering anyone. I don't feel that it would be wise to attempt to Apparate in. I have no idea of what type of defences they may have to protect against magical intrusion."

"Your job will be to keep any interested parties from getting suspicious about my absence. If you determine that anyone might come looking for me, I have Charmed this Disney coin as a way for you to reach me."

Snape handed Hermione a gold Disney coin roughly the size of a Galleon. This coin was embossed with the head of Mickey Mouse and used commonly around the parks for tourist currency.

"I have a similar coin in my pocket. If you decide I need to leave any sensitive area where I may be located, simply hold the coin and think of me. My coin will heat up and warn me of the potential situation. I believe you have used something of this fashion in the past," said Snape with a typical smirk.

Hermione coloured slightly, knowing that he was referring to her Protean Charmed Galleons, which had been used by Dumbledore's Army. She wished that she had trusted Snape back then. Things could have turned out so differently for so many people. Lives may have been saved, injuries avoided. Well, that was water under the bridge now.

"Once I have acquired what I need, I will rejoin you. We can continue to play whatever social role is required, but I promise you, Hermione, I will not abuse your generosity any longer than necessary. We will leave as soon as we are able to," Snape finished.

"Don't worry on my account, Severus. I am happy to help. I'm finding it enjoyable to be back in clandestine operation for a time. I'm afraid Ministry business can be dreadfully boring, and a girl can't help but enjoy dressing up like this for a change," Hermione replied with a smile.

Snape stared at Hermione for a few moments as if not believing what he had heard. Then he regained his composure as he stood up from their meeting space. "Yes, regarding your attire, I believe I promised to provide the jewellery."

Snape left the room, returning shortly with several boxes in hand. Upon their opening, Hermione found herself gazing at the most beautiful set of emeralds she could imagine. The necklace consisted of an exquisite emerald teardrop, hanging from an intricate gold chain, wrought with diamonds and smaller emeralds. Matching teardrop emerald earrings set off the necklace. Finally, an emerald-cut emerald and diamond ring completed the set. Hermione gasped. She had rarely seen gems of this nature outside a museum, let alone worn something of such value.

Not knowing quite how, she found herself facing a mirror while Snape fastened the necklace around her throat. "It suits you," Snape exclaimed in a low voice that sent shivers down her spine. He handed her the earrings and ring to put on, mumbling something to the effect that she needed to put them on herself as he turned away.

Truly feeling like Cinderella, she exclaimed, "Wherever did these come from?"

Snape turned back to face her and Hermione was rewarded with a most mischievous expressions, as Snape uttered "Malfoy."

"Malfoy!" exclaimed Hermione. "This jewellery belongs to Lucius Malfoy! Does he know whom you borrowed it for?"

"Indeed," Snape replied. "I think you would find Lucius much changed these days. He is quite aware of his good fortune in avoiding Azkaban. Although I doubt he will ever be able to reclaim his standing in society. Voldemort's final demise caused a significant change in many of his attitudes, and the man owes me innumerable debts. He seemed almost eager for the chance to loan you those gems."

"Well, I hope he doesn't expect any favours in return from me," Hermione exclaimed in a rather heated fashion.

"You have nothing to fear, Hermione. Lucius understands that the favour was mine alone. It carries no debt for you," Snape assured her.

Once everything was sorted out and Snape was certain that Hermione had no questions about the evening, he called down to the valet for a hired car.

"There has really been no reason for me to have my own vehicle here, but we need a driver tonight," he told her as they approached a black Cadillac. A uniformed driver got out as they approached to hold the back door open for them. Once inside the car, Snape gave the driver directions.

"No matter what the purpose of our evening is, Severus, I admit that I do in fact feel like Cinderella tonight," Hermione spoke in an almost whisper. "And don't sell yourself short, Severus. You make a very fine Prince Charming."

Snape stared again at Hermione as if he couldn't believe his own ears. Then, sensing their driver peering at the odd couple in the rear view mirror, he turned one of his most withering glares ever on the unfortunate man.

Chapter 11 The Gala

Chapter 12 of 15

Hermione and Severus arrive at the Disney Gala event.

When Hermione and Snape arrived at Disney World Headquarters, Buena Vista, Hermione could not help but be impressed. Unlike the typical austere corporate office building of a mega-corporation, Disney gave one the impression of whimsy from the start. It was like walking through Alice's looking glass, or a Muggle-born witch's first visit to Diagon Alley.

For this evening's gala, guests were honoured by the red carpet celebrity treatment as they exited their vehicles. Lights, camera, action – the only thing missing was the paparazzi, which Hermione was grateful for. Numerous Disney characters were on hand performing various tricks and entertaining the guests in general.

After their driver opened the car door, Goofy held out a giant gloved-hand to assist Hermione from the vehicle. Snape, in turn, glared so hard at the character that he stumbled backwards, almost losing his footing. Hermione was forced to turn her head to hide her fit of giggles.

"Minerva will pay for this," Snape hissed in Hermione's ear as they enter the front doors.

Once inside, Hermione took a proffered glass of champagne. Snape declined. They were soon approached by a gentleman, whose appearance and demeanour screamed CPA. "Hermione Granger, may I introduce Patrick Weathersby. He heads the Auditing Department and has been my primary point of contact," Snape offered.

"My pleasure, Ms Granger. Mr Eisner has asked me to make sure you have everything you need this evening. He would like you to join him for dinner after the presentation," Mr Weathersby announced in a very nasal twang.

"Tell Mr Eisner that it would be our pleasure," Snape replied.

After Weathersby left, Hermione asked, "Doesn't it seem odd that at an event of this magnitude, Michael Eisner wants to dine with us?"

"Indeed," Snape replied.

At that moment, the guests were ushered into a room, which resembled an indoor amphitheatre. After welcomes and addresses from various corporate officers, Michael Eisner took the stage.

"Ladies and gentleman, it is my pleasure to introduce you to the future of Disney's global corporation – Asia."

For the next 45 minutes, the audience was wowed by a multimedia production, including live ethnic dancers from throughout Asia. By the end of the show, there was no doubt that the Walt Disney Corporation had a strong vision for their product placement in Asia.

"I'm convinced that this company won't be happy until every child's first words are Mickey Mouse," Severus spoke darkly in a low voice that only Hermione could pick up. "Whether illegal or not, it certainly is criminal."

"Like it or not, lots of people enjoy the Disney product, Severus," Hermione replied, earning a dark scowl from Snape.

Exiting the presentation room, Hermione and Snape were met by a waiter who brought them to the Eisner table. Dinner was an elegant affair, and though they were not seated directly next to Mr Eisner, he did manage to pay them some share of his attention.

"Severus, I hope our staff have provided you with everything you need?" Eisner enquired. Before Snape had a chance to answer, Eisner continued. "Who is your lovely guest? I'm certainly glad that Severus convinced you to join us tonight."

Snape introduced Hermione as a former colleague, and the chitchat continued. Eisner was skilled at making everyone seem important, being very attentive to each person, but at the same time not saying anything of real worth. In other words, he was a consummate politician.

Dessert consisted of a decadent chocolate torte, but Hermione was careful to not over-indulge in anything. She wanted to make sure she kept her wits about her. As the band began to change from dinner to dance music, Snape decided to make his move.

"During my previous visits to this location, I was quite impressed by the art galleries. Would you mind if I took Hermione on a bit of a tour?" he asked Eisner.

"Of course not. Collecting art for the company is one of my true joys. Would you like me to round up Weathersby to give you a guide?" inquired Eisner.

"That won't be necessary," Snape replied. "I've become rather familiar with this site over the past week."

Snape rose from the table and held out his hand for Hermione. "This I could get used to," said that little voice inside his head again.

"What do you have in mind?" asked Hermione as she found herself walking through a cavernous hallway by Snape's side.

"There are several art galleries located throughout the building. I'm going to find you a secure location where it won't seem odd if you are found alone. If you need to, you can tell them I had to use the facilities, and if things get really strange just use the Disney Dollar. Try to give me as much time as possible, and I will be gone no longer than necessary."

As Snape turned to leave, Hermione called "Severus, good luck and please be careful."

He turned back to face Hermione, taking in the concern on her face, and then he was gone.

Chapter 12 Surprises

Chapter 13 of 15

Hermione and Severus get down to the business which brought him to Disney, only to have a surprise or two thrown their way.

Hermione Granger was trying to be inconspicuous as she wandered the great art galleries of Disney Headquarters. She found herself in a room of Warhol-type paintings of famous Disney characters. The treatment of Minnie Mouse caused her to smile as she thought about the austere Minerva McGonagall being a childhood muse for Walt Disney. What sort of strange parallel universe had she been inhabiting this past week? She really hoped that Snape would reappear before anyone saw her by herself and wondered what she was doing away from the gala all alone.

Thoughts of Snape caused her to become reflective about these past few days. It was easy to see that her own life was in a rut. She was bored at work, and her social life was in the tanker. Being a favourite aunt to the Potter children was her most satisfying role lately. How could someone who had so many opportunities when graduating be in her position?

These past few days spent in Snape's company had awoken something in Hermione. She hadn't felt this alive in ages, but if she was honest with herself she knew that it wasn't just the adventure, or dressing up like Cinderella. There was something about the taciturn man to which she was responding.

Free from the constraints of a student/teacher relationship, and with the perspective that a couple of years brought, she could see the man in a wholly different light. Yes, he still had a prickly demeanour, but his intensity was compelling. It made her want to see more of the man, and she wondered if that would be possible after tonight. Well, come what may, Hermione knew that it was time for some major changes in her life, whether they involved Snape or not.

Lost in her musings, Hermione had lost track of how long Snape had been gone. "Please hurry back," she thought.

She thought she sensed movement in the shadows beside her. "Severus, is that you?" she asked in a quiet tone.

As she turned around to locate the source of movement, a wand was suddenly thrust under her chin, pointed at her throat. "You will accompany me quietly."

It only took a split second to recognize the nasal twang of Patrick Weathersby. With his free arm, he pinned Hermione's arms behind her and directed her to an unseen

doorway at the far end of the room. Once inside, Hermione realized they were in a stairwell.

"What is going on?" Hermione demanded as Weathersby forced her up a stairwell.

"That's what we're going to find out," Weathersby replied. "Your boyfriend has been poking around in the wrong places. I'll bet he thought he was clever, using you as a decoy. Didn't think we'd be watching him closely, huh. Well I've watched every move he's made since he's been here. I'll bet he's not feeling too clever now."

Hermione didn't say a word. She didn't know what had happened since Snape had left and felt that it would be better to remain quiet until she could assess the situation. Before she knew it, Weathersby was forcing her through the door of an office. Once inside, she saw Snape tied to a chair with a troll guard on either side of him.

"Severus!" she couldn't keep from exclaiming.

"Yes, Severus, look who I found downstairs in the East gallery," Weathersby taunted. "Tie her up too, boys."

The two security trolls forced Hermione into a chair and tied her hands behind her back like Snape's. They set the chairs in such a manner that Hermione and Snape were now back to back and couldn't look at each other.

"Are you ready to tell me what you were doing in Mr Eisner's office?" Hermione heard Weathersby ask Snape. After a moment, during which Snape offered no reply, Weathersby said, "Well, it will get pretty interesting once Mr Eisner gets here. You're gonna regret crossing us. You don't know who you're messing with. Boys, don't let them move an inch while I fetch the boss." With that, Weathersby left the room and the security trolls gave a cruel laugh. The one closest to Hermione began to leer at her.

"Hermione," whispered Snape "Can you lean back far enough for me to reach your bracelet?"

"I can try," she replied.

The trolls didn't seem perturbed by Snape and Hermione speaking to each other. Hermione remembered from her studies that while trolls could be trained for some positions, such as security jobs, their understanding of human language was fairly limited and usually had to be part of the training for the situation. She hoped that was true of these two and was glad that Weathersby hadn't asked them to keep her and Snape apart, or keep them from talking. Still, she followed Snape's lead on speaking softly.

"On the count of three," Snape instructed, "lean back as far as you can in your chair. One, two, three."

Hermione leaned back and felt Snape fumbling for her wrists. After a moment he caught her hand and found the bracelet. Wondering what he was up to, she felt him move the bracelet around until he could touch the emerald. Suddenly, Hermione felt that now familiar feeling of a strong pull below her navel. Then the room disappeared in a howl of wind and a rush of colours. The bracelet had been a Portkey.

In no time at all, Hermione landed with a little stumble. Snape grabbed on to keep her from falling over. Shocked by the unexpected series of events, both the sudden onset of danger from Weathersby, then the quick escape act by Snape, Hermione felt very shaken. Closing the arms length between them, she hugged Snape as if he was a life preserver.

"Are you alright, Severus?" she asked in a tremulous voice.

"Of course," he answered. "What about yourself Hermione? Weathersby didn't manhandle you, did he? I never meant for you to be in any danger. I'm afraid my espionage skills are a bit rusty."

As Hermione gazed up in Snape's face, she saw real concern written all over it. She had never seen him look less guarded.

"Yes, yes, I'm fine. Just shaken up a bit. One minute I was waiting for you to return, and the next minute I'm being taken hostage at wand point. It was rather disconcerting. Why didn't you tell me that the bracelet was a Portkey? Couldn't I have accidentally sent myself here, and where is here?" Once Hermione realized she was safe, a million questions began to fire in her head.

Snape had the decency to look a bit sheepish about the Portkey. "I really didn't think we would need it, but each piece of your jewellery is a Portkey. I am the only one that can activate them. As far as where we are, we are in the Amazon rainforest. Senor Raton's home is just down this path."

Because they were surrounded by tropical plants, Hermione had not known, until that moment, that the Portkey had taken them to a different continent. Snape pointed towards a narrow dirt road. Hermione could see lights twinkling in the distance.

"Shall we?" said Snape. Hermione took his arm. Her evening attire was certainly not made for traipsing along a dirt road in the Amazon. Plus it gave her the added advantage of staying close to him. She figured she could wait until they were safely inside to hear Snape's story.

Chapter 13 Senor Raton

Chapter 14 of 15

Severus takes Hermione to meet the elusive Senor Raton.

As Hermione and Snape approached the thatched-roof cottage, Hermione felt that it looked like something out of a fairytale, perhaps Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs. Snape rapped on the door, and it was opened by a dark-haired young woman. She stared at the unexpected strangers dressed in evening attire.

"Is Senor Raton home?" inquired Snape.

Before the young woman had a chance to answer, a jovial voice was heard from inside. "Maria, ask our guests to come in."

Hermione and Snape entered the cottage to find that the interior continued to reinforce the fairytale image. The whitewashed walls, thatched roof and wooden floors were enhanced with simple Spanish furnishings. Hanging from the broad, wooden ceiling beams was an assortment of dried and drying plants. Their aromas filled the air.

Standing in the middle of a room was a man whose mere demeanour caused Hermione to smile. There was no mistaking the resemblance to Dumbledore. While Senor Raton's hair and beard were considerably shorter than Dumbledore's, the twinkle in his eyes was a dead ringer.

"Severus, I had a feeling I'd be seeing you tonight, and you've brought such lovely company. Come in, come in, let's go into the study. Maria, could you bring our guests some tea, please?"

Their host acted as though there were nothing odd about two people in formal wear dropping in out of the blue at his cottage in the middle of the Amazon Rainforest.

"Who is your lovely companion, Severus?" twinkled Senor Raton.

Snape introduced Hermione as a former student and colleague. He explained how he had chanced to meet Hermione at Disney World and how he had recruited her to help him accomplish his mission.

"Then I take it that you have accomplished your mission?" their host inquired.

Snape reached into a pocket and withdrew some minuscule scraps of paper. "Engorgio!" he commanded while tapping the scraps with his wand. The scraps grew to reveal numerous contracts, written on parchment.

"As I expected, I found these, and many others that I did not remove, in Michael Eisner's office. They are contracts with certain magical entities who are placing charms on Disney products and services. It works like this: after basic manufacturing, the products receive a Compulsion Charm. Muggles who pick up, or sometimes just look, at the product are compelled to buy it. Some Muggles can fight the compulsion, but if they had any inclination to buy the product at all, it would be almost impossible to overcome the urge. There is also evidence of enchantments throughout the various amusement parks that operate the same way. The basic goal is to get Muggles to spend more than they would naturally," Snape reported.

"The complexity of it is that these charms and enchantments are designed to act neutrally on witches and wizards. They didn't want to risk detection by the Wizarding community, and since the American Ministry of Magic has been very lax in monitoring the situation, the likelihood of detection was slim. I expect there has been some gold changing hands at the Ministry. It would certainly fit the modus operandi in the earlier Eisner family scandal," Snape finished.

While Snape was speaking, Senor Raton had walked over to a window and stood with his back to Snape and Hermione. With a heavy sigh, he turned to face them. He now looked every bit the old man that he was and had lost his twinkle. Maria had entered the room to serve tea, so he waited for her to finish serving before he spoke.

"I can't say that I'm surprised," began Senor Raton, "but I am disappointed none the less. In my haste to leave behind the identity of Walt Disney, and pursue my new dreams, I've left my brother Roy without the support he needed to prevent things like this from happening. I can see now that I'll need to come back, behind the scenes of course, to help Roy clean house and make sure he has the resources he needs to succeed, including me."

"Severus, I don't know how to thank you. I know this was not a job you would have chosen to take on. I know Minnie McGonagall called in a favour to get you involved. You can be assured that I am forever in your debt. Rest assured that you will never lack for any potion ingredient that I can supply," Senor Raton promised.

At this statement, Hermione actually saw Snape's eyes light up.

"Then my time was well spent," Severus replied.

"What about you, Ms Hermione? How can I thank you for assisting young Severus in this matter?" Senor Raton asked.

"I want nothing, sir. It is a real honour to meet you, and other than a few uncertain moments," at which Hermione shot Snape a grin, "it has been a pleasure. I think I needed to get involved in something like this at this time. Stir things up a bit, if you know what I mean."

At this enigmatic statement, Senor Raton looked from Hermione to Snape and back. "I think I do, my dear," he replied.

"Well, the time is late, and I must get Hermione back before her friends worry about her," Snape interjected.

"Yes, yes, we don't want anyone turning into a pumpkin now, do we?" Senor Raton added with the twinkle back in his eye again.

Opportunities

Chapter 15 of 15

The morning after the Gala finds Hermione with much on her mind.

The following morning found a very reflective Hermione back at her suite with the Potters. She was thinking over the night before, the beautiful gala with all its glamour, the capture and escape from Disney headquarters, and the visit with Senor Raton, a.k.a. Walt Disney. Her mind strayed most of all to Snape and how his company thrilled her. He may have underestimated their opponent last night, but he did get them out of a sticky situation in the end.

"Hermione, we are headed to the Blizzard Beach water park this morning. Are you sure you don't want to come?" Ginny asked. They had two days left on holiday and wanted to continue to make the most of their Disney experience.

"The water slides look awesome, Aunt Hermie," piped up Evan. "James and I can't wait to race the Downhill Double Dipper."

"It sounds great," assured Hermione. "I'll join you lot this afternoon. I'm just a bit tired this morning. I need a bit of rest first."

Ginny looked at her friend with concern. Hermione had seemed pensive since her return last night. Ginny wondered what had happened to give her friend such a heavy aura. Had something happened between Hermione and her mystery date? It seemed that if Hermione had enjoyed herself she would have been more cheerful.

At that moment, there was a knock on the door to the suite. Harry opened the door to find Severus Snape looking him directly in the eyes. "Snape!" exclaimed Harry.

"Severus!" exclaimed Hermione.

"Severus?" repeated Harry.

"Really, Potter, I hope you haven't regressed to one word utterances," Snape quipped.

In spite of herself, Ginny couldn't help but laugh at the incredulous look on her husband's face.

"Mrs Potter," addressed Snape, "I do apologize for barging in on your holiday, but I was hoping to have a few words with Hermione before I leave. I'm afraid I'm due back in Paris as soon as possible."

"Just give me a minute," said Hermione, who stepped into her bedroom to change out of her bathrobe.

"Come in, Professor Snape," uttered Ginny. "You don't have stand in the doorway. I'm sure Hermione will take a few minutes."

"Would you like to see my pet, Nibbles? He's a rat." Molly Rose Potter unabashedly walked up to Snape, explaining about her Charmed marble and how it allowed her to keep tabs on her pet back home. To Harry and Ginny's great surprise, Snape knelt down to Molly's level and gave the child his full attention.

Hermione reappeared dressed in a summer shorts set and sandals. "Severus, where would you like to go to talk?"

"There is a garden just outside this building, Hermione. I won't keep you long from your day's plans," Snape seemed to speak to the room at large.

"Excuse us," added Hermione.

They walked down the corridor in silence, and passing the elevator, Snape opted for leading Hermione down the stairs and through a door to a lovely tropical garden that Hermione had not seen before. He ushered her to a bench by a large Koi pond, surrounded by blooming Birds of Paradise.

Once they were seated, Snape began to talk, staring straight ahead, as though avoiding eye contact.

"I felt the need to speak to you before I left today," he began. "Having your assistance was most valuable, and I thank you."

"I'm sure you could have done the whole thing without me. To tell you the truth, I'm not quite sure I was any help at all," answered Hermione.

Snape turned to face her. "You're wrong, Hermione. Your help was very necessary."

Hermione saw a questioning look in Snape's face. "Hermione, I need to know, are you happy working at the Ministry?"

"Well, no. I didn't really explain my job to you because I was a bit embarrassed. I took it right after graduating while I was trying to decide what to do. I never imagined that I would still be there after all this time." The words just began spilling out of her mouth.

Snape interrupted. "We have a small potions research community in Paris. I've never had the need for an apprentice; however I do know a couple of Masters who are always looking for good talent. I seem to recall that you had a certain aptitude in potions. Would you mind if I passed your name on to them?"

Hermione felt a happiness bubbling up inside of her. With Gryffindor boldness, she grasped Snape's hands in her own. "Yes, Severus, I wouldn't mind that at all."

She was rewarded by the warmest expression she could ever recall seeing on Snape's face.

Upon returning to her suite, Hermione found Ginny and the children still there. "Where is Harry?" she inquired.

"Harry is having a lie down," Ginny replied. "I believe he is in a state of shock. This whole time, you have been telling us the truth about Professor Snape, and we thought you were joking. You really pulled a good one on us this time, Hermione."

Hermione laughed "Well, that's what you get for doubting me."

"I'll have to admit, Hermione," Ginny continued, "He may be a bit rough around the edges, but there's Prince Charming material there after all."

"Indeed," responded Hermione with a wry smile. "Indeed."

The End

A/N: My thanks and appreciation to everyone who took the time to read my first fic that is longer than a drabble. I must give a special thanks to my beta, Lucy Lupin, who helped me use the correct British words and spelling. Plus my gratitude to the patient mods of the SS/HG Exchange, Shiv5468 and Ginny W. My getting this fic into final form became a challenge as real life stepped in after I had taken the assignment. Two family members passed away during my writing. The closest, my brother Jimmy, died right at the time I was trying to get the last few chapters done and submitted by the deadline. So the story did not have quite the depth I had originally hoped for. It has taken me close to a year to post it at an archive. Yet the numerous lovely comments I have received have encouraged me to try again. Maybe next time I can get Severus to actually kiss the girl. Finally, my story is not meant in anyway to imply that Micheal Eisner is a nefarious Wizard. It is just a bit of fun, and in the world of Disney he made a very convenient target.