

How Sprout Learned to Love Teaching

by queenp

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Only Chapter

Chapter 1 of 1

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A/N: Thank you to my beta, Lady Karelia. You are great. And fast. And you volunteered before you had any idea what this would be about. Many hugs for you!

Sprout's Story

Oh, my. I do remember when I began teaching. Those were the worst few years of my life. You see, I never wanted to teach. I always fancied myself a researcher. I wanted to find new plants; I wanted to find new uses for my plants. I wanted life to be me and my plants. That didn't happen, though. When I finished my studies here, I had no idea what to do to make my dream a reality. I didn't have the experience, and that was all anyone looked for when hiring. AND I was a witch trying to make my way in a wizard's only club. Every time I would speak to someone about what I wanted to do, I was told, "You are just a witch, go find a husband and have children. That is your dream. Forget all this nonsense." Or that if I MUST have a career, it should be in teaching. I was giving up hope. Then I was approached by my Herbology teacher to consider taking his place when he retired. I felt I had no other choice. I didn't want to teach, but if I were to be able to do anything in my chosen field, I needed to start somewhere. Maybe I could manage some research on the side to get my foot in the door so to speak. I accepted his offer. Looking back on it, I wonder now if he realized that I really would find happiness in teaching although I was convinced I never would.

I reluctantly accepted the position of his assistant for the next school year. He suggested I help one year, an apprenticeship of sorts, to learn the ropes. After I agreed, I went to visit my family for the next couple of weeks before the next term began. I arrived at Hogwarts the week before term began, as instructed, only to be informed that I was now the new Herbology professor. It seemed my predecessor knew he was seriously ill and chose to hide it from everyone. He died just a couple of days before I arrived. I think he knew that I wouldn't run away from my responsibility even though I was unsure about whether the position should be mine or not. I had one week to try to get ready for a job I didn't want in the first place.

When I was introduced that first night to the students, I was petrified. I was going to be teaching my friends. And my enemies. Now, I didn't really have any enemies, per se, but there were quite a few who didn't like the fact that I knew more than them when it came to my plants. They were not going to easily accept having a peer as their new teacher. My first class was, to my relief, first-years. I wasn't quite so scared by them. However, they were Slytherin. You know the dislike Slytherins have for anyone not in their house. Apparently, they are born with this attitude, or at least are taught it that first night in the castle by the older students. They were rude and disrespectful; they questioned everything I told them. They refused to do any work I assigned. It continued this way for the entire year. The other classes were not much better. Only my NEWT-level class with Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff was different. These were my friends. They knew that I knew my subject. They did question me, but they were not hostile about it. And we all learned from their questions. They helped me better understand how I needed to explain so everyone could understand what they needed to learn.

By mid-term, I was ready to walk away from my position. I wasn't cut out to be a teacher. I decided that I probably should just find a husband and get married. I decided to first speak with the deputy headmaster. Albus was helpful. He told me that I could do it, reminding me that children are by nature cruel. He made some recommendations

that I tried. But when they failed, I decided to speak to the headmaster. He looked down his nose at me and told me my classroom issues were my problem and to find a way to deal with them. I was livid. What did he think I was doing there? I was looking for suggestions for how to fix the problems. And he was giving me no assistance? Talk about being thrown to the wolves. I was ready to walk out. But as I wrestled with that idea, I decided I was a hell of a lot more stubborn than those fools. Whether I was thinking about the students or the damned headmaster, I don't know. Maybe both.

Sometime around the Easter holiday, I began to realize that part of the reason my friends responded so well to what I did in class was because they knew I cared about how they did. I thought, "What if the other classes are just reacting to how I feel about them?" I knew that I didn't care about the younger ones the same way. They frustrated me. They even scared me. How could I be doing right by them as their teacher if I didn't care about them? I decided to make a conscious effort to change my opinions about them. I knew I couldn't do this all at once, so I began with the young ones. The ones that I felt were most impressionable. I forced myself to not lose my temper with them, to be more understanding about their questions and requests for repeating information. I started sending owls to their parents and Floo-calling to let the parents know what was going on, ask how they would handle certain behaviors if the student was home. Just before the OWLs and NEWTs that year, I had a fifth-year student ask me why I didn't do that for anyone but the firsties. Her younger sibling got praised, but she didn't, no matter how hard she worked for my class. I realized one of my mistakes with that question. I couldn't care about just SOME of my students. I had to take an all or nothing approach. I apologized to her and told her I would address it with the class, but to please remind me. Next class period I had with these older students, I took the time to explain to the students my struggles with the year. I told them what I had done to try to make changes. I apologized to them for neglecting them in my desire to become a more proficient teacher and promised them it wouldn't happen again. I did the same to all my classes.

Now, some might say that this was a mistake—letting my students see my weaknesses. However, I found it to be just the opposite. I could have never become the teacher I am today without that experience. I even had a few students apologize for their actions, realizing that they were causing some of the distress. And I made right by my promise to them. That night, I sat and started writing a note to the parents of every student I had not already done so. It took me about a week to get them all sent out, using all the available owls that the school had.

The next year proved difficult too. But not as much so. I found that by allowing myself to get excited about my subject, I could get the students more excited. But that excitement needed to be tempered. Too much creates havoc, not enough leads to boredom.

It ended up taking me four, maybe five, years to grow comfortable with my role of teacher. At that point, I was asked to become Head of House for the Hufflepuffs. I readily accepted that role. I chose to become a second mother to these children. And they readily accepted it, wanted it even. After that first truly horrible year, I have never reconsidered giving up on my students. They need me almost as much as I need them. But I had to prove that to myself and to that first bloody headmaster I had as a teacher. Turns out, I discovered many years later, that he was convinced that if I could survive that year, I would be eminently successful as a teacher. He didn't want me to become dependent on his help or, as he felt, I would always require the intervention of the headmaster. And I do believe he was right. I became a stronger teacher for his lack of assistance.

Challenge 31. When she first joins the Hogwarts staff, Pomona Sprout loves Herbology, but dislikes teaching. How does she come to enjoy her job and decide to stay at Hogwarts?