

# Let Someone ELSE Tell You About the Birds and the Bees

*by dracontia*

Do you mean to say that there might be issues with sex at a coeducational boarding school? (Gasp!) And someone might, just might, be upset enough to demand that the school start teaching where little wizards and witches come from? In response to the Sex Ed Challenge at Potter Place, the wildest parody I can devise that does not involve a Jarvey. AU--oh, so goofily AU!

## Prologue: In the Beginning, There Was Sex--Almost...

*Chapter 1 of 9*

Do you mean to say that there might be issues with sex at a coeducational boarding school? (Gasp!) And someone might, just might, be upset enough to demand that the school start teaching where little wizards and witches come from? In response to the Sex Ed Challenge at Potter Place, the wildest parody I can devise that does not involve a Jarvey. AU--oh, so goofily AU!

Disclaimer: Even the idea for the challenge isn't altogether mine (waves to SS Lupin).

Author's Note: See Challenge rules at the end of this prologue!

**WARNING!** Reports of side effects experienced while reading this yarn have come to my attention, including, but not limited to:

- aspirating frozen desserts
- forcefully expelling staining fluids from the mouth and/or nose
- damage to nearby electronic equipment as a result of said expulsions
- strange looks from coworkers or other persons within earshot of the reader
- and various forms of muscle strain due to excessive laughter

In light of these reports, I highly recommend you postpone consuming any refreshing beverages or other forms of nourishment until after reading this. A trip to the loo beforehand might not be amiss, either.

Please read in good health--and safety.

"Terry, are you sure?"

"It will be fine... trust me."

"Oh! I didn't expect it to be so cold."

"Well, this isn't the Mediterranean Sea, Sue, dear."

"D-didn't you use a W-warming Charm?"

"Y-yes, but it d-doesn't seem to affect the w-water."

"I-I-I d-d-on't th-think this-sss a g-good id-d-dea."

"B-b-but I h-heard s-s-some of the S-s-slytherinsss..."

"Th-that's it! I-I'm g-g-getting out! Y-you w-w-want us to d-do something you heard *Slytherins* discussing?"

"B-but Susan...Hey!"

"W-what was that?"

"What touched me?"

"EEEEK!"

"Holy Triton...it must have been the Squid."

"Ugh!"

"I'm really sorry, Sue. I wanted to do something special for you."

"Oh, Terry."

"Mmmm."

"Oh... Terry!"

"Ahem."

"Professor Flitwick!"

"My back is turned, children. Please clothe yourselves and come back to my office. It's a good thing Professor Vector saw you before the Squid had a chance to decide if it was going to simply scare you, or do something more disturbing."

"His Warming Charm works better than yours."

"Well, he IS a professor."

"Mr. Boot, Miss Bones, please do pay attention. I am walking back towards the castle now. I expect you to follow me. And in addition to whatever detention Professor Sprout and I decide to assign, you will both be practicing Warming Charms."

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After properly dealing with the two lovebirds (including a stern lecture on the difficulties of continuing one's education while trying to care for a baby), Filius and Pomona decided to sit down for a bit of chin wagging before going back to sleep. It was early Saturday morning, and they wouldn't have to supervise the overeager young couple at their detention of wrangling Sun-Racing Heliocanthus until high noon; so the fellow professors and incurable gossips saw no reason not to pass an hour or so chatting about all and sundry of their charges and coworkers before turning in.

"They're a bit less imaginative than in my day, Filius," Pomona said disappointedly. She was rather embarrassed at having one of her House caught in such a compromising position; thank goodness the other guilty party had been a Ravenclaw. Severus' office was as approachable as a Doxy's nest, and his touchy House pride wouldn't let him have a nice, juicy chat after dealing with such an incident. Minerva was a little more liberal about such discussions, but her office was just as forbidding...because, by contrast, it was neat as a pin. To make matters worse, she only kept tea and Gillywater on hand for guests. No, for a good gossip session, nobody beat Filius, and as a locale, nothing topped his office...with its comfortably shabby armchairs and an office lav in which the coldwater tap was charmed to run with the libation of one's choice, if one knew the secret pattern in which to turn the handle.

"Too true, Pomona," he replied, stepping out of the little door holding a half-coconut shell garnished with hibiscus flowers. Filius was a decent hand at Transfiguration, even if he seldom used his skill for anything more elaborate than changing a plain tumbler into something more suitable for a Lemuriacolada. "Even in my day, when it was quite daring to go beyond a kiss on the wrist..."

Pomona's snort said more plainly than any words that she thought kissing wrists had gone out when Dumbledore was in nappies.

"...we were careful to use forms of Disillusionment to hide, ah, any incriminating views."

"Why are Slytherins so fascinated with that damn Squid? And what in the name of Magic is motivating them to pass it along?" Sprout asked, studying the sparkling head of foam on her Argent Stout. She had learned to love the strong-tasting stuff in part because of its entertainment value; the silver bubbles seemed to go up and down at the same time, like some sort of oddly enchanted quicksilver.

"Not being a Slytherin, I don't understand that, myself."

"Ha! I dare you to ask Severus."

Filius chuckled and wagged an admonishing finger at his colleague. "I think the third years are having a bad influence on you, Pomona, dear. Assuming he was ever foolish enough to have attempted any shenanigans with the Squid, which I rather doubt, he certainly wouldn't admit it to anyone." The little professor shook his head sadly. "I was rather hoping he'd cheer up a bit with the Dark Lord finally gone, but he's still going about with a face like a wet weekend."

"Yes, and he's as irritable as ever. I swear he gets absolutely Victorian at any mention of the students acting on their hormones. Speaking of which...have you been seeing anyone lately, Filius?"

Professor Flitwick succeeded admirably in not sending his mouthful of fruity, tropical mixed drink out his nose, though it was a very near thing.

It was Pomona's turn to have a laugh. "I'll take that as a 'yes.' I'm glad to hear that you're ready to go on with that part of your life."

"Well... it has been almost ten years since I lost sweet Clementina. She wouldn't have wanted me to mourn forever."

"Of course not. So, are you going to tell me who the lucky witch is?" she asked slyly.

Flitwick played with the large pink flower on his cup coyly. "My, my. You sound almost jealous, Pomona."

"Oh, rest assured, my dear Filius, I would be...if I played that side of the pitch."

A sharp squeak, like a rather large mouse having its tail stepped on, issued from the other side of the half-open door.

"Septima, dear? Is that you?" Filius called. He had rather expected Professor Vector to come to him at the end of her rounds, considering how agitated she'd been upon reporting the loving couple at the lake.

"Yes, Prof-I mean, Filius," Professor Vector stammered, then yawned.

"You were quite right to come to me. Mr. Boot and Miss Bones were none the worse for wear when I found them, although they will be in detention for some time to come...and should you see anything of that sort in the future, please confront the students yourself and *then* bring them to me. Just in case the Squid is feeling moody."

"Very well, Filius," she said faintly.

"Your rounds are almost over for the night, and it's rather quiet right now. Why don't you go get some sleep?" he asked genially.

"Yes, I-I think I will. Good night," she replied, still sounding a bit nervous as she skittered off. She honestly wished those two had cast a Silencing Charm before holding such a conversation. Or maybe she should learn to walk more loudly. Now she would have to get all she heard out of her mind, somehow.

Sprout watched Vector scramble off down the hall, waiting for her to get out of hearing distance before commenting. "Good grief. I know she's one of the youngest professors on staff, but hasn't she ever caught students petting before? She only glimpsed a couple of half-clothed bodies from a Quidditch Pitch away, and she acts as if she's seen a Boggart!"

Flitwick sighed. "I honestly don't know what to make of her, Pomona. She's very bright, and a competent teacher, but socially... Septima is...well, she's not inept or antisocial. She's truly a lovely person. But she is definitely *incredibly* shy."

"If by that you mean she bolts as if Fluffy were hot on her heels at the faintest suggestion of sex, I'll agree with you wholeheartedly," Sprout replied, shaking her head and wondering if the poor girl had ever even been kissed. It seemed a foregone conclusion that she was still a virgin.

And as the two professors nursed their drinks and wrapped up their little chat, the darkest shadow since the final demise of the Dark Lord slowly began to stretch over Hogwarts.

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Author's Note: As promised, here be the rules, folks...

## THE SEX ED CHALLENGE

### Premise:

Parents in the Wizarding world have traditionally told their children about 'the birds and the bees' in their own time. But this is causing problems at Hogwarts (gee, problems with sex at a coeducational boarding school where the age range runs from the beginning of puberty to full hormonal fever pitch? Who could have guessed?)

The exact nature of the crisis is up to you; but whatever the triggering event or series of events, the Ministry of Magic and/or the Board of Governors has decreed that once a year, a class on 'reproductive health' (or your favorite euphemism) will be taught.

Since we monkeys issuing the challenge aren't interested in the educational quality of the class per se, the only absolute requirement for course content in your version of 'Sex Ed at Hogwarts' is that the little monsters must be told where babies come from. You decide how much detail you wish to go into, and which other topics to cover.

Naturally, no teacher will voluntarily touch that class with the proverbial ten-foot wand, so you decide which professor(s) draw the short straw.

### Additional information:

- 1) Challenge commences July 7th and concludes August 21st (just in time for back to school frenzy to start kicking in!)
- 2) Length: 2,000 to whatever you can write within the time limit. No extensions, but if you go multichapter and haven't finished it by the deadline, what you have up to that point can be submitted for voting. Any rating/category.
- 3) No 'pairing' requirements. You can have any or none. If you opt for 'any,' please keep everybody legal (if not ethical.)
- 4) Oh, and set it whenever you like...AU is fine; if you can shoehorn it into canon (pre- or post- HBP), also fine!
- 5) Post on TPP (The Petulant Poetess)
- 6) Voting will commence on Potter Place August 26th-ish, and the poll will close September 4th--so the 'curriculum' will be all ready for the good professors when school starts up! MUHUHWAHAHAHA!

### Optional Shenanigans:

You don't need to incorporate any of the following features...they are just suggestions to get you in the right frame of mind! ;-)

--Someone is revealed to have an interesting kink or fetish as a result of the course. How public the revelation is up to the author.

--The topic of sexual injuries is brought up, to the extreme psychological trauma of every male within listening distance.

--The topic of menstruation is broached, and people are badly squicked.

--Someone (it matters not whom) asks the question (of anyone), "What was losing your virginity like?"

The answer is either

"None of your business" (at which the conclusion is reached, either correctly or incorrectly, that the respondee is still a virgin)

or

"Which time?" (you're on your own for a follow up if you choose to use THAT answer!)

--Make up really freaky Wizarding STDs and/or discuss how wizards deal with those from the Muggle world.

# 1: ...and The Board Heard About It, and That Wasn't Good

Chapter 2 of 9

Albus Dumbledore wonders how many lives he has left--because he's pretty sure he's going to burn another one of them, breaking *this* news to the staff...

Disclaimer: Were I J.K. Rowling, I would make sure the little buggers knew where babies came from; that way, they could continue reproducing characters, about which I could continue writing books...thus making about twenty ruddy fortunes a year...well into infinity. Hey, I've got kids to put through school! You'd better believe I'm mercenary on their behalf!

Please see the **WARNING!** at the beginning of the Prologue. I'd hate for anyone to lose a monitor on account of this story.

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Chapter Title: 1:...and The Board Heard About It, and That Wasn't Good

*Someone had been very busy during that first Voldemort-free Yule...and it wasn't Father Christmas.*

*Carefully selected parents were owed some very detailed letters about events which had transpired in empty classrooms, vacant Astronomy towers, and a certain lake, in proximity to a certain Squid.*

*Said distressed parents sent some very demanding letters to various members of Hogwarts Board of Governors with the alarming information. Interestingly, letters of inquiry to the school were not answered by Headmaster Dumbledore...which led to downright threatening letters to the Board. Several poor owls worried their tail feathers would catch fire.*

*This resulted in a very anxious meeting of the Board of Governors, attended by an irate Ministry representative who arrived with a condemning attitude and a huge pile of books and parchments pertaining to the subject. His visit left the Board highly motivated to move with unprecedented alacrity.*

*This time, the resulting letter...and the pile of texts, charts, and a few shockingly detailed wizarding illustrations...were hand-delivered to the Headmaster's office.*

*Happy belated Christmas, Albus.*

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Albus Dumbledore reflected that it was always the same with the Board of Governors and the Ministry of Magic...how short their memories, how long their penchant for interference. Did certain luminaries perchance resent having said all those lovely things about him at the 'funeral'? It wasn't as if anyone had actually trusted the sincerity of a crowd of politicians and would think to hold them to any of it. But the speed with which they resumed the Cold War must constitute a record even for them; troublesome Tom had only been fertilizer for six months and they were already back to their usual level of interfering ingratitude.

Dumbledore read the letter carefully. Three times. The mandate would be impossible order to ignore, and very difficult to get around. Since the Governors hadn't changed recently, perhaps there had been an infusion of operable gray matter at the Ministry. Evidence of intelligent life at the Ministry was almost unprecedented, and under different circumstances, it would have been a highly welcome turn of events. As things stood, it bit Bubotubers.

Then he looked over the materials that came with it, and his expression grew increasingly grave. True, he had been contemplating instituting something of this nature for the past three decades. (The whole Squid thing had rather exploded in the seventies. What was it with Slytherins?) But to force an entire set of lessons in it out of the blue would be rather a shock to the system. Certainly, there had been a good bit of post-War exuberance last term, but was that sufficient to have brought all of this on? They had placed a time limit on the ultimatum, for Merlin's sake!

The most curious part of all was the complex spell randomly assigning teachers to the proposed classes. There were much simpler methods for making a random choice. Very, very, curious...

Although it was plain there was nothing untoward about it, Albus resolved to dust off his old Arithmancy Rules sometime during the next few days.

As was his custom in serious situations, he carefully contemplated his resources, options, and the possible ramifications of a variety of potential actions. Then, he considered the fact that he was tired, old, planning retirement, not feeling especially wily at the moment...and strangest of all, that the Board, rather like the broken clock that manages to be right twice a day, actually seemed to have a bit of a point this time. It all led to one inescapable conclusion.

"What was that Muggle expression again? Ah yes... the excrement has struck the oscillating ventilation device." Albus sighed as he crossed to the Floo to send memos for an emergency staff meeting. "At this point, I think I will settle for ensuring that it is fairly distributed."

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Snape had tried to arrive at the meeting first so as to snag the plum wingback in the corner. Naturally, his luck being what it was, he succeeded in opening the door just in time to see Binns materialize there. It wasn't as if the ghost needed the seat where no one could be quite certain if you were paying attention or not; everyone knew full well that Binns had fallen asleep in every Staff Meeting for the past century. To compound his annoyance, Sprout bustled in and cheerfully co-opted the second best chair. It was going to be one of those weeks.

Pomona noted Severus' expression as he returned her greeting distractedly. It appeared that the Snape forecast remained unchanged: partly cloudy with a chance of passing thunderstorms.

Flitwick and McGonagall arrived hard on her heels, and the four Heads of House were deep in speculation on the possible reason for the meeting as the rest of the staff filed in. Snape's personal rain cloud aside, the atmosphere in the Hogwarts Staff Room was mildly inquisitive. The only apparent cause for concern was that no one had thought to secure the wonky-legged chair before Professor Quill absentmindedly sat in it. She tended to devote half her brain to the meeting and the other half to her latest translation project. This left no portion of her awareness free to realize she was rocking the offending piece of furniture and driving everyone else barking with resulting

rhythmic creak-bump.

Secure in the knowledge that the Serpentine Git was eternally contemplating his navel in Hades, the professors assumed that a little onomatopoeia constituted the direst annoyance on the agenda. Plainly, either none of them had heard (or if they had, they'd forgotten) the old expression about what happens when one assumes.

As always, Dumbledore breezed in exactly two and a quarter minutes after the last professor to arrive. The staff knew this number in no uncertain terms. Professor Foote, whose enthusiasm for things Muggle made his job teaching Muggle Studies a joy (and made Arthur Weasley's fascination look like a passing fancy by comparison), always timed it with a Muggle stopwatch. Everything was nice and normal so far.

The pile of documents in Albus' hands failed to raise concerns, and his pleasant greeting suggested nothing untoward. But every set of shoulders in the room tensed as he sat down and made a steeple of his fingers, studying them briefly before looking up again. The Headmaster may have appeared relentlessly cheerful to the casual observer, but he never revealed anything by his body language unless he wanted to. Any sign of hesitation on his part before speaking was fair warning to brace oneself.

"Yesterday afternoon, I received a missive from the Board of Governors, backed by the authority of the Ministry of Magic."

Terrifying visions of Umbridge danced luridly in the assembled well-read heads.

"It appears that word of the above average number of incidents involving loving couples discovered in indicting positions over the past term has reached their parents...who have elected to display somewhat above average displeasure at it. Upon hearing their complaints, the Board of Governors and the Ministry issued a joint decree that we must take specific academic measures to curtail such activities and reduce the likelihood of their recurrence," Albus began.

"Forgive me, Albus...I must have heard you incorrectly. You did say we are to take academic measures? Not disciplinary ones?" Filius asked.

"You heard correctly. These books and other documents are the curriculum for a new one-week course educating students on human anatomy, the reproductive cycle, childbirth, and related issues."

He allowed a moment for that to sink in.

Madam Pomfrey reflected that she ought to have realized something was amiss when her presence at the meeting was very specifically demanded.

Reliable as the hour of sunrise, Minerva led the counteroffensive. "If parents are so worried about it, why don't they set down and explain where wee'uns come from...and why niches behind suits of armor aren't the place to be starting them?"

"That," Albus responded wearily, "is probably the sole question not addressed in either the decree or the highly detailed texts for the course. The mandate is quite specific on everything else...when the course is to start, how long it is to last, what information is imparted to students of each year, how that information must be conveyed...there are even instructions on how to assign teachers to each class."

Disbelief was giving way to concern. It appeared that Albus, uncharacteristically out of fight, might actually oblige them to do this unthinkable thing.

"Since the subject has never been taught here, materials have been adapted from Reproductive Health classes taught in Muggle schools, modifying the texts and lesson plans to include more accurate images and information peculiar to our society. You are allotted one week from receipt of your assignment...today...to review everything and note any omissions. It will be up to you to supply the correct information should you detect such discrepancies. Classes will start the following week; I presume they want it all instilled in the students before Valentine's Day."

"Albus, the full moon is next week," Remus interposed. For the first time in his life, there appeared to be a slight silver lining to his affliction.

"Yes, I'm aware of that. Under the circumstances you will be partially excused from this particular duty. Once you are able, you can step in to assist whoever is assigned the first and second year boys, and help teach any necessary makeup lessons to prevent the N.E.W.T. and O.W.L. students from falling behind."

"Of course," Remus positively beamed at his employer. This was the best news he'd had since Tonks said 'yes' over the holiday.

Up until that moment, nearly everyone at Hogwarts had been quite happy that Lupin's war hero status had translated into a bye from the Ministry, allowing him to return to his former job at the school. Now, a fair number of those people felt the fleeting urge to walk up to the mild mannered professor and say, 'Bite me.'

Albus hurried on before the stewing could set in, in earnest. "First and second year students will have a basic anatomy and hygiene class. Third and fourth years will be taught 'Reproductive Health,' which includes the anatomical material plus pregnancy and birth.

"Fifth years and above will have all of those lessons plus in depth information on contraception and sexually transmitted diseases. That particular set of lessons takes the full week. A scheduling spell has been provided to ensure that all students can fit in the full curriculum with a minimum of disruption to their normal course of study."

Every professor's face was seized with its own particular mien of outrage. Even Professor Quill sighed briefly into the page of hieroglyphs she was translating before sinking back into the happy oblivion of the papyrus. (The staff had a betting pool going as to whether or not she would retire before becoming the next teaching ghost of Hogwarts.)

Speaking of whom, only Binns was unperturbed...chiefly because he was, as typical during staff meetings, unconscious.

Albus decided to forge ahead with additional delicate details. "While the less demanding schedule and the differing information for first through fourth years will allow these classes to be divided into male and female groups, the time constraints and identical lessons for the older students necessitate coeducational classes."

It took a moment, but the Knut dropped. Sinistra finally found her voice. "Surely we aren't going to have the older girls and boys *together* for these lessons?" she managed to strangle out.

"Well, they're sure to be together, if and when they try to put them in to practice," Flitwick remarked in an overly-innocuous tone of voice.

"Filius!" McGonagall yelped, both amused and scandalized.

Snape was obliged to apply 'Scourgify' and several apologies for spraying Flitwick with coffee. Although in a perfect world, he would have been automatically blameless on account of the fact that the coffee would never have come flying out his nose were it not for the little man's remark.

"I'm afraid the requirements must be followed to the letter," Albus said apologetically.

"Who is going to teach which level?" Quill asked resignedly. She'd come to the end of her scroll, and there was nothing for it...she'd have to contribute to the meeting.

Twelve pairs of eyes darted about the room shiftily...excluding Lupin, who felt pretty safe in the knowledge he'd only have to deal with first years...and Binns, well, he was always dead to the world, but now he wasn't paying attention, besides. Evidently one more topic upon which the professors were in accord was their desire to foist the fifth years and up on someone else.

"This, too, is subject to a non-negotiable procedure. A Scheduling Spell assigns teachers to each group. The final results will operate like a Wizarding contract. No trading will be allowed, under threat of some rather unpleasant penalties."

"Let Filch teach it. That should put the little cretins off sexual activity for at least a year, if we're lucky," Severus muttered...getting some of his own back by catching Filius

in a spit-take.

"Now, Severus, the purpose of this course is to allow our students to see to their reproductive health and to make prudent decisions regarding their sexual lives...not to frighten the life out of them," Dumbledore admonished gently but unyieldingly.

Snape personally felt that the latter would make the former much easier, but he had long since given up trying to evangelize the rest of the staff as to that particular epiphany.

Before the words that were straining at various sets of frowning lips could burst forth, Albus briskly wrapped up his remarks. "I want no one here under any illusions about this meeting. This is not a discussion; you are here to receive your assignments. Participation in this venture is non-negotiable. Think of it this way: it will be over in a week, and by next year...when whatever furor sparked this initiative dies down...we will have devised a better way to do this."

*Or found new jobs*, ran the thought through several people's minds.

Without further ado, Dumbledore withdrew several sets of documents from the stack and placed them together. The Scheduling Spell incantation was performed, and there was suddenly a class sheet for each teacher.

"That was an interesting spell, Albus," Minerva remarked as she took her sheet. "Seventh years, of course," she sighed.

Charlie Weasley, Hagrid's replacement (since the half-giant had left to do things everyone preferred not to contemplate with Madame Maxime), let out an undignified whoop of relief. "First years! Oh, um, sorry," he added, trying his utmost to sound contrite. It wasn't working very well; with every fiber of his being, he was rejoicing that he'd not have to do much more than explain a lot of mildly detailed diagrams to a lot of embarrassed boys who were unlikely to ask any questions. Though his enthusiasm was tempered by the discovery that Trelawney would be responsible for introducing the subject to first year girls, and wished to discuss it with him over tea.

Filius sighed. "Third years; it'll be a wonder if I can get them to stop giggling long enough to listen."

Snape gave an undignified squawk of dismay. "Albus, I can't show this drawing to a lot of seventh year boys and...and girls!"

"Oh, my. That is... *detailed*," Remus said, leaning over to study the offending illustration...a wizarding illustration, no less. Snape's glacial glare reminded Lupin that calling attention to himself was, under the circumstances, simply not the thing.

Albus cleared his throat significantly. "You will teach this course based upon the prepared materials. They are quite thorough. After all, you wouldn't wish to have to supplement with your... personal experiences." He reflected that, despite the varied backgrounds of the professors and the varied reasons they would prefer not to bring personal experience into the matter, their reactions to that remark were amazingly similar. Rigid posture, wide-eyed stares of terror...if he didn't know better, he'd swear there was a Basilisk peeking over his shoulder. Even Binns coughed in his phantasmic slumber, giving a little shudder as if something had walked on his grave.

Poppy looked at the books for the third and fourth years thoughtfully. "I've always contemplated pressing the Board for leave to instruct the young ladies in the basics of dealing with menstruation. It never fails...at least a handful of times a year, I get some poor dear running to the infirmary in a panic because she has no idea why she's suddenly bleeding to death."

"Yes, and the ones who don't go to you come to one of us," Minerva allowed reluctantly, her vague gesture encompassing all of the female professors.

"I suppose it might be a good thing to be certain all the students are conversant in Contraceptive and Prophylactic Charms. Every now and again, some lad comes back from the holidays with ah... a souvenir he hadn't intended upon," Filius sighed. "And of course, there have been the odd wandpoint weddings over the centuries."

Hooch let out a howl of hilarity when she came to some of the animated illustrations. "Now, here's a bunch of fellows with over-inflated opinions of themselves!"

Quill adjusted her spectacles and peered over Hooch's shoulder. "Oh, lovely! They have the wizarding version of the Turin Papyrus for the topic of 'positions for intercourse.' I wonder if it includes the section with the controversial writing suggesting Animagus sex?" she chirped pleasantly. Wrapped up entirely in her love of ancient writings, she began translating the shocking little notes in hieratic script with an earnestness that entertained Sinistra and Hooch no end. Only S. Clara Quill could look at *that* document and honestly say she was studying it for the inscriptions.

Septima's eyes had been growing steadily larger since the assignments were announced. Wasn't anyone going to object more effectively? They all sounded as if they were quite resigned to this intolerable state of affairs! She would speak up herself, being a competent teacher and, much like the rest of them, a war hero... if only she could bring herself to use the word 'sex.'

"From where I'm standing, it looks like the one subject in which the entire student body of Hogwarts feels highly motivated to take on in depth, independent study. Burning valuable classroom time on it is akin to teaching the little monsters how to eat their lunch," Snape remarked dryly...though he reflected that this might not be all bad if it meant never again having to brew the counteragent to the Sybaritus Virus. He filed away Quill's comments for such a time as he could study the materials in the privacy of his office. He wasn't going to be caught dead ogling the Turin Papyrus in the Staff Room.

"Have you ever watched some of those kids eating lunch? It's enough to put me off mine," Sinistra retorted.

If neither Snape nor McGonagall was going to pitch a fit, the die was cast. *I'm doomed*, Vector thought dully.

Binns yawned, blinked, and gazed around the room. "We have to teach them to eat?" he asked in sleepy disbelief.

"No, Cuthbert. But we *are* supposed to be teaching them about sex," Pomona explained, with patient amusement.

"Oh. Good. If it had come to teaching basic table manners here, I'm afraid I'd be obliged to retire," he replied seriously, and drifted back into whatever passes for sleep in a ghost.

Septima Vector, who had held up heroically to that point, finally gave up the ghost and fainted upon seeing that she would be teaching sixth years.

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By Wednesday afternoon, the student texts had arrived at the school, and any hopes the professors had of a last-minute reprieve were dashed. Dumbledore announced the plans for the classes at dinner that night.

"Another bloody book," Ron muttered, shoving the text in his bag without so much as glancing at it on the way back to the tower.

Ginny snorted. "And he wonders why Hermione gave him his walking papers," she giggled into Harry's ear.

"Not much he doesn't, lately," Harry replied, glancing significantly at Hannah Abbot, who blew Ron a kiss before hurrying off with the rest of the Hufflepuffs.

"How'd I miss that?" Ginny asked in astonishment.

"I think you were otherwise occupied." Hermione's wry tone and pointed look at Harry would have made him blush at the implications, once upon a time; now, with Ginny on his arm and Voldemort's ashes (figuratively) under his feet, his radiant confidence didn't leave room for false modesty. He quirked a grin at her and pulled his lady love a little closer.

"She told him she was interested in a big family," Harry stage-whispered to Ginny.

Hermione decided to ignore the world in favor of reading and walking. Did those two really think they were fooling anyone? It was pretty obvious that all that whispering was just an excuse to stick their tongues in each other's ears. Some days, she felt she was the only person in the school not reverting back three years in maturity in commemoration of Voldemort's demise. An uncharitable observer would have dismissed this attitude as sour grapes. After all, it wasn't as if she'd been swamped with romantic overtures, heroic status notwithstanding. She preferred to think that she simply had more lofty priorities.

Speaking of lofty academic priorities, what was this 'Reproductive Health' book, anyway?

After the first three pages, her walking slowed. She paged ahead through the book and stopped dead in the corridor *We're going to have classes about sex?* she thought, amazed, confused, and embarrassedly curious.

And also, evidently, completely oblivious to her surroundings...as she discovered when she was nearly bowled over while staring at an amazingly detailed anatomical drawing.

"Watch where..." she started to snap, then found herself staring up at a wall of black robes.

"Ten points from Gryffindor, for making a roadblock of yourself!" Professor Snape snarled, then quickly spun away and rushed off down the hall. He stuffed his Teacher's Manual into his robes and tried to control the warming of his face. Snape hoped she hadn't noticed the page he'd been studying to the detriment of watching where he was going. Why must the authors spring such illustrations on a reader like that?

Hermione never even had time to begin offering an apology, though on reflection, there was no excuse for him running into her while she was at full stop. She decided it was just as well; she might have felt odd apologizing to Snape immediately after studying a wizarding diagram of a penis attaining the state of erection. She snuck another quick look at the cutaway diagram, amazed at how the artist had animated a convincing illusion of blood flow. Fascinating, how simple an organ it appeared to be in the drawing of external anatomy, compared to the internal workings. Perhaps sex was a worthy topic of academic endeavor after all. In that case, she'd better start researching.

Speaking of blood flow... It would be logical to suppose the odd color that came over the professor's face was due to anger...either at himself for carelessness, or at her for simply being there.

So why did she have the overwhelming feeling he'd been... blushing?

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Snape reflected that the approaching five-day span might qualify as the worst work-week of his entire life. Considering some of the previous contenders for the title, that was saying quite a lot.

Just looking over the material for the class brought back his first-day-of-teaching nervous stomach. Not that there was anything there he hadn't read about before; after all, he was the one Madam Pince had called on to better secure access to the more risqué books on sexual magic in the Restricted Section. He had secured them quite thoroughly, all right. No student was going to come across them, now that they were safely tucked away in his private quarters. The amazing bibliographies of those books contributed to the expansion of his collection.

No, he could teach the class without coming close to exhausting his knowledge of theory with regards to the subject. His worry certainly had to do with conveying it to a plague of giggling students. Contrary to popular belief, Snape was not opposed to laughter, merriment, or frivolity on general principle; it was simply that, when they took place anywhere within roughly twenty feet of him, he couldn't quite shake the nagging feeling that they were somehow at his expense. And he'd bet good Galleons that even his reputation wasn't fearsome enough to prevent giggling in a room full of hormonal teenagers hearing the word 'orgasm.' Perhaps he'd forgo his habit of pointedly asking questions of obviously inattentive students as well. After all, he wasn't any more eager to hear them reference the vulva than they were to hear him mention it.

Severus' face flushed fleetingly at the thought, but he stifled his qualms and hardened his expression into one of practiced superiority. He would plow through this class behind an implacable shield of cool contempt, and woe to anyone who dared ask him to elaborate on the topic! Bloody little pests weren't going to get anywhere *near* his personal life, not unless they wanted to experience every legal form of punishment he could utilize for the rest of the term. He relaxed perceptibly at the thought. No, there'd be no giggling on his watch. Who would dare ask He-who-was-seriously-irked-at-being-stuck-teaching-Potions-again detailed questions about sex, of all things?

Then, he made the mistake of scanning the list of students assigned to him.

The Ravensclaws on the list were all straightforward fact sponges who would soak in the information without comment. The contingent of Hufflepuffs would be no problem. His Slytherins knew better than to give him any grief, and as for the Gryffindors...no Longbottom, good; ugh, Weasley, but it's not as if he'd pay attention, anyhow; yes! No Prat-who-lived-to-kill-off-the-Bigger-Prat, but...

Snape swore aloud. So much for being certain the class would be intimidated into blissful silence.

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Hermione decided that a busy corridor was probably not the ideal spot to study her new subject, so she hurried to her Head Girl's room and read the book through. It seemed to be a decent overview, but she had a distinct impression it was possible to go into greater depth on the subject. So, she did what any girl would do in her situation...went straight to Harry. She needed to borrow Hedwig.

As happy as she was making the Wizarding world her home, it was relatively narrow slice of reality. Hermione had no intention of losing track of the rest of the world. To that end, she not only took time to read Muggle newspapers (for what they were worth), but also belonged to a service that provided an extensive catalog of Muggle books, which could be purchased by owl-order. Hmm. Where would they be in the catalog? The Biology section seemed contain little pertaining to sex. Puzzlingly, 'Self-help' had more of a selection. *What sort of sex book would be in that section?* she wondered.

Amazing. There was actually a sex section in the catalog, and she eagerly checked off several titles. Then, for good measure, she ordered one or two more from the section labeled 'Erotica,' though that didn't sound very technical.

There was one title in particular that the publisher's note said was highly recommended. She wasn't going to be caught dead ordering something called 'Sex for Dummies,' though.

A few resources on magical sex were in order as well, since some practices and STDs were exclusive to the Wizarding world. Oddly, the primary titles referenced in the bibliography of her textbook were missing from the Restricted Section. Somehow, she didn't feel quite up to asking Madam Pince to help her find them, especially since Professor McGonagall had given her leave to access the collection based on an expressed desire to read up on Animagus training; but that didn't stop her from having a good, long, browse while she was at it, so it wasn't a total loss. The Eclectic Bindery in Hogsmeade didn't carry anything quite as advanced, but they did allow her to Floo-order a couple of basic volumes without too many odd looks.

The books arrived just in time for the weekend. Hermione had caught up on all of her studies in anticipation of their arrival. (For those not conversant in the laws of Hermione Land, she was happily a month ahead of the syllabus.) Now she was free to lock herself in all weekend to absorb as much knowledge as humanly possible.

By Monday, she was certain she knew nearly everything there was to know about sex. At least, she was pretty sure her theoretical grounding in the subject was quite sound, and the applied portion seemed much more straightforward than flying a broom. It was almost a shame the course didn't have a practical component.

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Vector hadn't been nervous her first day of teaching.

She knew Arithmancy backwards and forwards (and in four planes of existence). When she taught it, all she had to do was let her love of the numbers pour out. Explaining it was simply an added joy, allowing her to share the beauty of the subject with those who lived in the sad ignorance that was Life Before Arithmancy. But this...this was a Thestral of another color.

She just couldn't bring herself to see the beauty in a lot of messy bodily fluids being exchanged, nor in the awkward body parts involved in the process. It was with a defeated expression that she began studying the diagrams she would have to explain, willing herself to use the peculiar and dirty-sounding words that described them. It might be wise to assign seating for the class as well. Having the boys near the front where she could see them would be disastrous. The only good news was that she'd been given a fairly large batch of Ravenclaws. Septima would range the young ladies of her former house along the front row, Miss Lovegood front and center. It would help to have someone there whose wide eyes and slightly odd stare wouldn't be attributable to the material, nor to her shortcomings conveying it.

Feeling nauseous, she decided to visit Poppy for something to settle her stomach. Maybe she could talk the nurse out of a Calming Draught for Monday as well. She just couldn't think of any other way to get through having to see that p-penis diagram become erect again.

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#### **Author's Notes:**

The incomparable LariLee suggested that Voldemort was now fertilizer rather than mulch...although not without first pointing out the potential for a water retention/PMS/Tom Riddle joke. I hope you all realize how hard I worked to resist that temptation, once it was suggested to me.

The Turin Papyrus: a satirical and rather lurid document from the New Kingdom (Ancient Egypt) depicting a bunch of raggedy old men with huge penises, attempting intercourse with lithesome young women in a variety of positions, ranging from the somewhat plausible to the highly unlikely. It also depicts a woman apparently masturbating on an upended piece of pottery while applying makeup, and a series of animal vignettes, including one of a cat attempting to have sex with a goose. Interesting folks, the Ancient Egyptians...

For all those people who are aghast that the sexes are taught together in the advanced classes, this is not merely literary license on my part. It was done that way when I attended a Catholic High School. From age 14 onwards, we had a refresher course of some sort every year, boys and girls in the same room, often asking most pointed questions. The decision to give first and second years a rudimentary introduction to the subject is also based on my actual experiences. The first time I was subjected to the basic 'talk,' was in public school...when I was 9. It was the awful, vague speech about menstruation and the fact that somehow, those sorry little line diagrams (with which one could never hope to identify real human reproductive organs) would get together and form a baby under the correct circumstances. The boys and the girls were separated, and the school nurse was stuck teaching it all. The teachers wouldn't touch it with a ten-foot pole. Nor even an eleven-foot pole.

Up next: Torment begins in earnest!

## **2: And Darkness Was Upon the Face of the School**

### *Chapter 3 of 9*

Did I mention this is just a bit AU? Or that I am probably going to use painfully descriptive chapter titles in lieu of summaries? (Now that we have that established, on to some quality time in the classroom.)

Disclaimer: I own nothing but the plot. If you see it in here, let me know...it's that small, twisted thing with a few holes in it.

Please see the **WARNING!** at the beginning of the Prologue. Your nose, your electronics, and your coworkers will thank you.

Chapter 2: And Darkness Was Upon the Face of the School

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Monday morning found assorted seventh year students uncharacteristically waiting outside a dungeon classroom. Usually Professor Snape left the room open for the dunderheads. His grand entrances would be interrupted if he had to wade through them to get to the door.

Ron took the opportunity to strike up a conversation with Hannah. He should have picked the icy dungeon climate as a topic.

"I'd like to know what sorry prat forced us to come down to the dungeons for *another* class with Snape," he complained. "What is it we're supposed to be doing here, again?"

Ron was interrupted by a distinctive high-pitched giggle. Malfoy really ought to have been embarrassed to still laugh like a second year girl at his age. "Merlin's arse, Weasley...it's a safe bet you never so much as glanced at the book!" Draco seemed to find this incredibly amusing.

"Some of us are busy over the weekends, Malfoy," Ron retorted superiorly, putting his arm around Hannah's waist for emphasis. She blushed becomingly.

Hermione was, herself, a bit miffed with Ron regarding his sadly typical academic laxity; but she shot a halfhearted glare at Malfoy from force of habit. It seemed bad form to let his odd snide remark slide altogether. Though she had to admit, he'd not said anything genuinely nasty since having summoned unusual reserves of intestinal fortitude to help them take out Voldemort. It was almost enough to make her feel good about blocking the Slicing Hex that would have certainly emptied the little blond prat's jugular.

He returned the expression, though it was more of an amused sneer than a proper glare. Summoning appreciable contempt for Granger these days took more effort than he cared to exert, considering she'd saved his arse (with a minimum of bitching about it, no less). "Don't tell me you can't appreciate the irony of a Weasley being unaware we're about to discuss reproduction," he challenged, still snickering slightly.

Well, put that way, it was rather funny. But truce or not, Hermione didn't feel any compelling need to laugh at Malfoy's jokes. Fortunately, Ron saved her the trouble by finally catching on to the topic.

"You mean, we're going to have to hear Snape talk about...you know..."

"The word you're groping for is 'sex', Mr. Weasley," Professor Snape intoned dryly, and immediately regretted his choice of words. Granted, the laughter was directed at the boy who was looking increasingly festive as his face turned as green as his hair was red, but it still seemed a bad omen.

"Silence!" he hissed, taking out his frustrations on the door. Students shuffled in behind him like so many dejected cygnets trailing after a cranky black swan.



The winter chill in the dungeons was highly conducive to resuming an appropriately icy demeanor. Snape found the walk up to the podium wonderfully restorative for his sense of detached superiority. "For those of you who did *not* spend the weekend leering at the diagrams in your texts, you will find the chapter on the male reproductive system begins on page eight," he said boredly. There, he'd managed to insult both the dunderheads who hadn't read the book and the irritating little swots who had. "We will start with the external portion of the system. The penis is the reproductive organ in human males, and also serves as the external organ of urination...and if you were unaware of that before now, it's a wonder you manage to get dressed in the morning."

True, that last bit wasn't in the book. But saying it was ever so satisfying.

This seemed sufficient to keep the students' mouths shut. Indeed, some of them looked as if they were fighting a gag reflex. Had he known inducing nausea was such a worry free means of keeping a class quiet, he'd have figured out a way to secretly administer mild Vomiting Draughts years ago.

It was enough to lull Snape back into his usual teaching mode, asking pointed questions of the inattentive and reveling in their stuttered responses. Miss Abbot, who'd actually dared giggle when he began to describe the scrotum, was summarily obliged to read aloud about the epididymis. This was a relief to Snape, as there was no way to make that word sound dignified.

And if Mr. Malfoy and Mr. Weasley thought they were getting away with their exchange of rude gestures, so be it; they would discover otherwise, much to their sorrow, when he called on them to read aloud the purpose of the corpus cavernosa and the corpus spongiosum. Especially when they realized that the animated diagrams of the internal and external male genitalia obligingly attained a state of erection as the words describing the process were recited...

Snape was obliged to ask, "Are there any questions?" at the end of the first bit of nonsense. He expected the question would prove rhetorical, so he moved briskly along to female anatomy.

"The external female genitalia are known collectively as the vulva. Do not use this term interchangeably with 'vagina.' It would be akin to saying a door is the same thing as a hallway, and only serve to make you appear even more of a dunderhead than you are. We will start with the Labia, Latin for 'lips,' of which there are two sets. Since you find this so amusing, Mr. Boot, I am certain you would derive great pleasure from reading about the vulva for our benefit. You may stop when you reach the clitoris."

*Not if he's hoping for another date*, the female population of the class thought. Miss Bulstrode had the poor judgment to think it aloud, however, and so earned a place in history as the first Slytherin from whom Snape had ever taken five points...as well as the honor of reading about the organ in question.

Things were going smoothly until they reached the vagina...at which point an all-too-familiar hand flew into the air. Snape reflected that if there was one human being on earth he could instantly recognize from the palm and fingers alone, it was Miss Granger. *I'm going to regret this*, he thought. "Yes, Miss Granger?" he acknowledged her as quellingly as possible

"Sir, the textbook describes the hymen as a membrane stretching across the vaginal opening. But it isn't shown in the diagram. There's no explanation of how menstrual blood issues from the vagina in women who haven't yet had intercourse, so..."

"Miss Granger, the female reproductive cycle, including menstruation, will be covered tomorrow. This class addresses anatomy only," Professor Snape said in a dangerously quiet tone of voice. *And discusses it in far more detail than anyone not a Healer would ever want or need to know* he thought sourly.

"Sir, I am talking about anatomy. I'm wondering why our Reproductive Health text does not adequately describe the variations in this part of the vulva. The biology texts I've read medical procedures to perforate it to allow menstrual flow are rare, implying it isn't normally a solid organ. It comes in an annular form, which implies a hole in the middle..."

"I am familiar with Latin, Miss Granger," he grit out from between his teeth.

"Yes, sir. It can still be present after intercourse, or even after childbirth, though this is rare. So what exactly is it?"

Snape's plans for this subject included the vain hope that he might miraculously be able to offload all the information within three days rather than the allotted four, leaving him with a lovely block of free time on Friday when he would otherwise be supervising their exam on the subject. Now it was looking as if he might well spend the rest of the class period getting past the hymen.

"Miss Granger, for the purposes of comprehending the female anatomy, suffice to say that *something* is there, it can be damaged, and that is that! Now, we are moving on to the internal genitalia." He proceeded through the vagina to the cervix and beyond, at this point only thinking that this needed to be finished as quickly as possible. They'd be seeing these diagrams again the next day, during the discussion on the reproductive cycle and birth.

"Are there any questions?"

Every head in the room whipped toward Hermione, looking at her either as if she were mad, or as if they were inclined to Petrify her lest that arm go up again and seal all their fates. With a sigh, she clamped her mouth over any further attempts at discussion.

"Five points from Gryffindor for unseemly breathing," Snape said to Miss Granger, glowering. "Class dismissed."

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If the Staff Room had a clock on its wall indicating the overall mood of the professors, the hands would be at approximately 'half-past disgruntled.'

"Ungh. One day down, four to go," Sprout said with a sigh.

"Problems, Pomona?"

"No, Filius, they were actually fairly tame. I'm just looking backward to Wednesday. That's when they actually have to hear about intercourse, you know."

"Ah, yes, there is that. Charlie, dear fellow, I don't suppose you'd care to risk whatever the alleged penalties are and consider trading?"

"Not on your life. I managed to get myself into enough trouble explaining the diagrams," he said mournfully. The younger boys had proved painfully obtuse with regards to the anatomical drawings. He'd been obliged to point out the penis on a Crup to set them in the right direction, and the Crup had indicated its displeasure at being used as a visual aid by peeing on him and the boys standing nearest. Female anatomy had been a completely lost cause.

"You seem unperturbed, Clara," Flitwick asked Professor Quill, hoping she could add some encouraging words to the discussion.

Severus took a break from rubbing his temples to interrupt. "Yes, well, I have it on good authority that she was pointing out the various runes and hieroglyphs that are phallic or yonic, throughout the lesson."

S. Clara smiled at a particularly choice Linear B tablet she had acquired as she answered. "I didn't skip any of the material, Severus. Mine isn't exactly the most popular subject in the curriculum. It's not often I get a chance to advertise it like this."

Snape pinched the bridge of his nose, wondering if all Ravenclaws were annoyingly adept at optimism, or just Flitwick and Quill.

Filius noticed the gesture and asked sympathetically, "Headache, Severus?"

"No thank you, Filius, I already have one."

The resulting laugh set the clock back to merely disgruntled. Snape managed a smirk. He may not be an optimist, but all was not lost so long as his wits were intact.

"Have your lot already started asking awkward questions, then?"

"Not the lot, but one is enough," he said grimly. "Miss Granger seems insufferably fixated on proving the nature of the hymen or some such. Perhaps she's trying to make a name for herself by rewriting the textbook."

McGonagall briskly pulled out her Teacher's Manual and glanced at it. "Well, at least we're done with Mr. Willy here until Wednesday, when the topic of intercourse...arises," she said, her lips twitching with mischief.

After a few seconds of staring to confirm that the speaker was, indeed, Minerva McGonagall, the assembled professors erupted in mirth.

"Ye gods, Minerva...you didn't just call that diagram M...Mr...." Sprout gave up, laughing too hard to finish.

"You need to quit eavesdropping on third years," Professor Foote advised, trying to catch his breath.

"Well, I couldn't abide all the long faces in here a moment longer. Fare-thee-weel 'till Wednesday, Willy me lad!" she comically addressed the drawing before slamming the book shut roughly.

Immediately, almost half the room stopped laughing and looked nervous. The male half, to be exact.

"What's gotten into the gentlemen hereabouts this fine day? I swear all the lads in my class were looking like that through almost the entire lesson. Mr. Longbottom was even cringing."

Filius decided he was nominated to break the news to her. "Well, Minerva, if you were batting the anatomical diagrams about during your lecture as you were just now, I can see why the young gentlemen might have been...discomforted."

The rest of wizards in the room nodded with awful solemnity.

Minerva waited for the laughing to resume, since this was surely another joke. When none was forthcoming, her incredulity spilled over into her voice. "Let me be sure I understand this. Slapping a *drawing* of a penis constitutes a traumatic experience for a roomful of almost-grown men, some of whom have actually fought in *war* for Merlin's sake? And even mature wizards, having seen more of life...and death, for that matter...have the same reaction?"

"You make that sound so... so *unreasonable*," Professor Foote complained.

"It's just not right to treat a man's bits like that, Minerva," Charlie said uncomfortably.

"We're talking about a drawing, Charlie m'lad," she retorted, still rather baffled.

"*That* is quite beside the point," Severus said significantly. The witches all patiently waited for him to elaborate. The wizards all nodded at the sagacity of that eloquent utterance.

McGonagall's face was a study in blankness. "Well, I'm sorry, gentlemen. No...discomfort...was intended."

"Quite all right, Minerva," Filius replied in a forgiving tone. "Do try to be more careful about such things in the future." He excused himself from the room with his usual cheery aplomb once again intact, and the rest of the men straggled out after him, looking righteously indignant. It was high time for a drink at 'Flitwick's Pub'...to settle the nerves.

Total silence reigned for about four minutes after they exited. Then the staff room exploded in witchy cackling.

"How did you manage to apologize with a straight face?" Sprout gasped, tears rolling down her cheeks. Minerva simply shook her head, unable to find the breath to respond.

"Wizards are such babies," she finally whispered. "What a shame Rolanda and Aurora missed that."

"Absolutely. And men have the nerve to think we'd want to be like them! I can't for the life of me understand why anyone would envy *that*," Pomona added, dragging out the drawing (now permanently christened 'Mr. Willy') and pointing to it derisively.

"Indeed," Quill remarked sagely. "Historically speaking, in most cultures outdoor plumbing has been regarded as synonymous with barbarism."

The screeches of feminine laughter were nearly deafening.

Even Vector, relieved at having stammered through her first class without any awkward questions being asked, managed to sketch a smile.

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"You don't understand, Harry..."

"No, Ron, *you* don't understand. There is no way you can compare hearing Snape say 'vagina' with McGonagall whacking her pointer at a moving illustration of a penis until it just goes **limp**."

"It's 'flaccid,' Harry," Hermione corrected.

"After that display, it sure is," Neville muttered in dismay. He hoped the trauma would wear off soon.

"And that was the other half of the torture," Ron complained, shooting Hermione an evil look. "Couldn't leave well enough alone, could you, Hermione? The bastard would've been just as happy to humiliate us for half an hour, then let go. But no, *you* had to egg him on. *Actually asking questions!*"

Before Hermione could fire back, Ginny bounced into the conversation. "Too bad you didn't have Hooch. She's an absolute riot! I don't think we stopped laughing the entire class, and she would have loved to have had more students ask questions. Of course, as it was, we just ran out of time, and..." She trailed off in the face of a ring of hostile stares. Ginny felt her popularity suddenly drop about twenty points. Even Harry favored her with a pained expression.

There may not have been much she could do about everyone else's reaction to her good fortune, but she knew what would put Harry back on track. She sauntered up to her man and whispered in his ear. "I'm sorry, lover. Could I make it up to you by helping you review today's lessons?"

So few words, so much to improve his frame of mind. "Actually, you could, my pet. You wouldn't happen to remember what the opposite of 'flaccid' is, would you?" he asked slyly.

Ron stalked off in a fine snit. "If you two are going to talk dirty, either bloody well learn to whisper properly or use 'Muffliato!'" he shot back over his shoulder.

"I'm with Ron on that one," Neville averred. Harry and Ginny shrugged and left to find some privacy.

Hermione retreated to her room in a huff, leaving Neville with Padma Patil, who was in the Gryffindor common room under the pretext of visiting her sister. "I didn't realize that Professor McGonagall was making all you chaps so uncomfortable," she said apologetically.

Neville blushed a little, but managed to respond. "Well, I don't think she was doing it deliberately. Gods, I hope she wasn't doing it deliberately."

Padma couldn't help asking, teasingly, "Was she enough to make you want to trade with Ron?"

Neville's face twisted in an expression of anguish. "Why don't you give me a choice between the grooming Doxys and swimming with Grindylows?" he asked, and they both laughed.

"Well, at least Ron's was just 'half an hour and let go,'" she said.

"If that's his approach to the subject, I pity Hannah," Neville remarked. He did his best not to look away as he said it, but he couldn't quite control the blushing. He hoped that it was a reasonably tasteful first attempt at sexual innuendo.

Apparently Padma thought so because she managed another giggle and a very fetching blush. "I was wondering... Parvati isn't about, and I really wanted someone to help me revise for my Herbology N.E.W.T. Do you have some time?" she asked.

"Oh, sure!" Neville piped up cheerfully. They spent a very comfortable hour going over the care and feeding of mobile plant life.

It wasn't until much later that Neville remembered, to his happy amazement, that Padma couldn't have been planning to study Herbology with Parvati. Only the Ravenclaw Patil twin was seeking a N.E.W.T. in the subject.

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Professor Flitwick went into the second day of Reproductive Health classes in an amiable mood. This was typical for him, but he suspected he'd have to work on maintaining it, in the face of today's subject matter.

Yesterday had been fairly easy. He could deal with the giggling. But menstruation had to be mentioned today, however briefly, on the way to conception and birth. The chorus of *sotto voce* 'Eeews' and horrified faces had him worried that these boys would revert back to the 'girls have cooties' stage of development. Perhaps if they had a vague idea of the basic processes, he could skip some of the details?

"Do you children have any idea where little wizards and witches come from?" he asked in a plaintive squeak. He was rather hoping to avoid going through the entire section on the female reproductive cycle. Although if the lads did manage to grasp the importance of observing the ebb and flow of women's, their lives would be infinitely easier. It had certainly served him well.

"Um... St. Mungo's?" one particularly gawky Gryffindor suggested, nervously.

With remarks like that, Filius wasn't holding out a great deal of hope for their survival in the female tidal environment. Sighing heavily, he carefully guided them through the outline of what happens when the sperm cells they discussed yesterday became acquainted with an ovum. It was fortunate third years weren't obliged to hear the mechanics of intercourse in anything more than the most rudimentary fashion...he'd have to do a reverse Cheering Charm to keep them from wetting their pants from hilarity.

The giggling diminished as he proceeded to fetal development and birth, and he felt a distinct sense of relief when the hypothetical little witch or wizard they were discussing was finally born.

*There*, Filius thought, managing to surreptitiously banish a bead of sweat that threatened to slide down his brow without the class noticing *I've done my duty. The little dears know where babies come from now...*

All of a sudden, one particularly sensitive Hufflepuff broke out in a sob. "Do you mean that all that happened to my Mum when she had me?"

All the other boys, in the nature of boys everywhere, looked distinctly uncomfortable at one of their number crying. It wasn't as if they could laugh at him, or slap him on the back and tell him to suck it in, under the circumstances. After all, he was upset on behalf of his Mum, and that was sacred ground.

As Professor Flitwick did his best to reassure the boy, he decided this must be a nightmare. Unfortunately, his schedule said he would be having it all over again tomorrow, with another group of impressionable children.

---

Snape had rather wasted his dramatic account of the agonies of labor, considering his primary target proved unperturbed. She even had the nerve to primly point out several references on pain management in labor and delivery. However, not everyone was similarly unaffected. As the description of the birthing process ground on in graphic detail, Ronald Weasley's face grew white enough to make his freckles look like drops of blood. From the Slytherin corner of the classroom, there was a muffled sob. Draco, unable to grow any paler, had turned grayish.

The good professor had to be content with most of the class staggering out as if quite unwell, and several couples appearing to be on the outs as a result of losing their rose-colored lenses regarding babies.

As Harry headed down to the dungeons to meet Ron and Hermione, he reflected that Professor McGonagall had been much more restrained when discussing childbirth. Perhaps the week would turn out to be fairly uneventful after all.

"Ronald, it's OVER! I don't want a big family, and you aren't getting within ten feet of me, ever again!" Hannah hurried away, leaving a stunned Ron standing in the middle of the corridor.

"What in the world was all that about?" Harry asked as he rounded the corner into the middle of that dramatic scene.

"Based on the measurements she's using, I'd say it means she wasn't paying very close attention to the segment on male anatomy," Luna supplied thoughtfully, startling the life out of Hermione, who hadn't noticed the Ravenclaw's arrival. Sometimes she swore the girl was part ghost.

When Luna's remark sunk in, Harry laughed until his legs wouldn't support him.

Once Ron caught on, he decided that it was really rather difficult to beat Luna when it came to sheer entertainment value, and he invited her up to the Gryffindor common room for a game of wizard chess (to help take his mind off the whole public dumping incident).

Luna cheerfully assented. After all, she had been listening to the pain management portion of Professor Vector's birth lecture (quite carefully, as most of it was almost whispered), and really did fancy having a large family.

Of course, she knew better than to mention that to Ron immediately. After all, she was crazy...not stupid.

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Snape had NOT wanted to come to the Staff Room for the review of today's debacle. But it was only because he felt disinclined to answer any questions. Never in his wildest dreams had he anticipated being attacked...by Flitwick, of all people.

"YOU!" the little professor yelled in an unusually forceful voice. "What kind of a sadist are you?"

Snape was, at least, not alone in being stymied into inarticulateness by the overwhelming incongruity of it all. Had anyone suggested this was his day to be accosted by a righteously apoplectic Flitwick, he would have told them to stop nipping at Sybil's sherry.

"Filius," he finally managed, in an awed sort of shock, "what in the name of Merlin's lopsided bollocks are you talking about?"

"I made a third year cry today," Flitwick said, still staring down the larger man with a ferocity that made it impossible to laugh at the absurd discrepancy in the degree of intimidation inherent in their respective appearances. "I had no intention of doing so. The poor little fellow couldn't take hearing what his mum had gone through delivering him. I felt like the lowest form of life on earth for doing it. And you, you...cruel, vicious, sadistic bastard...you make helpless little *first years* cry on a regular basis! ON PURPOSE!"

Hearing Filius Flitwick call anyone, much less a colleague, 'bastard' was quite enough to leave one utterly wrong-footed. Indeed, it was enough to make one disbelieve the existence of one's own feet because it left very little in the way of reality to stand upon.

Snape was still officially gobsmacked, but Minerva was unwilling to find out what it would take to send him into livid territory.

"That's ENOUGH!" she shouted, planting herself between the two wizards.

Flitwick blinked and shook his head. "Oh dear... I'm sorry, Severus. I don't know what came over me. I know you're not...any of those awful things." He couldn't bring himself to repeat any of it without the impetus of a bad temper and guilty conscience.

"It's all right, Filius," Severus managed, still taken aback. "I'm afraid I don't have the same knack with the young ones as you do."

"Well, you do have to worry about preventing the little dears blowing themselves up; I imagine it's rather nerve-wracking for everyone involved."

Minerva rubbed her head and sighed. "This would never have happened if not for this--this Sex Ed boot camp that's been forced on us. We need to get our priorities sorted, and now! For Merlin's sake, we're turning against each other out of frustration! It's not our fault we're stuck teaching this marathon course in Setting Teeth on Edge. We need to take out our aggressions on the real culprits!"

"The students?" Severus quipped darkly, earning an admonishing glare from Flitwick. It was still too soon to find that funny.

"Albus?" Aurora offered. She still couldn't help but think he should have raised a bigger fuss...at least enough get the thing postponed and reorganized.

"The Ministry?" Poppy hazarded to guess.

"Close," Minerva answered grimly. "The Ministry, the Board of Governors, and whichever lazy-arsed parents decided that they were going to shirk their responsibilities in teaching their children about the facts of life!"

"Hear, hear!" Foote cheered, gladly seconded by Vector.

"I move we hang in until the end of the week, then foist all weekend rounds off on Cuthbert, Remus, Sybill, and Albus. They can draft Irma and Argus if they have to because we're not going to be about! *We're* getting ourselves into Hogsmeade and getting seriously pissed!"

"Hear, hear!" more unanimously this time.

"Then, we track down the Board of Governors or infiltrate the Ministry or do whatever it takes to find out who instigated these foul classes!"

"Absolutely! Hear, hear! Minerva, Minerva!"

"And when we do, we find a way to make him, her, or them suffer as much as we have this week!"

William Wallace could have only wished to elicit that much enthusiastic support from a crowd.

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Meanwhile, Albus was puzzling over the sorting spell and wondering at the reasons for it. Granted, the professors would unquestionably have bickered and balked even more had they the option of trading assignments, but why did it matter which students were sorted into their classes, so long as the times worked out? Some truly advanced Arithmancy seemed to have been incorporated into the spell; even Professor Vector, proficient as she was in her subject, might have been a good several weeks at sorting out all the variables that went into its construction. He would have asked her to look at it, but the poor girl had enough trouble this week as it was.

All things considered, he really should have opted for a less considerate approach.

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Author's Notes:

Phallic: In the form of or resembling the penis. (Adjective derived from 'phallus,' the Greek word for penis.)

Yonic: In the form of or resembling the vulva. An adjective derived from the Sanskrit word yoni. Its most basic meaning is 'vulva,' though it has multiple connotations (the actual organ, symbolic depictions thereof, etc.)

Minerva's drill sergeant approach to Sex Ed (which is best appreciated by viewing others' reaction to it!) is a perhaps not so affectionate homage to a nun-who-shall-not-be-named. The woman looked like she could have stormed two Jima singlehanded (and was likely old enough to have done so.) She probably didn't know how to blush. She slammed right through the extremely thorough Sex Ed curriculum during my final year of High School without batting an eye, and I was very impressed with her thoroughness. The males in the classroom were also affected, but I wouldn't use the word 'impressed.'

## 3: The Epistles of Draco and Ron (and The Wisdom of Narcissa and Arthur)

Chapter 4 of 9

Draco and Ron feel the need to get something off their chests. (I apologize if that sounds more lurid than it actually is.)

Disclaimer: If these two lads were mine, they'd be bringing home better marks and using better language—or I'd take it out of their hides.

Please see the **WARNING!** at the beginning of the Prologue. I know this is a short chapter, but it would be a shame to lose any good keyboards on account of it.

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### Chapter 3: The Epistles of Draco and Ron (and The Wisdom of Narcissa and Arthur)

#### ***The Epistles of Draco***

'Dearest Mother,

I hope this finds you well.

Since I have every reason to believe that Father will presently be freezing the account from which I draw my allowance, I have taken the liberty of emptying it completely and forwarding majority of the sum to you. I would like more than anything for you to use it to build and stock that greenhouse you've always wanted. Don't worry, I have set aside what I may need for the remainder of the term.

Please keep any funds you might otherwise use for buying me sweets for the necessary seeds and cuttings and so forth. I'm really too mature for such frivolities, and I would love to see what you've been growing when I come home after graduation. Maybe you could raise some of those Full-Moon-Blooming-Lotuses and Acidic Orchids you're always admiring in the Enchanted Pavilion at Kew Gardens.

Your adoring son,

Draco'

(sent two days later)

'Dear Father,

The classes in 'Reproductive Health' have come to their conclusion. If anyone other than Professor Snape had been teaching the subject, I think I would have dismissed the outrageous claims out of hand. However, considering the esteem in which I hold him, I decided to tentatively accept everything as fact.

I actually went to the library. It's amazing what one can learn there, Father. Even more amazing, it confirmed everything in the class. Including the lessons on reproduction and birth.

For years, you've been telling me that Mother is very delicate and I must not do or say anything that might upset or surprise her. I've also heard you say that she is unfit for any strenuous activity or work. I know that many times over the years, she has expressed a desire to pursue Herbology, and each time you refused to pay for the supplies on the grounds that she is delicate and is not to overexert herself.

Well father, I know where little wizards and witches come from now.

And I must state unequivocally, with all due respect, that you are full of shit.

Your son,

Draco'

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#### ***The Wisdom of Narcissa***

'My Dearest Draco,

I haven't been this proud of you since you were Sorted into Slytherin, and this has been my happiest moment since discovering that Severus was able to save you from that dreadful mission.

The timing of your letters were impeccable, my darling boy—your father was out of the country on business when he received his, and work was completed on my lovely conservatory well before he could make his excuses and come home to object. I can't wait to show you the wonderful Carnivorous Carnations I planted by the door. They're the most pliable little things to train—I've managed to teach them to snap at your father if he looks as if he might enter the building with herbicidal intent.

I do hope the timing was intentional on your part. Forgive me, my precious Dragon, but it's high time you began exhibiting more pronouncedly Slytherin tendencies. (This would also go a long way towards easing your father's temper. Whatever did you tell him in that letter, dearest?)

Speaking of Slytherin and placating your father, have you found someone to replace Miss Parkinson? I know he would prefer that you reconcile with her, but frankly, the girl is as thick as two Galleons on end and has a face like a Baroque pearl. I'd prefer you make an alliance with someone who could produce children of better quality, even if you must stoop to court a Ravenclaw.

All my love,

Mother'

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#### ***The Epistles of Ron***

'Dear Mum,

Um, I think you've heard this already, but we have been taking a class on something called 'Reproductive Health' this term. It's some of the strangest stuff I've ever heard. Almost as weird as Divination. We just learned where babies come from. Hermione swears all of it's true.

I don't know what to say. Well, actually, maybe I do.

Bloody hell, Mum, what were you thinking? And what can I do to make it up to you?

Your loving son,

Ronald'

'Dear Dad,

I understand now why you let Mum run everything. But I still don't get how you convinced her to have all the rest of us lot, after Bill. Did I miss something? Should I have been paying better attention in Potions? Not that I've been skiving, mind.

Love,

Ron'

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### ***The Wisdom of Arthur***

'Dear Ronald,

Your mother was rather upset at the language you used in your last letter, though she cried at the sentiment. She may send you a Howler, but she may just as likely go into Diagon Alley and order the better version of the—well, what it is we are buying you for a graduation present. (Don't bother asking, I'm not going to let slip and spoil the surprise.) Pay close attention to this fact, son, because it tells you the most important thing you can possibly know about witches: they don't make much sense.

They are awesome, beautiful beings. Dragons are not as fierce and powerful; Puffskeins are not as soft and affectionate. We wizards would be utterly lost without them. And if we all live to be twice the age of Albus Dumbledore, we will never, ever, understand them.

Someday, Ron, you are going to meet a witch who is going to love you for the rest of your life, which will hopefully be at least as long as the average wizard's. Never take her for granted; she is putting up with more from you than you will ever know, because even if she does complain to you about the things you do that bother her, you will still be confused. Try not to aggravate her; your children will do enough of that. Don't argue with her if you can help it; you probably won't understand her reasoning about anything, but because she loves you, you can trust her to do the right thing for you and your family. Above all, whether she is a Pureblood, half-blood, Muggle-born, or Muggle, she is your goddess. Adore her accordingly.

What it all comes down to is don't try to convince a witch do anything. Just love her and be true to her, and she'll give you all you ever need and a lot of things you never realized you needed.

And if she is inclined to have a lot of children, don't ever suggest to her that it might be a good idea to stop at, say, three. That's how we ended up with Fred and George. Don't mention that last bit to your Mum. Think of Hogwarts' motto, if you're afraid you might let it slip.

Love,

Dad

P.S. Son, I've seen your marks. I know very well what you've been doing (or not doing) in Potions.'

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Author's Note: This painfully short chapter was the mad kernel around which the entire story eventually grew.

## **4: Try NOT to Be Fruitful and Multiply**

*Chapter 5 of 9*

Slytherin women are bartering away House secrets, Gryffindor men are finding that the King of the Beasts isn't always who you think it is, Severus and Remus have their boyhood dreams dashed by a careless word, and Ravenclaws provide comfort.

Disclaimer: Do I look like J.K. Rowling to you? Really? Better call your optometrist, then.

**Author's Note:** From here on out, the weirdness, naughtiness, and possibly even the rating of this story will be ratcheting upwards. Hopefully no one following this is unable to access an 'M.' What will the climax bring? (Um, yes, that phrasing was deliberate.)

Please see the **WARNING!** at the beginning of the Prologue. Neither dracontia nor The Petulant Poetess is responsible for spit takes ruining your clothes, electronic equipment, or interpersonal relationships.

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### Chapter 4: Try NOT to Be Fruitful and Multiply

By the third day of Reproductive Health with Snape, Hermione decided it was scarcely worthwhile to initiate discussion or ask a question. Discussing anatomy and physiology had gone over like a stone biscuit, his idea of elaborating on the female reproductive cycle and birth was to pile on intimidation, and he was depressingly unresponsive when it came to arousal.

It was rather disappointing. She had come to expect her professors to expand upon the texts, offering insights and insisting on thought. Snape normally did his share of that, though he always added a spoonful of sarcasm to make the information go down a bit raw. In this class however, all that was left of his usual approach was the sarcasm. He hadn't even demonstrated the prophylactic and contraceptive charms, insisting they should be able to cast simple charms from written instructions by now. Hermione found this another sad letdown; whatever his disdain for 'wand waving,' the professor certainly did it with style.

Yes, as she waited for her next class, she could just picture in her mind how his every motion would be crisp and precise, with a neat little flourish (though nothing unnecessary). It was enough to make her mind wander from the book she was reading...one of her 'independent study' texts for Reproductive Health...leaving her not especially alert to her surroundings. She realized her mistake as the ambient light abruptly vanished. Cause of the eclipse: Millicent Bulstrode.

"Granger, we need to talk," she said in a tone that tacitly added 'or else.'

*Don't panic, Hermione. You helped face down Voldemort, remember?she thought rapidly. Yes, but your record against Muscular Millie is two...nought, in her favor.*

"About what, Bulstrode?" she asked warily. It didn't help that her occasional tormentor was backed by apparently the entire seventh year female population of Slytherin.

"These sex classes, Snape, and you. It was bad enough that at the start of this mess he took points from Slytherin. But yesterday, he crossed lines! All that unnecessarily disgusting stuff about monthlies and hormones has set us witches back. I don't know what it's like on your end, but our blokes are acting absolutely third-yearish. Yesterday afternoon my man ran from me like he had Billywigs in his robes."

Considering Millie's 'man' was Greg Goyle, that made for an interesting picture.

"And that description of childbirth! Great Taweret, if witches were that delicate, there'd be nothing left of our kind. Trying to get a thorough rogering from a Slytherin bloke since then is like trying to find a Puffskein's teats. It's not on!"

Hermione thought the Taweret reference was ironically apt. If any person living was an avatar of the bewigged hippopotamus goddess, it was Millicent Bulstrode. She could have done without the 'rogering' comment, though.

"We need to get some of our own back, and juvenile crap from Zonko's or the Prat Twins won't cut it. We need to hit him where it hurts. That's where you come in. The only thing that irritates him more than fools are swots who ask pointed questions and know the material inside out. We need whatever you're getting this stuff from so we can study it. And we also need a lead-in, so our comments won't seem to be coming from somewhere off the pitch. You start us off, and we'll follow."

Hermione handed over the book she'd been looking at without hesitation. It was the least interesting of her collection; more sexual trivia than anything else, but that was probably what Bulstrode was after. "Borrow the book if you like. But unless you've a prophecy saying a Muggle-born Gryffindor has to be the sacrificial lamb, why are you asking me for help? I'm not keen to lose more points for my House." *It's not as if I have a boyfriend, or even any prospects of one at the moment,* she thought sourly.

Millicent shrugged. "You obviously have access to books we don't, and everyone knows you can speak up without making an arse of yourself. Best of all, aside from Potter, no one else gets on Snape's last nerve worse than you.

"Bloodlines don't matter here. What's important is that we're all witches with needs, and no wizard gets the better of us. He'll take points from Gryffindor for breathing if he's so minded. Make it worth the price you pay just for being in his class."

There was a dubious distinction: world's second greatest irritant, according to Severus Snape. Was Bulstrode inventing, or had Hermione missed something? She thought she'd been paying better attention. "Allowing for the moment you're right, what's in it for me?"

Voices drifted down the hallway, and the Slytherin girls scattered, leaving the scene or taking up falsely casual poses as if nothing of a conspiratorial nature had occurred. She wondered if Slytherins were taught to evade detection, or if it came naturally.

"That's an almost Slytherin attitude, Granger. I like it. If you agree, we'll give you something that's never been outside our House: the Syllabus of Slytherin Sexual Secrets, though we usually call it 'the little green book'." Millicent pulled out her ace in the hole...a green leather-bound volume that had about the same dimensions as a narrow address book. "Master this stuff, and any man will be putty in your hands on the very first go. Offer ends when the owners of those voices come into sight."

Hermione bit her lip, considering. She hated to lose even a few points, but if there was one bribe she couldn't resist, it was knowledge. At the very least, maybe she could finally confirm or refute those 'Slytherins and the Squid' rumors floating about the school. "I'll agree to trade books and start off with a question or two tomorrow. Anything else is up to you."

"Deal," she replied tersely and shoved the green book at Hermione. By the time it was safely stowed away, Millicent was walking along pretending to be deep in conversation with Pansy Parkinson. (At least, as deep as was possible considering Pansy's shallowness.)

*Amazing,* Hermione thought. *Bulstrode may seem nearly as wide as a troll, but it appears she's not nearly as thick.*

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The toll on the professors was obvious by day three. McGonagall was muttering something about 'coddling the wee diagrams,' and Sprout didn't seem amused, for once. Vector curled up on a chair in the corner, red-eyed and clinging to a cooling teacup with shaky fingers, in anticipation of the class she'd have to teach that afternoon. Her weepy appearance was such that even Trelawney came off her incense cloud long enough to attempt comfort. Granted, it was in the form of checking Septima's tea leaves and averring it would all be over soon, but the thoughtfulness was touching.

Snape had the just-barely-held-together look that had characterized his first few weeks of teaching. Flitwick decided offer a Cheering Charm by way of reconciliation. It was impossible for Filius to remain angry with anyone for very long...particularly Severus, whom he still recalled as a nervous first year who would have made the Creevey brothers look robust. Severus declined, but thereafter looked less combustible.

Lupin shuffled into the room, his condition having run its course...only to feel as if he'd stepped through the looking glass. Far from being their usual professional selves, his colleagues looked like he felt. A few were shooting him glances as if it were somehow his fault.

"Remus, can you take my rounds tonight? It's terribly important," Pomona asked, fidgeting.

"I'm sorry, Pomona, but I need at least one full night's sleep to get my strength back," he apologized.

"For the love of Circe, will someone please take my rounds?" Sprout begged. "If I don't get into Hogsmeade before this weekend, I won't be responsible for my actions!"

Her plea was met with half guilty, half resentful silence, punctuated occasionally by Septima blowing her nose.

Finally Quill sighed without looking up. "I'll do it, Pomona. Wouldn't want Rosmerta thinking you've abandoned her."

Lupin dropped the beaker of coffee he'd just summoned, creating an artistic arc of muddy fluid on the rug. Snape made a curious choking sound.

"What's gotten into you two? You know very well I don't fancy men," Sprout huffed.

"I don't think they knew *Rosmerta* doesn't fancy men," came the amused voice from behind a treasured cuneiform tablet.

Just then, Rolanda walked in. Remus' fiery cheeks could have been attributed to chagrin at having caused the spill he was tending to. Severus wasn't so lucky. "Venus' tits, Severus, you look like a first year who just found out there's no Easter Bunny."

Filius tried his best to suppress an amused smile. "He learned the truth about Rosmerta. Really, Clara, I thought we'd agreed not to disillusion the lads."

"I'm sorry," Quill said apologetically. "It slipped out."

"Remus didn't know, either," Severus pouted. He refused to be the only one looking stupid here.

"Does Charlie already know, then?" Remus asked, hoping the answer would be negative. He wasn't keen on feeling foolish, either.

The silence was profound. One could imagine hearing crickets chirp.

"You straighten Remus out," Quill grumbled, burying herself in her eyeglasses and tablet again. "My dietary requirements of foot have been met for the week, thanks."

Minerva, out of patience, decided to complete the clearing of illusions. "Charlie never had a schoolboy crush on Rosmerta. Nor **o**any lass," she finished, applying emphasis carefully.

Severus decided it would seem childish if he said, *I* knew that! so he settled for looking smug.

Remus shook his head like a dog shedding water. "All right, I knew I shouldn't have gotten out of bed this morning. Filius, the bar wouldn't happen to be open, would it?"

And can it produce anything that will make me feel less like death on toast? Coffee or tea just isn't quite going to do it this morning."

"I think I can scare something up," Filius said sympathetically as they headed out.

Quill moved subtly over to Snape. "I am sorry, Severus; perhaps this will help," she said discreetly, pulling a substantial sheaf of parchment from somewhere in her drapery layers. "I finished the definitive rendering of the Slytherin House journals that you asked for. I must say, even though they were only written in archaic English, the penmanship of Salazar's successor made them quite a worthy project." Her big brown eyes, uncharacteristically not squinting at anything for the moment, projected genuine contrition.

Under better circumstances, he might have actually cracked a smile at receiving these long awaited documents. As it was, they did something nothing else would have at that point...took the edge off his annoyance. "Thank you, Clara. At least I have something to look forward to at the end of this hellish week."

"You haven't forgotten our plans, have you?" Minerva asked sharply. She was counting on Severus to help her with tactics, seeing as how 'sneaky' was his forte.

"Right. Well, perhaps I'll just read a bit now to tide me over."

Vector wandered off to her doom with Pomona whispering 'good luck' for all the good it did. The room grew quiet again. Still, if Hooch had been sitting farther away, she would have missed Snape's gasp. "Problem, Severus?" she asked.

He looked up from the documents, blinking and doing a fair impression of an owl. He suddenly felt much better about not having carried out that particular Slytherin tradition, though it certainly gave one pause to consider how many others had heeded the supposed advice of that passage over the years.

Finally he murmured, "The original reads **Squib!**"

---

Vector was practically hiding behind her desk and literally jumped in her chair when the door creaked slowly open to reveal Luna Lovegood, arriving well beforetime for the dreaded class.

"Good afternoon, Professor Vector," she said sweetly; then her dreamy eyes clouded as she noticed her professor's red-eyed, haggard appearance. "Are you feeling well, Professor? You know, it's the season for ice-licking Horklump allergies," she added, sounding most concerned.

It was worthwhile, putting Luna in the front row, Septima decided. No one else had a chance of making her smile on a day like this. "Nothing like that, Miss Lovegood. I... I'm just worried about how I'm teaching this class. I know it's very important for you to learn this information, but I just don't feel comfortable... talking about... sex," she managed to force out, stomach churning.

"Yes, some people do find it a little embarrassing. But I think you've been doing a good job so far, though some of the boys complained after class that they had trouble hearing you yesterday. You've relayed all the information. After all, it's just another subject, isn't it?"

Granted, this was praise from Luna Lovegood, but it was still heartening. "Why, thank you, Miss Lovegood. But I just don't see how I'm going to get through this. How can people talk about something as... animalistic and messy as mating as if it were just another subject?" she couldn't help asking, a bit plaintively.

Luna tipped her head and looked thoughtful. "Well, harvesting Bubotuber pus is messy, but people manage to talk about it all the time. I suppose sex is a little base at the mechanical level. But wizards and witches aren't animals. Loving the other person sort of elevates the process, doesn't it?"

"No amount of love could make it less awkward," Vector said in a nervous voice, wishing her bangs were a little longer. It would be nice to have something behind which to hide her rapidly warming face during this discussion.

"I guess the first time tends to be uncomfortable. But messes can be cleaned, and I don't know if anyone gets it right on the first try. I always thought that practicing with the one you love until you perfect the process was supposed to be part of the fun," she said innocently.

Vector was startled. "You haven't been...practicing...have you?"

Luna smiled. "Not yet. But it's like anything you might have to learn, isn't it? Read, practice, talk about it, and learn it bit by bit. Once I'm quite sure I have the right wizard, we'll just try things, and if they don't work, I imagine we'll try something else. People have been doing it since there've been people. Not everyone who is good at it is brilliant, so it can't be that difficult to work out."

Professor Vector was sunk so deeply in thought that Luna simply wandered off and sat down, assuming the conversation was over. It wasn't unusual for people to acquire an odd expression and stop responding to her words after a while.

She was therefore rather surprised when the professor's soft voice carried over to her. "Thank you, Miss Lovegood. Those are some very interesting insights. I suppose... it might be easier for someone who isn't brilliant because they don't over-think things or expect to do everything perfectly, right off."

Luna brightened. "Oh, you're welcome, Professor Vector. And if you ever have any trouble with allergies, please let me know. I have just the thing for them."

Vector managed a wan smile. "I'll try to remember that."

---

Immediately after her last class for the day, Hermione cheerfully delved into the book she had been given by Millicent. Some of it was a bit cringe inducing, but she persevered, discovering a myriad of fascinating ideas on what constituted apt sexual behavior for Slytherins. There was a good bit of instruction on what sounded like very advanced kinkiness, indeed; it even hinted at something about the potential utilization of a squid, though she found the wording of that reference odd. However, most of the information seemed devoted to how not to embarrass oneself in one's first sexual encounter. If every Slytherin studied this and mastered it, maybe the rumors about them weren't just idle gossip.

It also strongly emphasized the idea of practice. It was all well and good to have the information in mind during one's first encounter, but actually practicing the maneuvers could ensure success. A little transfiguration would yield the necessary tools, and there were even Charms that would allow her to have feedback on whether she was performing the motions correctly.

Hermione read a little farther then decisively unsheathed her wand. There was just enough time to try the first three basic operations before dinner. Now, for something she could transfigure into the proper shape; maybe that perfume bottle would do...

---

McGonagall was fairly certain the students were about as eager to hear her discuss intercourse, contraception, and masturbation, as she was to have to discuss it. Best to get it over with as quickly as possible. After all, it was just one more subject.

"You know why we're here, ladies and gentlemen. Today's topic is intercourse and related activities. Does anyone need to review anatomy?"

The chorus of 'Nos' was unanimous and particularly emphatic from the male population of the classroom.

"First up, if you're going to have sex in any position, you'd best do it safely. Unless you and your partner are completely monogamous and have both tested clean for the array of sexually transmitted diseases we're going to discuss tomorrow, you will need to use a prophylactic charm. Both parties need to perform it lest some wee nasty bug get through. Contrary to popular belief, it doesn't dull the sensations of intercourse. It can be felt, but it's a matter of personal preference whether that enhances, detracts



from, or is utterly inconsequential to, the act."

Lavender Brown hesitantly wiggled her fingers in the vicinity of her ear. Minerva decided that was probably meant as a raised hand, and responded. "Question, Miss Brown?"

"Um, yes, professor. I can't find where it mentions, uh, sensation in the text," Lavender said, puzzled.

"It's not there," McGonagall answered crisply. "These books cover the basics more than adequately, but I deem it best that you have the most complete information possible."

Must they stare at her so blankly, as if they'd no idea how she could have additional information on the topic? It was quite annoying, really. Did they think teachers took vows of chastity? Or that sexual desire dried up at about age thirty?

Well, she'd be damned if she was going to elaborate on the sources of her practical knowledge. Rolanda was welcome to keep the title of 'most uninhibited Gryffindor of all time.' In a state of indignation, she made them practice both the prophylactic and contraceptive charms until they got them right. By the time intercourse was thoroughly addressed, Minerva was resigned to breezing right through without imparting any additional wisdom.

"All right, we're to masturbation, and we're going to make it quick. For the simple fact that people can and will do it, your text mentions safety issues...but I'd like to emphasize a few points, just in case you were tempted to glide over that bit in your reading.

"Ladies, please heed the admonishments regarding cleanliness, lubrication and safe use of, shall we say, foreign objects. There are shops that sell such things, but any competent witch should be able to Transfigure her own. Just don't go overboard on the size. Despite how wizards brag, none of them is hung like a Hippogriff...and if you've been paying attention in Care of Magical Creatures, you'll know that's for the best.

"Whatever you do, don't use a wand! That is unquestionably one of the places they were never meant to go, and anything with that narrow a circumference probably isn't going to prove very satisfying anyway."

The males had more or less reconciled to the idea of having McGonagall instead of Snape, once she'd put away her pointer. The females were now beginning to wonder if they really had the lesser of the two evils, since rumor had it Snape had blown by this topic so fast as to leave a vapor trail.

"If, despite using caution, you end up with something in a place it ought not be, get to a qualified Healer immediately. Nobody ever died of embarrassment, but a courgette in the plumbing can result in some very serious medical issues, indeed.

"And for goodness' sake, if you fly solo...so to speak...mind what works for you. The chances are excellent that your man won't have a clue how to please you, so you'll have to show him."

That last bit was enough to thoroughly shut up the few snickers from the males. Minerva relied upon decades of teaching experience to suppress a self-satisfied grin.

"Now, gentlemen! It's a bit more straightforward for you, so I'll get right to the point. I'm going to assume you're all familiar with the basic process..."

For an awful instant, the boys were afraid she'd actually go into detail.

"...but some men attempt variations that are best not tried, and just in case any of you lads has heard of them, I need to make certain you don't try to follow through.

"First of all, your text isn't nearly emphatic enough regarding the dangers of devices, magical or otherwise, or suction spells. St. Mungo's has a discreet ward on the Spell Damage floor devoted to the things that can go wrong with a lad's equipment when he uses spells or devices on it. It's especially dangerous to get yourself off by pushing belly-down into the mattress. Nothing makes a penis useless for intercourse faster than shoving it against the bed with the full weight of your body, and it's not a matter of if you'll do yourself an injury, but **when**. You'll be lucky if you can ever please any lass again.

"That being said, the traditional method had one thing to recommend it besides safety...the chance to practice. Your witch will thank you if you use that time behind your bed curtains, with a Silencing Spell, to build up your endurance."

The ladies grew more amused as the gents grew more uncomfortable. All the gents, that is, except Neville. His ears had gone pink, but he was still taking notes.

Her perfunctory 'Are there any questions?' was supposed to have been rhetorical; however, Longbottom was in the class.

"Professor?" he managed to ask timidly, raising his head scarcely higher than Miss Brown had.

There were a few unkind folks who sniggered into their books. Most of the class, however, simply felt a lurch of sympathetic embarrassment in their guts and braced themselves for the dropping of poor Neville's latest clanger.

Professor McGonagall almost deliberately passed him by. She really thought it would be a kindness, not to allow the lad to embarrass himself. Still... if he had a question, he had the right to an answer. Were Gryffindor courage defined as persevering despite all the evidence indicating you hadn't a Horklump's chance at a Gnome convention, Longbottom should get the title of the bravest lion of the lot.

"Yes, Mr. Longbottom?" she finally responded. It was with tremendous self-control that she refrained from sighing.

"I...um, it's all very well to have so much information on, um, sex. But it doesn't much help one get to that point, does it?"

*It's worse than I thought, Minerva reflected despairingly. How do I break it to him gently that this course is not 'advice for the lovelorn?'*

Neville was oblivious to McGonagall's internal dilemma as he forged ahead. "After all, what if a chap's met the most wonderful witch, and now would like to know if he's got a chance at being more than just friends? She's as beautiful, intelligent, kind, and interesting as he could ever hope for. They've got common interests and have spent a bit of time together, getting on pretty well. How does this, ah, fellow we're talking about let on how incredibly special she really is?"

Neville was fairly used to being stared at, but this wasn't anything like the usual stare. The males were incredulous. The females all had a sort of half-surprised, half-misty look that he would have found puzzling, had he eyes for any feminine face in the classroom except one. He was pleased to note that one was favoring him with a most encouraging little sideways smile.

This time, Minerva did allow herself a sigh...of relief. "Mr. Longbottom, if you tell her anything resembling what you just said, I imagine she'll catch on. And no doubt be favorably impressed, as well." Before Neville could think of anything else remotely related to the topic, she hastily dismissed the class.

Evidently the ladies had been taking note as well. As McGonagall dismissed the class, there were a good few witches wondering whom, exactly, the closet romantic had wanted to impress. After all, he certainly hadn't been talking about a theoretical girl. Come to think of it, that Order of Merlin wasn't just awarded as a courtesy, and he wasn't half bad to look at with the baby fat gone. To their dismay, he made a beeline for Padma Patil before anyone could maneuver for a word. When she smiled at him, he was stuck grinning rather foolishly back for long moments before remembering what he'd meant to say.

"Padma, I've been working on a project for my Herbology N.E.W.T. It's a new gnome-resistant hybrid of the Northern Stellar Orchid, and it's particularly fragrant in the starlight. Would you like to see it this evening after dinner?"

Padma's smile suddenly faded. "I'd love to, Neville, but I really need to practice for a quiz of Professor Flitwick's. It's one of my last chances to have a thorough go-through

on some of the material that's bound to appear on the N.E.W.T. Maybe tomorrow evening?"

Now Neville's face fell. "Bother. I promised Professor Sprout I'd help her with the sun-racing Heliocanthus seeds in their temperature-controlled frame tomorrow evening. Could we study for the Charms Quiz together? I have the same class, you know."

Padma brightened again. "Of course! And we could always visit your orchid Friday night...couldn't we?"

With the last iota of awareness that was remotely connected to his power of speech, Neville managed to reply with some form of affirmative. The rest of his mind was floating somewhere high above the castle, singing 'Padma asked me out!' Granted, he had suggested the orchid first... but she had moved it to Friday night, which officially made it a *date*.

Dean shook his head as he watched them go off arm in arm. "Who could have guessed... Neville as Prince Charming?"

Betony Magallanes clutched her books to her Hufflepuff tie and sighed. "Evidently, Padma did. And she wasn't sorted into Ravenclaw for nothing."

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Albus Dumbledore may have been done fighting wars, but he would never stop being a general.

He had attacked the puzzle of the arithmatically complex spell and come up with some intriguing implications. One of his own was connected, but there was no evidence of direct involvement. He had used contacts to make discrete inquiries, discovering extensive Owl Post activity and possible interruption of messages to the school in the recent past. He had even gone so far as to do something he had never planned to do again...he had called upon the talents of his spy.

It was the General's Dilemma: he had information, but not enough for comfort. He had excellent people under his command, but even the best people make mistakes. The decision came down to him, and responsibility for the consequences of his decision would follow.

That was how he measured his age...not in years, but in how long it took him to make decisions. And judging by the trouble he was having with this one, his last birthday had been the milestone year of 'too damn old for *this*.'

Albus decided to let things run their course. He had seen enough of Dark magic to know nothing of that sort was at work here, not even its distant cousin. His instincts told him that there was deception involved, but without malice. The classes had the potential to do some good; there was no point in stopping the last class, nor the exam Friday, as it did nothing to impact the student's marks. His people had proved themselves time and again; he would see that they had all necessary material for their expedition and trust that they would sort it all in a responsible manner.

And should things go badly, there was always his spy... in place and ready to prevent any bad situations from getting worse.

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#### **Author's Notes:**

Taweret: Ancient Egyptian goddess of childbirth, invoked to promote a safe pregnancy and delivery. She was a monstrous composite of hippopotamus, crocodile, and pregnant woman in a long, black wig. She's the first thing I think of when anyone mentions Millicent Bulstrode. There are many ways of spelling her name; I picked my favorite (one that looks easy to pronounce).

Courgette: In Italy or America, a zucchini. Do you think Sprout is going to have to ward that particular greenhouse?

Thank you to MSN's Sexploration Column (by Brian Alexander) for the idea for the 'discrete ward' Minerva mentioned in her cautions against unsafe soloing. Turning to medical (and occasionally criminal) reports, he recounted numerous cringe-inducing incidents of males and females doing some really awful things to themselves in the interest of self-pleasuring.

## **5: I Am My Beloved's, and My Beloved is... What Exactly ARE You?**

*Chapter 6 of 9*

Wherein we learn what happens when a boy meets a girl... or a boy... or a boy who can be a girl... hmm. Oh, and Cushioning Charms are REALLY important.

Disclaimer: I do not profit from the use of these characters. Nor do I have to deal with random people walking up to me and telling me what to do with them, so it sort of evens out. At least, that's what I keep telling myself.

Please see the **WARNING!** at the beginning of the Prologue. Neither dracontia nor The Petulant Poetess is responsible for hospitalization due to aspirated snack foods.

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### Chapter 5: I Am My Beloved's, and My Beloved is...What Exactly ARE You?

Rolanda Hooch may have been the one professor in the school genuinely enjoying this peculiar interlude of Sexual Education. To be sure, some were handling it with greater aplomb than others; Sprout had soldiered through the irrepressible fifth years admirably, and Pomfrey was happy about the program on general health principles. Quill didn't count; she only had third year girls to deal with and was chuffed to the frames of her reading glasses at the chance to work recruiting tactics into the exercise.

But Rolanda was having a ball, and so were the sixth years lucky enough to have been assigned to her. Speaking frankly on the subject suited her nature; she lived exuberantly, and had few inhibitions. The last day of the class would be a bit more serious than it had been up to this point, however. There was nothing entertaining about sexually transmitted diseases and various forms of dysfunction. However, she planned on redeeming the heavy subject matter with one of her personal favorite topics...non-standard sexual behavior.

"Okay, kiddies, you know where all the pipes are located and how the plumbing works. And we all know what it's for, right?" she asked, winking.

The class giggled, but it was more conspiratorial than embarrassed. Everyone felt comfortable with Hooch by now, male and female. She was banking on that comfort to get today's lesson across.

"But, I'm afraid it's not all fun and games down there...not that birth is something to take lightly, mind you, but it's a natural and healthy process, despite the risks. No, today we're going to address the weeds in the Garden of Eden, some of the nasty little things that have decided to make a living by hitching a ride on your equipment. There are all sorts of diseases from both the Muggle and Wizarding worlds that you need to watch out for. Decent prophylactic charms will block them, but you have to remember to cast them properly and renew them after a few hours...if you're lucky!"

The requisite laugh out of the way, she forged ahead.

"Now, I know we've had fun with this class, but I'm going to be quite serious here for a moment. If any of you has had sex without the proper charms in place, or if you're afraid you cast one incorrectly, please see Madam Pomfrey as quickly as possible. Some of these ailments are just a right nuisance, but some can be lethal. Most can be treated or cured if caught early, but not all of them."

Hooch's class fell unusually quiet, and she knew she had their undivided attention. Time to drive the point home. "I know you've probably heard the myth that wizards can't contract Muggle ailments. It's actually the other way around: most diseases specific to wizards needed magic to feed upon and simply couldn't survive in a Muggle body. It's true that simply being magical will protect us against most Muggle parasites and slow the progression of bacterial infections enough that they can be easily treated. But viruses are only affected by Charms or Potions specifically designed to kill them or block their transmission."

No, there was nothing funny about STDs, either Muggle or Magical. Well, Priapic Pox was a little amusing, seeing as how its only major symptom was frequent, inappropriate erections; but that was more than countered by such maladies as Severing Scales, a parasite that made intercourse painful and could cause infertility and serious infection if untreated.

"The one exception to the rule of crossing the magical divide is a disease that Muggles have identified as a culture-specific form of mental illness: Koro. It was a type of infectious curse developed by Chinese wizards trying to prevent Muggle men from courting witches and generates the illusion that a man's genitals are receding into his lower abdomen. It is so specifically engineered that it only affects men with some Chinese ancestry. All further development of the disease has been banned by international statute, but it periodically re-evolves in Squibs, generating new outbreaks. There have been reports of it mutating into a form that can affect wizards, so there is the chance that it might spread to other ethnic groups. Remember your charms and be aware of the symptoms...just in case."

She skimmed over sexual dysfunction (depressing topic, but it didn't hurt for them to be aware of the possibilities) and prepared to dismiss the class on a lighter note.

"Okay, kiddies, on to the fun stuff! Now, I know most of you boys are looking at the mention of a bloke with another bloke and rolling your eyes, and...don't try to deny it...you read about two witches together and wondered if you could convince your girlfriend to give it a whirl. And I can see all the girls are looking around to see which of their men got caught agreeing with what I just said."

*Very good. The hilarity level is back up to par,* Hooch thought with satisfaction.

"Your texts lay down the basics adequately, so you shouldn't be too shocked at anyone or anything you might come across. I do want you to know that if any of you leans that way or is just curious, don't be embarrassed to talk to someone about it! You'd be surprised how many wizards and witches, including some of your professors, do some mighty odd things for fun."

A series of nervous titters ran through the class. Ginny decided to be especially cheeky and asked, "Really, Madam Hooch? Care to give us any hints as to who...and what?"

"Now, I don't know for certain about my colleagues, so I'll not repeat rumors," Hooch said admonishingly. "As for me, well, have you read the section on Veneramorphagy?"

She expected the confused looks; even if they had read the brief blurb in the text on that topic, they'd be none the wiser as to what it actually meant.

"You've heard of Metamorphmagi, haven't you?" Nods and smiles told her they were back in recognized territory.

"Well, this is a slightly more common variation, though there aren't any hard numbers on how many can make the switch. Most people aren't aware the ability exists, even if they have it. Put simply, it means you can change your sex organs at will, one fully functioning set for another. The rest of your body, including your face, stays pretty much the same. If you're going from male to female, you gain breasts, though nothing too large; the other way, they flatten out."

A few giggles got started, and soon the entire class was consumed with laughter. Obviously, Hooch was having them on.

"Don't believe me? Then watch," she said smugly. Her face took on an expression of deep concentration.

"What's wrong, my dears? Is there a Snitch loose that you think you can catch with your mouths?" she...or, more accurately...teased. The face had changed only minutely, the voice ever so slightly more so, the silhouette just subtly altered; but the person they were looking at, while still Hooch, was undoubtedly no longer 'Madam.'

"I was born Roland," she said, laughing as she unbuttoned her blouse to display a flat, more or less masculine chest with even a hint of hair. "But over the years, I came to prefer Rolanda." She buttoned up and switched back, the blouse filling out again and her voice and expression reverting to the female flying instructor with whom they were acquainted.

Hooch knew it was a gamble; there was a good chance at least some of them would regard her as a freak. Merlin knows Severus had literally taken years to get over finding out the truth. (Okay, she probably shouldn't have gotten tipsy at that Yule party the first year he was teaching and propositioned him...in both of her forms...but it's not as if anything had actually happened before that point. And he made it clear nothing was going to happen, ever.)

But if any one of her students, in any year, had questions about their sexuality, she wanted them to know that they could talk to her. She could definitely relate. It would be a shame for any of them to go through life as confused as she had been at first or end up a terrified virgin in their thirties, like poor Septima plainly was.

"My only regret," she said solemnly, "is that the rules of Quidditch are such that I can never try out for the Harpies." Then she cracked a huge grin.

Finally, the students began breathing normally again, as if they'd had a bit of a scare for a moment, but found out everything was going to be all right after all. This was still the Madam Hooch they knew and were amused by. Come to think of it, her condition wasn't the weirdest thing the Wizarding world had to offer.

"I'll just briefly mention the existence of various more unusual ways people get turned on..."

It really was quite funny that some of the class actually dared make noises of disappointment at that. But she wasn't here to encourage kinkiness or fetishes, just reassure her students that all was not lost if it interested them.

"And finally, your text doesn't have much to say about sex outside one's species. Frankly, I don't have much to say about it, either...it's one of the few things I haven't tried," she admitted mischievously.

"But what it does have to say is pretty much spot on. Don't try to chat up anything that thinks of itself as a 'Creature' rather than a being, or anything that can't chat back...I'm not talking about language barriers, but lack of ability to speak!" she clarified. "Even Animagi won't 'go native' to that extent.

"Now that being said, there are beings out there who can and do...occasionally...make a go of a romance with our kind. It's rare for things to work out between a wizard and a goblin, Veela, or giant; but it's been known to be worthwhile." She didn't need to reference teachers, some former and some current, who were examples. Everyone was nodding in the appropriate places.

"Oh, and if you've heard things about the squid... Let's just say I have it on good authority that all such rumors are **amisprint**."

After wrapping up with that cryptic remark, Rolanda dismissed the class feeling fairly lighthearted. Judging from their reactions, they would report her to their friends more as a curiosity than a freak. It was a distinction she'd learned to value. It would probably behoove her to keep to her office hours for the next few weeks. Someone was bound to want to discuss such things away from the ears of their classmates. She could respect that...very few people were as uninhibited on the topic as she was.

What she didn't expect was for Ginny Weasley to slip back into the classroom just before the door closed behind the last student to exit.

"Madam Hooch?" she asked hesitantly.

"Forget something, Miss Weasley?" she asked, a little surprised. She hadn't pegged the 'girl who was almost surgically attached to the boy who kicked arse' as someone who might question her sexuality. But of course, you never can tell.

"No... I was just wondering...how can you tell if you can make the switch?"

"There's a spell that detects the predisposition...a fairly simple one. But even someone with the natural capability has to learn how to use it properly. Do you want to test yourself?"

Ginny nodded. She didn't quite trust her voice just then.

Patently, Madam Hooch demonstrated the spell, explaining the significance of the colored ball of light that resulted. Ginny imitated her.

"Did I do the spell correctly? Mine came up a different color," she said, frowning.

"You got it right. This just means that you don't have the ability to make the switch. I hope you aren't too disappointed," Hooch said gently.

"No... I was more curious than anything else. If someone did have the predisposition though, how would they learn to make the transformation?"

"As with any magic of that sort, you would need to be taught. There are a few books that mention the process, but it's safer to be trained by someone who has the ability. I've been able to do it for most of my adult life, so I could easily train an aspiring Veneramorphmagus in as little as a week of lessons, if he or she took to it."

"Well, thanks, Madam Hooch. If I ever hear of anyone who's interested, could I recommend you as an instructor?"

"Of course," Rolanda replied, trying not to look at Ginny oddly. The redhead smiled a little nervously, thanked her again, and hurried out.

"Well," Hooch remarked to the empty room, "*that* was interesting."

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Ginny Weasley was doing some hard thinking.

She remembered her first few days at Hogwarts...how odd it was to share a room with a lot of other girls when she was used to being up to her neck in brothers. Girls were strange; so like her, yet so alien. She had female friends, but always felt most comfortable around the boys. Playing Quidditch and roughhousing came much more naturally to her than comparing notes on hairstyles, the latest fashions in *Witch Weekly*, or even which guys had the best bodies.

It would have been easier to dismiss if she found boys (in general) especially arousing, but aside from Harry...whom she adored...boys were more or less just the acceptable option, and she had pursued them because they fell within her comfort zone and because it was the thing to do. She couldn't honestly say she'd ever been truly aroused at the sight of one of her dorm mates. But, being honest, she also had to say she found a certain aesthetic quality to the shape of fellow females. Touching herself was interesting, to say nothing of pleasurable. Would it be as interesting to touch another set of soft, feminine curves?

It wasn't enough of a yearning that would move her to leave Harry by the wayside, not by a long chalk. He was her true love without question. But there was no denying that she'd been tempted (more than once) to ask him if there was any truth to the rumor that men fantasized about seeing two women together; if she'd had a specific woman in mind, she might have gone through with the question.

Now that Ginny was aware of this new wrinkle in the world of gender relations, she had the fleeting idea of Harry as a girl. The idea was undeniably intriguing.

She was going to have to have a talk with Harry this Friday after the test.

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Snape was at the top of his form as he surveyed the sea of variously sullen, cowed, and studiously blank faces before him. He considered it a shame that the syllabus taught prophylactic charms *before* the accounts of sexually transmitted diseases. Perhaps it would have inspired the hormonal beasts to practice them more thoroughly had it been the other way around...after all, they certainly seemed quite motivated to get the contraceptive charms right after hearing about pregnancy and childbirth.

It was a good thing, too; contraceptive potions were only as good as the brewer, and if these dunderheads obtained indifferent commercial preparations or had to rely on their own lack of skill in that regard, their substandard progeny would be hopelessly clogging his classroom sooner rather than later.

Of course, the bright ones would take precautions, thus reducing the chances he'd have many decent students to look forward to. Granger could probably brew a perfect contraceptive potion in her sleep. This was an unaccountably disappointing thought. Granted, it would spare him having to look at generations of fluffy-haired, arm-waving mini-know-it-alls, but it didn't bode well for the long nights of marking essays. Saving hers for last was one of his sanity-preserving tactics, the equivalent of an exquisite dessert following page after page of gruel on parchment.

After running through that set of musings, Snape felt particularly vindictive. Since this was not unusual for him, he didn't bother to examine why. He simply proceeded to squick the living snot out of the little snots.

The lesson seemed to grind on with nary a question asked, making the Slytherin girls increasingly concerned that they had been double-crossed. Millicent was seething and planning retaliation (not to mention retrieving her book) when the magic hand went up.

*Damn!* Snape thought fiercely. *And with this segment almost out of the way.* When ignoring the raised hand failed to dissuade her, he finally favored her with a look of exquisite contempt.

"Question, Miss Granger?" he purred dangerously. "Or has your arm at long last become stuck that way?"

She gave a slight, innocent smile, which unaccountably set off a host of alarm bells for him. "Sir, I noticed that the pictures in our texts don't distinguish well between harmless conditions, such as Fordyce's spots, and potentially harmful genital warts. Are there more reliable indicators for evaluating the health of one's potential partner?"

Miss Granger was trying to get at something with such a deceptively innocuous question, Snape decided. If only he could put his finger on it...

"The only reliable way of avoiding these disgusting little maladies altogether is to keep your knees together," he said dryly. "But since that advice is unlikely to penetrate the collective thickness of most skulls in this classroom, the best course of action is to have intercourse only with someone whose health you are absolutely certain of, through independent means such as appropriate medical tests. And for Merlin's sake, don't neglect prophylactic charms."

Millicent raised her hand, grinning inwardly. Granger had opened the door wide enough for two Abraxans abreast. Perhaps Gryffindors were useful, after all.

*Shite. Not Bulstrode as well. Was Granger contagious?* Snape wondered irritably.

"If perfectly healthy looking people may have all sorts of nasty pox, just think what a filthy little drab from Knockturn Alley could pass along. Why are such potential sources of disease allowed to ply their trade so openly?" she asked pointedly. True, it was rather a social issue than otherwise, but they were talking about social diseases...

"If you have a relevant question, ask it, Miss Bulstrode. I do not think we need a lecture on the detrimental aspects of dealing with prostitutes...the mere idea of paying for a sexual partner should suffice to dissuade any self-respecting male from that particular pursuit," he said with his most disdainful sneer...causing Miss Bulstrode to think that perhaps the professor protested too much.

The Slytherin females were not dissuaded. They suddenly seemed to have a surfeit of detailed inquiries to make about sexual disease and dysfunction. Since when had the Little Green Book not provided all a Slytherin could want to know? Never mind he himself had read outside that classic.

The Slytherins were managing, but Hermione thought it looked as if they could use a slight boost. She had agreed to seed the field with a couple of questions, after all. "Speaking of forms of dysfunction, I'd like to bring up..."

"Miss Granger, I do hope this isn't a lament on your boyfriend's failure to perform adequately. That would be a topic best left between him and his Healer. Neither are we interested in any concerns you might have about frigidity," Snape drawled softly. Oh, how she would pay for making him suffer through all four days of this topic... and it would start now.

*Okay, it's gloves off now, Snape* Hermione thought furiously, though she managed to control her reaction to no more than a narrow, nastily sweet smile that eerily echoed her own expression. "I think that the gentlemen in this class should be aware, in particular, of pudendal nerve entrapment. It's scarcely mentioned in the text for this class, but I've read that it can be caused by any sort of persistent, excessive pressure applied between the legs. Muggles sometimes suffer such damage from narrow, hard bicycle seats. But wouldn't a broom handle be even more hazardous to the perineum, and therefore, broom riding more likely to result in loss of sensation in the penis, pain in the entire region, and even *impotence?*" she pronounced the last delicately and deliberately.

The Slytherin girls were exercising all their cunning to maintain poker faces. Indeed, it was with utmost effort that they refrained from rising from their seats as one and making this 'hug a bushy-haired Gryffindor Day.'

"That's what cushioning charms are for, you impossible, book-regurgitating know-it-all," Snape's volume never rose, but his voice was a terrifying rumble by the end of his response. There was no way anyone in the class had failed to hear him; however, the looks on several faces said plainly that the popularity of Quidditch at Hogwarts was going to plummet like a dropped troll, at least for the immediate future.

*Do NOT Crucio the Granger chit... Do NOT Crucio the Granger chit... It doesn't matter that she is plainly possessed by the evil shade of Bella Lestrage... You've gone this many years without using an Unforgivable on a student, don't drop the Quaffle now...*

"What about Animagi? Does it constitute bestiality if they have sex while in their animal form?" Pansy burst in, carried away by the general tide of questions.

Millicent decided she would have to murder Pansy at some point in the near future, or at least cause her significant pain. That was an idiotic question unworthy of a Slytherin, and they hadn't quite gotten to the section on deviations yet. The stupid cow was going to give away the game, all the more because a few other idiots were unable to resist flinching slightly at the gaffe.

Snape decided point loss and detention were rather lost on a dunderhead of this magnitude. It would be best to simply fix her with his most evil glare until it penetrated even her thick head that she had been a bad little Slytherin and her Professor was very, very displeased...which was NOT a good thing. A pity Granger *wasn't* contagious; she might have been able to infect Parkinson with a modicum of intelligence. He quietly intimidated his way forward.

Meanwhile, Bulstrode scrawled, 'Ask another question or I want that book back!' in large, insistent letters on a scrap of parchment and subtly tilted it in Granger's direction. The Gryffindor gave no outward acknowledgement of having noticed, but soon raised her hand again.

*Too bad Granger's Muggle-born, Millicent thought. Slytherin could use a few more brains with some grasp of subtlety. Merlin knows, you could blow out a candle in Parkinson's left ear and get smoke from the right.*

"I'm curious as to why fetishes and minor 'kinks' are grouped with abnormal and deviant behavior. I would tend to think that, so long as no one is harmed in the performance of the acts, they are really..."

"Whom, precisely, are you trying to impress with your encyclopedic knowledge of sexual trivia?" he interrupted, his voice raw, raspy, and dangerous. Aghast did not even begin to do justice to his reaction to the question.

### ***DO NOT Crucio the Granger chit...***

Her lips parted slightly, and he hastily interrupted lest it be the prelude to a reply rather than an expression of shock. "If you wish to discuss deviant behavior, so be it! I want no less than three feet on the subject by precisely six AM Saturday morning...and you shall come to my office and read it aloud. I do not care to strain my eyes staring at your minuscule script. It's like watching so many over-educated ants creeping across the parchment. Class dismissed."

It was ten minutes before the end of class, and there was still a modicum of material that technically ought to have been covered. The students were petrified with amazement.

"I said you are dismissed," Snape hissed in his best creature of the night voice. The rush to the door threatened to result in trampling incidents. All other evidence to the contrary aside, the old vampire rumors suddenly popped into everyone's mind just then. With that look on his face, no one cared to find out when the professor had eaten last.

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Harry walked out of the final day of Professor McGonagall's Reproductive Health class. He should have felt relieved, but he didn't.

The exam to come tomorrow didn't bother him. It had no bearing on his marks, and he felt quite sure he could pass it handily. The material wasn't that disturbing, though he could have done without McGonagall's method of teaching it, especially that first day. He'd seen more disgusting things in the Potions classroom, and more disturbing things just about every term of his student career at Hogwarts.

No, it was his reaction to the topic that worried him...particularly the reaction to the lesson he'd just left.

The information on Sexually Transmitted Diseases didn't bother him. He and Ginny had observed appropriate precautions. Although he was a little taken aback at the number of fellow students who started looking nervous...if not panicked...during that part of the lecture.

He'd been fully prepared to roll his eyes derisively at the mention of homosexuality, and perhaps pass a note with a few Lockhart jokes to Dean, who was sitting next to him. Anything more ostentatious than that would be childish. Anything less wouldn't be manly enough. This would have worked, except that the lesson...unlike the student text...came with pictures.

They weren't nearly as detailed as the images accompanying the anatomy and physiology portions of the lesson, nor even so much so as the bit on birth. It was just a bit of artwork, really...a charming drawing of two delightfully underdressed witches whispering in each other's ears, and one other...the one that left him so distracted that he couldn't concentrate on the rest of the class.

It was just a very non-explicit drawing of two young men, unclothed. It was nothing that couldn't be seen in the locker after Quidditch, except for the looks they were

exchanging. It wouldn't, shouldn't, have bothered him, except for one thing...something about the slender waist and hips, the mischievous smile, the smooth back of the one fellow, reminded him of Ginny. He realized that the witch he loved, with the exception of her pretty face and quite lovely breasts, had a very boyish figure.

This left him intermittently distracted for the rest of the class. It hardly mattered for the purpose of the exam; Professor McGonagall had stuck to the book, and he'd done his reading. He was free to reflect on his feelings, and not like how they were shaping up.

Cho had had a rather boyish figure as well, he thought worriedly. The fact that he'd never been attracted to any of his dorm mates placated him for a while, but then the nagging idea came that he felt rather brotherly towards all of them. What about males for whom he didn't have protective, brotherly feelings? It was tempting just to try to put the subject out of his mind, but he wasn't going to be a coward about this, even if no one else ever knew.

Analyzing it closely, he didn't seem to find specific feminine or masculine forms inherently enticing; what appealed to him was a more general type...slender, athletic, strong, yet still someone he could dominate. He wasn't interested in hurting anyone, but the idea of being the one in charge was undeniably exciting. He imagined a male face giving him the soft-lipped, vulnerable gaze Ginny occasionally favored him with in their most intimate moments, and couldn't ignore the tingle of curiosity. He wanted to see that look on a male. He wanted to be the one to put it there. He adored Ginny, and couldn't imagine feeling that way about anyone else. Still, he wanted to know if the rush of power would happen in real life, or if it only existed in his imagination.

Harry hurried to his next class, swearing under his breath. He was quite certain he wasn't exclusively homosexual, but there was no denying that curiosity. Bloody hell. Would it go away? Probably not, as long as he had frequent looks at Ginny's slim backside. Could he keep it dark and never act on it? Probably. But that would mean being dishonest with Ginny, and he could never do that to her.

There was nothing for it. This Friday after the exam, they would have to have a talk.

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Hermione wasn't best pleased with the detention, but she was pretty certain Millicent Bulstrode was going to be a sort of odd ally from now on. And she would get to keep that fascinating little green book, which was quite the addictive read...more so once you started practicing the lessons. The foremost topic on her mind now was why Snape had reacted so intensely and abruptly to the topic of minor sexual deviations. Everything else he had deflected with accustomed levels of insult and sarcasm. She must have hit a nerve there. Maybe the book would offer some insights.

There was one section in particular which intrigued her...a potion that could be used for detecting deviations, fetishes, and kinks in one's sexual partner. It was a bit complex to assemble, but only needed to brew for two nights. Nor were the ingredients rare except for the rather significant amount of unicorn hair. Luckily, there was still quite a bit of it in Hagrid's former abode. She could complete it and use it during her scheduled detention on Saturday morning to figure out just exactly what had made Professor Snape so uncomfortable when the subject came up.

It shouldn't be a problem to make the potion, and write the three feet on deviant behavior she was supposed to be embarrassed to read to him, within the available time. She had to admit, it would be a bit embarrassing, but she had managed to ask all those questions in class, so reading some fairly disturbing stuff with only the professor for an audience should be manageable.

One thing bothered her slightly. The redaction did not specify the exact manner in which the potion worked. All it said was that taking it would cause the drinker to know exactly what it was that aroused his or her partner and stressed the necessity of drinking it just before the planned encounter. Maybe it caused you to be able to perform a sort of Legilimency. That could prove awkward; he'd probably deflect the attempt, leaving him more irate that ever.

Hmm. How much, exactly, did she want to know what made Snape tick?

Well, nothing ventured, nothing gained...

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"Were the children still giving you grief?" Minerva asked surreptitiously at dinner that night. She'd have thought Severus would be in a better mood, now that it was all over but the testing. And of course, the revenge.

Snape snorted. Not only were all the students in question of age, but the past few days indicated their last vestiges of childishness were probably limited to a puerile sense of humor. "Not they... she. Miss Granger, the Gryffindor part-Fwooper. If she carries this behavior over into Potions, I may have to put a Silencing Charm on her before I go mad."

"Whatever could she have been on about that was so much trouble?" Pomona wondered aloud.

"What *wasn't* she going on about?" he grumbled, refusing to elaborate. The sooner he managed to forget yesterday's session, the sooner he'd be able to bring himself to ride a broom again. With extra cushioning charms.

Snape didn't need the hint to be dropped on him from great height. Even without Parkinson practically taking out an advert to announce it, he would have worked it out. He knew a conspiracy when he saw it, and it looked as if his Slytherins had not only turned against him, but had apparently gone so far as to recruit a Gryffindor as a weapon. They'd pay for this, and pay dearly.

He would have to ascertain Miss Granger's exact role. Normally he would have made her punishment public, but the weekend detention would allow him to interrogate her at his leisure. It seemed unlikely that she could have been coerced. The Umbridge episode suggested she wasn't the sort to roll over in the face of intimidation. Perhaps she had a friend in his house, though that didn't seem terribly plausible, either...

For tonight, he would deal with the ladies of Slytherin in a more general manner. He knew their little tricks for sneaking into the boys' dorm, or making private space in the common room. (Merlin knows, he'd had to listen to enough of his more careless...or exhibitionist...classmates' noisy liaisons in his student days.) Well, there were ways to prevent that, though he usually never bothered. As Head of House, he could lock down their living space so tightly there was no way the libidinous little traitors could do more than troop from their beds to the loo and back, from after dinner until breakfast the next day. Once Miss Granger had yielded the necessary details, he could tailor more suitable punitive measures.

In Slytherin, if the Head of House ain't happy, ain't **nobody** happy.

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With all the children (theoretically) in their beds and the work week over, the professors met in Kent Foote's office to go over last-minute details of their plan to track down the perpetrators of this disaster. Minerva was not pleased, for two reasons...the evident distraction of the troops, and the apparent lack of actual secrecy.

Not that she had really expected to keep this from Albus for any length of time, but it was a little distracting to find a note on Kent's desk reading,

*My Dear Minerva (and co-conspirators):*

*There are invisibility cloaks and a Ministry map in the package on the filing cabinet. Don't worry, your rounds are covered for the weekend, but please return to school grounds before noon on Saturday or your alibis will not hold up. Oh, and do refrain from getting arrested.*

*Yours,*

*Albus*

"Bloody old coot knows everything," she grumbled. "Kent, what on earth are you wearing?"

"My favorite Hawaiian shirt," he said proudly, turning to model it. "I was lucky to find several different patterns in Hufflepuff colors."

Minerva privately thought it was bad luck, at least for anyone looking at him. "Is that your clothing model over there?" she asked, indicating a strange, roughly human-shaped, greenish figure with an angular head, dressed in another of his shirts.

"No, that's a representation of a Muggle entertainer of some sort... 'Gummy,' I think they call him. It's a gift from one of my students. Severus! You've stepped on him!"

Sure enough, air was slowly leaking out a tear in the green figure's foot. "Sorry, I'll put him to rights," he said, hastily managing the rip with a passable *Reparo* and thinking hard as to how to restore the thing's original state of inflation. Right, almost got it...

"Two flicks to the right," Filius whispered discreetly to Severus when his first attempt failed to prop up the sagging figure.

"I know, I know," he murmured back irritably.

Filius shook his head. Severus was one of the best duelists he'd ever taught, but when it came to Charms, the boy had a devil of a time managing his wand.

"Severus, quit fanning about with that Muggle toy and get over here," Minerva snapped.

He glowered at her, but his voice remained elegant as ever. "No need to get your knickers in a knot, Minerva," he said delicately. "We're starting with Kent's cousin, one of the junior members of the Board of Governors, and he won't be home for another half hour."

"What, exactly, am I supposed to ask him again?" Kent queried nervously.

"Start up a pleasant chat, have him let his guard down, and then find out which parents instigated the inquiry, and which members of the Board approved the plan," Minerva reminded him impatiently. "One of us will be with you, to prompt you if you have problems."

As Minerva continued the briefing, Severus studied the troops. He didn't like the way Charlie was getting worked up about this. He'd definitely remind Minerva to station the lad outside as a lookout. And it might be best to check Quill for books and scrolls before embarking...it wouldn't do to have her reading and walking through the Ministry, periodically bumping into statues and apologizing. Though he had to admit, the Ancient Runes professor had an alert look tonight that she normally reserved for pieces of parchment.

"Right, then...we've got the cloaks, if necessary, and the map. The bottle, Professor Foote?"

Kent handed over the bottle of Firewhisky with which they would pledge their intention to stick together until they'd learned the identities of their tormentors, and everyone was safely home again. They agreed to leave any references to revenge out of this evening's magically binding contract; circumstances might require that they mete out punishment over a period of time, or on a more opportune night. Minerva Transfigured an appropriate number of glasses, and Aurora poured solemnly until the entire contents of the bottle were evenly divided.

"To the truth," Minerva said, and everyone resolutely chugged their share...though Filius, accustomed to much milder intoxicants, had to be steadied by Septima and Clara all the way to the gates and was cheerfully calling them, 'my lovely little ravens' by the time they were in position to Apparate. Quill graciously took him Side-Along, since they were afraid he might not make it otherwise.

"I told you we needed to wait until the mission was over to start drinking," Severus needed Minerva.

Minerva's judgment in such matters wasn't entirely off. She did manage to realize it would be best to wait until after they'd done all they'd set out to do before giving in to the temptation to Transfigure Severus into a bat for that remark.

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#### **Author's Notes:**

The information on Koro (barring the bit I made up about it being a wizarding ailment) is from my numerous psychology classes, which not only gave me wonderful insights into human behavior, but helped me to realize that being a psychologist would actually constitute occupying the wrong end of the microscope.

The information on nerve problems from chronic pressure such as might be caused by hard, narrow seats (or surgery, or sometimes pregnancy...yes, women have to worry about this too, which Hermione conveniently overlooked in her desire to use the word 'impotence') hails from the Wikipedia, and just goes to show how important those Cushioning Charms are.

Hooch's ability is balderdash I invented.

## **6: Vengeance is Ours, Saith the Professors**

### *Chapter 7 of 9*

The good news? It looks like all the information about safe sex is sinking in. The bad news? Some students are using it as a jumping off point for advanced studies. Of course, that's not bad news for you--unless you DON'T like a dash of erotica with your comedy.

Oh, and herein lies the Big Reveal! Who inflicted this curse upon Hogwarts, and why?

Disclaimer: Please, don't sue me; I'm probably going to be punished for all eternity on account of my misappropriation of Bible quotes. Isn't that enough for you?

See the Prologue for food and drink warnings! Oh, and Ginny says a very naughty word in this chapter. Don't tell Molly.

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#### Chapter 6: Vengeance is Ours, Saith the Professors

Charlie Weasley decided that covert operations were not necessarily the high drama they were reputed to be. They certainly weren't thrilling in the absence of a dragon of some description. After what amounted to two and a half hours of socializing, the professors were now grouped in the Atrium at the Ministry of Magic, checking the map for the most discreet route to the Education department and grumbling about the lack of blame so far encountered.

Kent's cousin Archibald had been cheerful, gracious, and chatty as an expiring Jobberknoll. He had revealed with almost no prompting the names of every parent who had complained, the substance of their complaints, and even presented an example of the letter apparently owed from the school. He also revealed that all the Governors had done in the matter was to approve a mitigation plan brought to them by a Ministry representative, thus making it rather pointless to go after any members of the board. After all, as Archie cheerfully stated (at least five times by Kent's count), "All we had to do was stamp it 'approved' and ship it over! If it was good enough for the Ministry, and so on, you know!"

This illustrated the problem with dear Cousin Archie...trying to get him to stop talking. Aurora, shifting boredly under the invisibility cloak behind Kent's chair, had nothing to do but hold up the extendable ear Charlie was using to listen to the conversation and relay it to Minerva. Deciding this could take all night and they could always retrieve Foote and Sinistra later if necessary, she sent Sprout and Flitwick after the two families who appeared to be most upset by their children's indiscretions.

By the time Kent located the equivalent of an 'off' switch for his loquacious cousin, Pomona and Filius had come back from their respective missions. Miss Bones' and Mr. Boot's families had been slightly mollified but very puzzled at a personal visit from their respective child's Head of House regarding an incident they thought well done with. After all, no harm had been done, and that nice gentleman from the Ministry had assured them it was being sorted thoroughly. They could direct any correspondence on the issue through his office, though strangely, they now could not locate his business card no matter how they tried, nor recall his name.

That was how Charlie, who refused to be left waiting again, came to be quietly entering the Department of Education and Certification with Minerva, Rolanda, and Septima, determined to find something in the files that would give them the name of this mystery official. Severus guarded the door while Aurora and Kent grudgingly baby-sat Filius, who was still a bit tipsy, and Clara, who had managed to sneak a book along.

Of course, things picked up when a voice from a corner of the apparently empty office said, unconvincingly, "Can I help you?"

The professors whirled, wands drawn...to find they were confronting the ghost of a middle-aged witch with a sour look on her silver face.

"If you're going to threaten a dead civil servant, you'll have to find something more frightening than offensive magic. I'm already in the equivalent of Hell," she grumbled. "I don't suppose you're willing to offer a bribe of some sort for what you want?" she asked more hopefully.

"If you want money, ask someone other than a teacher," Minerva retorted.

"I was thinking more of vengeance," the ghost said wistfully. "Bloody head of the department, or as I like to call him 'The Bastard,' could use taking down a notch. Thinks a witch hasn't got anything better to do on a Friday night than catch up with paperwork. Just because I don't have a body anymore..."

"What a coincidence," Charlie said brightly. "We're trying to find out who in this department diddled our schedules and made us teach some ghastly course on 'Reproductive Health,' so we can give him a nice, sharp talking-to...at least."

Minerva gave him a quelling glance. Charlie only shrugged. "The direct approach has been the best so far tonight," he whispered.

It turned out the direct approach paid off again. The hapless haunt floated into a filing cabinet and returned with the pertinent documents. "Here's the paperwork and the original order."

The ghostly clerk looked at the authorizations and sighed. "Well, 'The Bastard' signed off on it, but it wasn't his initiative. I doubt he even read it," she remarked ruefully. "The bloke wrote this up is actually a quiet one. Never gave *me* any trouble, leastways."

Minerva fumbled with her reading glasses, eager to see the name of their oppressor. Septima, reading over her shoulder, saw it first and went pale as a ghost, then a shade of red even Godric Gryffindor would have found too much.

"Where are the Commuter Portkeys?" she asked the clerk in a voice so commanding no one recognized her as the shy, gentle Vector they'd come to know. At the ghost's answer, she stormed out of the office, nearly slamming the door open against Severus on her way.

"Septima!" he hissed indignantly, only to be forced to dodge Charlie, Rolanda, and Minerva as they exited in hot pursuit.

Before he could follow, he found himself confronted with a ghostly head poking through the door and yelling, "Don't forget about sorting 'The Bastard' for me when you're finished!"

Stealth was obviously well and truly in the bin. Severus rolled his eyes and whistled for the rest of the crew.

Professor Vector, who had evidently hijacked the mission, scarcely waited for them to catch up. She grabbed one of the non-descript rings from the wall that acted as chargeable Portkeys, and yelled out an address. The professors found themselves on the front walk of a tidy little cottage behind thick hedges, obviously a dwelling hidden from its neighbors by magic judging from the almost palpable charms designed to deflect notice.

"Septima, what in hell is going on here?" Minerva demanded.

"That's what I'm going to find out," Septima said grimly, running up to the door and punching both the bell and the knocker ferociously. In a few moments, a sleepy *Lumos*' and sounds of scrabbling at the inside of the front door could be heard.

"Freddy, how COULD you?" Septima screeched at the tall, reedy wizard who blinked sleepily in the doorway. His hands, too long and floppy for even his stretched-out frame, fumbled for a pair of glasses to better see who confronted him.

"She knows him!" Charlie exclaimed incredulously.

"Brilliant deduction," Severus muttered, "considering the alternative is that Septima is prone to walking up to strange wizards and calling them 'Freddy.'"

"Tima, my sweet, what exactly are you doing here at half past midnight in the middle of the academic year?" he asked, more confused than alarmed.

"Don't play dumb with me, Aethelfred Euclid Barnaby Chance! I know your equations when I see them. Just what did you think you were doing, forcing all of us to teach that vile stuff?"

"I was trying to save our marriage!" he exclaimed plaintively. It was no use pretending not to know what she was talking about, and since the people ranged along his walk were plainly his wife's disgruntled coworkers, he'd need to do some very good explaining very soon.

It was a good thing for Pomona that Severus' and Rolanda's reflexes were decent, even when numbed by shock. Otherwise she would have fallen face flat on the walk when she passed out.

Filius spoke first. "Septima, my dear... Is there, perhaps, something you'd care to share with us?" His voice was reduced to its most quavering squeak.

Her voice shaking, Vector pointed to the man in the doorway. "This is...or maybe WAS...my husband." He made a pained noise, and she shrugged off his attempt to take her arm. "Perhaps we should go inside for this. There's no need to wake up the neighborhood with something that should be private."

"Um, my dearest floating variable, do we really need to have all your colleagues in on this discussion?"

"Don't you try to butter me up with pet names! We most certainly do need to have them present. After all, your little joke made their lives as miserable as mine for the past



week, if not more so!"

He dejectedly followed her pointing finger back into the house. After exchanging baffled glances, the rest of the teachers followed. Sprout held on to her rescuers for a few steps more; at her age, *'Rennervate'* got you back on your feet, but it also tended to leave the knees a little weak from adrenaline.

Septima had no sooner seated herself on the first available chair than Aethelfred was on his knees in front of her. "Please, try to understand, my sweet...I never meant to upset anybody, much less you! But you ran off the day after our wedding night, and all I've seen of you since are your letters."

"I've been at the school..." she started, sounding more evasive than indignant.

"Yes, but why won't you take Floo calls? And why haven't you, in the stack of parchment the height of this chair, ever addressed what upset you so much? I've asked and asked, and you ignore that part of my every letter. Now, I find out you haven't even told your friends that we're married."

"I... nobody knew we were getting married. There was the war, and we couldn't have a proper wedding, so I hadn't invited anyone. Then, that night...it just wasn't what I expected. I love you so much, but I was so confused and so afraid I'd hurt your feelings that I just ignored the issue then left as soon as I could. I didn't tell anyone afterwards because I was embarrassed...at being embarrassed." She hung her head. "I know I should have addressed it when I answered your letters. I know I should have asked someone for advice or help. But it was easier not to talk about it."

Freddy worked his lips anxiously before responding. "After a while, I figured it must be something like that, since you kept saying you loved me and never gave me any indication you wanted to leave. I started researching everything I could find out about marriage and intimacy problems. Muggles write a great deal more than wizards about such things, I may tell you! After reading as much as I could find on the subject, I was able to guess at some of the things I could have done better, but it didn't help as long as you wouldn't discuss it. So I turned to Arithmancy, the only thing I do well. My calculations showed that the best way to communicate with you would be to play up your greatest strength: the ability to learn and to teach."

He took a deep breath and continued. "I came up with a set of lessons that would address any question or worry you might have about sex. I used the bits of gossip in your letters to construct stories that would alarm parents. I intercepted the letters so that it would look as if the school was being evasive. I maneuvered to be the Ministry representative sent to the Board of Governors meeting, and I tricked them into thinking the course would be taught from the most pathetic reproductive health program I could find in any Muggle school...knowing that the more inane it appeared to be, the more quickly they would adopt it."

"He evidently speaks bureaucrat as a second language," Quill whispered to McGonagall, who nodded vigorously.

"Then, I had the real lessons hand-delivered to Headmaster Dumbledore, along with a spell that would ensure everybody...teachers and students...would get what they needed from the class. Every set of students would be with the ideal professor to ensure they learned all they were able to, so that none of them would have to have problems like we did. I wanted to make sure that the professors...especially you, my dear...would be in the position of teaching the students who would optimize their best qualities." He hung his head. "Instead, all I did was traumatize innocent bystanders and do the one thing I feared most: push you away for good, my love."

For agonizing moments, Septima stared at her husband. Then, she flew out of the chair and kissed him with all her might.

The assembled professors spent quite some time trying to find other places to put their eyes and clearing their throats pointedly before she finally let him up for air.

"You wonderful, brilliant, adorable Arithmantic genius, you! That was the most perfect, exquisite, amazing set of calculations I've ever seen...why, when you publish them, they'll be the masterpiece of your career! And you did them for *me!*"

"You mean, you're not mad at me anymore?" he asked hopefully. Actually, he gasped it; Septima definitely didn't have the knack of kissing without half-smothering the life out of her target. But compared to previous conditions, he wasn't about to complain. "Would...would you actually like to talk about what went wrong... our wedding night?"

"No, Freddy, I'm not angry anymore... and yes, I think I could try. I've got the vocabulary pat now, but I think there's going to be a bit of a learning curve. I may need to pause and try again later."

"Of course you can, my precious trilateral approxiuation," he said mistily.

Minerva reasserted her role as expedition commander, and decided to call for a strategic withdrawal. "Well, we'll leave you two to talk it over; we've an appointment in Hogsmeade, if you'll recall, ladies and *gentlemen*," she pointedly addressed Severus, who looked the most mutinous of the lot.

Aethelfred stumbled to his feet, dusting awkwardly at his knees. Septima stayed close to him. "I'm really terribly sorry for all the trouble I caused you. Please, if there's anything I can do..."

"Will you promise to alter the Ministry order so I can make a more reasonable schedule and appropriate adjustments to the course of study, for next time?" Minerva asked in her best Deputy Headmistress voice.

"First thing Monday morning," he promised earnestly.

"Do you have the original Muggle artifacts you showed the Governors?" Kent piped up excitedly.

"Right here," he said, fumbling with some Arithmantic instruments on a catch-all table until he found the pamphlets and folded drawings.

"For now, we'll leave it at that. I will discuss it with Headmaster Dumbledore to determine if any other restitution is needed. Oh, and, Septima? You have leave from your duties until Sunday night."

Professor Vector smiled from under her messy bangs. "Thank you, Minerva," she said softly. Her arm was still wrapped tightly around her husband's waist.

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Minerva herded the troops outside and made everyone Apparate to the entrance of the Three Broomsticks. Then, she obliged them to settle down at a discreet corner table before they began to deconstruct the mission in earnest...that is, to gossip and complain. Just to be on the safe side, she also bought the first round.

Sprout sighed and blew Rosmerta a quick kiss as she took her usual libation. "Okay, I was irked to start with..."

"You were out cold, to start with," Aurora huffed.

"...but I think my closet romantic has melted. Ah, the splendors of Super-Brain love..." she trailed off, clasping her hands over her heart.

"She sure had me fooled. If you'd bet me that she'd been so much as kissed before, I'd have lost my shirt," Hooch remarked.

"Well, a quick change and you wouldn't have to worry about breaking any indecency laws," Filius said with a chuckle, admiring the brightly colored and umbrella-bedecked drink Rosmerta knew was one of his favorites. No more Firewhisky tonight.

"I still think we need to make someone pay for this," Severus grumbled into his firewhisky. How did Filius drink those syrupy atrocities? "But obviously, I've been outvoted."

"If it makes you feel better to see someone suffer, hide all the Hangover Relief potion before tomorrow morning," Clara whispered, reading by the light of her merrily burning rum concoction.

"Let's see your souvenirs, Kent. What did Septima's impossibly obtuse love use to put one over on the Ministry and the Governors?" Minerva asked with great interest.

Kent, who had been studying the booklets and sniggering, passed them around. "You're not going to believe this," he said with a chuckle. "If they ever found out what we really taught the children, I do believe they'd shut the school down like a shot."

"THIS is what some Muggle schools use to teach about sex?" Sprout gasped, reading over McGonagall's shoulder.

Minerva started giggling. "They might as well not bother!"

Aurora snatched one of the little books, turning to the diagrams. "Good gods, is this supposed to be the uterus? It looks like a Plimpy juggling!" she chortled.

"Do the ones who get *these* classes ever manage to reproduce?" Filius asked, shaking his head over hopelessly vague allusions to 'fertilization.'

"Maybe by accident," Severus remarked derisively

"Apt choice of words...there's nothing in here on preventing them!" Rolanda sang out, downing her first shot with a flourish and enthusiastically accepting Clara's offer to host the second round.

"Och! Well, we always managed somehow without having classes in it," Minerva said breezily. With a Firewhisky and a Gillywater warming her, she was feeling rather lighthearted about the situation. One more round and she'd be well on her way to lightheaded.

"Yes, it's not that difficult to figure out the basics of what goes where. It's doing it well that takes a bit more finesse," Filius remarked, displaying some happily tipsy finesse by charming the paper umbrella to dance with the cherry from his drink.

"Some do better than others, no doubt," Aurora snickered. Charlie hid his burning face in his pint, vividly recalling being rousted out of the Astronomy Tower during a particularly vocal rendezvous in his sixth year. Fortunately for him and his hunky Hufflepuff squeeze, Professor Sinistra had been as discreet as she had been amused.

"Better at having sex?" Clara asked in amusement. "Or better at having accidents?"

"Slow down, Filius, we've got all night," Pomona said, noting his eyes eagerly scanning for Rosmerta and his share of round three.

"Is that what Professor Devereaux tells you?" Rolanda teased, causing him flush brilliantly.

"That's who you're seeing?" Pomona gasped in astonishment. "The tall blonde from Beauxbatons?"

Filius grinned broadly.

"Not the one that..." Kent described an hourglass shape in the air with his glass, unmindful of the sloshing whisky.

"That's the one." Severus sighed. "Jammy bastard."

"Filius, you devil." Aurora giggled. "How did that come about?"

"She was impressed by my Charms," he answered solemnly, earning a well-deserved volley of peanuts being tossed at him from all sides.

"It's a wonder we ever go out with you men, with lines like that in your repertoires," Minerva said bemusedly.

"Hmm. I seem to recall hearing about a student who agreed to go into the broomshed with a certain Quidditch team captain, all on the strength of a clumsily worded ode to the properties of his broom," Filius said, winking at Minerva over the rim of his fresh drink.

"Not the broomshed, Minerva," Rolanda chided. "That's so...*cliché!*"

"Everyone's got to start somewhere," she retorted weakly. "Since you're so clever, my dear, what was losing your virginity like?"

"Which time?" Rolanda, sometimes Roland, asked cheekily.

"Ah, I think that's enough for me, tonight," Severus said, pushing back from the table hastily. "I have a detention to oversee in the morning, and I have no intention of showing up the worse for wear," he added more smoothly, slipping Minerva his contribution towards round five by way of excusing himself.

"Well, that's a fine coincidence; I've bought my round, alcohol is no beauty treatment at my age, and I think it's high time I found some young gentleman to escort me home," Quill said, rather than attempt to cajole him into remaining.

With the fourth round well underway for the rest, similar restraint was hard to come by. Not a few cries of 'spoilspout' followed them out, and Rolanda even catcalled and wolf-whistled after the retreating pair.

"You know, it's customary for a gent to offer a lady his arm in this situation," Clara chided gently once they were in the street. Severus hastened to do so, amazed at the birdlike lightness of her arm on his. He knew Clara was one of the older members of the staff, but now he began to wonder just how old. Her face was only lightly yet thoroughly lined, and the wide streaks of silver in her hair looked artistic rather than geriatric

"You're dying to ask, aren't you? 'Oh, Severus, why must you be so uptight all the time?'" he said in a fair mockery of Minerva.

"You mean, do I need to know why you'd prefer not to make your personal business public, with all patrons of The Three Broomsticks looking on? Not especially," she said mildly.

Something had been bothering Snape, and he hesitantly broached the subject to Quill. "Albus knew about this expedition, and Minerva didn't tell him."

"True."

"I also know he's not omniscient, despite his reputation. He places a great value on intelligence gathering. He always has."

"Absolutely. Not to mention he tends to look after his sources. Provided they last long enough." She looked at her companion, practically able to see the gears turning in his head, though his expression retained its practiced calm. She smiled in approval. "Go ahead, ask. I'd feel terribly guilty if you were to burst."

"What does the initial 'S' stand for in your name?"

"Sadalmelika."

"That's... unusual."

"Yes. It's an odd name for a wizard, but to feminize it is unheard of. And yet, you've heard it before, haven't you?"

Severus simply walked beside her in silent awe for several minutes. Sadalmelika was infamous to anyone familiar with the war against Grindelwald...the unexpurgated

version, that is. Her exploits were either toned down or passed over completely in the accounts available to students. "Amazing. All that wandering about with your nose in a book is just an act."

"Hardly. I love my field. It's the bumping into statues and apologizing that's an act."

"You know, some historians still debate which side you were on, and everyone thinks you're dead. Even Binns."

"Well, I should think my presence here resolves the debate...though that's quite the compliment, considering my former job."

"Former?"

"Touché. Once a spy for Dumbledore, always a spy for Dumbledore...at least, until you die. Or he does. You're lucky...you'll outlive him and finally be free."

"You're not that old."

"I have grandchildren older than you are, my dear, and a few almost-grown great-grandchildren. I'm just well preserved. I still dance, you know...though not for an audience anymore!" Snape went distinctly red in the face. "Oh, you needn't blush. It's pretty well established that Mata Hari was a babe in the woods compared to me in my prime."

"You have children...?"

"You needn't search for a way to ask delicately! I got married while I was still in school. Snagged my Ancient Runes professor," she said mischievously. "A good bit older than I was, Altair... but he gave me two good sons before passing on. Both Ravenclaws," she added proudly.

"They were grown by the time the war began. So when Albus recruited me, I thought it best to dispense with my former life altogether... except for my given name, which was exotic enough to be suitable for the stage. Afterwards, I simply took on a pseudonym. Couldn't resist keeping the initial, though, as sort of a souvenir.

"Everything I did...it was ultimately to protect them, you know." She shook off her pensive mood and came back with another glib remark. "Luckily for Albus, Grindelwald's tastes were considerably more sensual than Voldemort's. Otherwise I'd have been no use as a spy."

Snape favored her with an incredulous look. "Your ability to speak and write ten languages, as well as break every code ever devised by Grindelwald's alliance, didn't count for anything?"

She laughed again. "Bless you, honey, you're the only one I've ever known to be interested in that part of my career. Even 'serious' historians devote reams to speculating on how much 'accommodating' I had to do with old Grindeg and his lot to get the goods."

She allowed Severus to digest that a moment, then let drop the other shoe. "It never occurs to them to wonder what I was up to with Albus."

"Please tell me you're kidding," Snape begged.

"You know, he wasn't always a gnarled old codger," Clara said slyly.

"I **really** don't need to know this."

"I wasn't offering details," she retorted.

Severus sighed. "Why does it always come back to sex?"

"Well, most people more or less enjoy sex...even Septima probably will, now that she realizes the first go can be improved upon. I've even heard rumors that Minerva is partial to it, though if you suggest that to her once she's sober, I can pretty well guarantee she'll turn you into a coat rack."

"That I can believe. She must have been sloshed to her eyebrows just now to start asking people about...losing their virginity."

Quill gave him a searching, sideways look. She never bothered with Legilimency; that can be defended against, as Severus had so often and admirably demonstrated. Her specialty had always been reading the tiny quirks of posture, the infinitesimal involuntary twitches and changes of vocal register that not even the most accomplished dissembler can disguise. Find the pattern, make sense of it...it was one of the things that made her a brilliant translator and code breaker. What she saw surprised her only a little, but saddened her a great deal. She chose her next words very carefully.

"I've heard some of those stories before, and they're by and large, rather pitiful. It's not worth doing just to have done it. Ask poor Sybil...that garish git Lockhart took advantage of her during his brief but intensely irritating sojourn here. Laid the charm on with a trowel, then kept finding excuses to avoid her, once he'd gotten what he wanted."

"As much as Sybil annoys me, I wouldn't wish Lockhart on anyone," he said grudgingly. "But I think I could stand to be taken advantage of by a beautiful witch. Or even a decent looking one."

"Be careful what you wish for," Clara cautioned. "For heaven's sake, at least insist on a shag from a witch that respects you."

"I can't believe you just said 'shag.'"

"Do you prefer 'bump tummies'?"

"That's what I'd like to know," he said ruefully.

"Ah, well, you're still quite young for a wizard. Believe me, there are witches out there that fancy a quick wit and a good-sized nose when it comes to a man. It's hardly a lost cause."

"You do realize you're too much," he remarked as they approached Ravenclaw Tower.

"That's how I can tell I'm getting old. It used to be blokes said they couldn't get enough."

Severus narrowed his eyes at her, but his lips twisted in a hint of a smile. "I happen to know from the quantities Poppy requests that someone besides Albus dips into arthritis potions on a regular basis. Seeing as you can't mix anything more complex than a martini, perhaps you should stay on my good side, such as it is."

"Hmph! Cheeky thing. Seeing as you've gotten no better at telling your 'ankh' from your 'sa' since you took my classes, you'll still need my good will to translate those antique Potions manuscripts you turn up now and again," she said, grinning her face into a web of amused wrinkles. With that, she wished him goodnight and toddled off to her quarters.

---

While the professors were making some amazing discoveries at the humble abode of Frederick and Septima Chance, other remarkable revelations were taking place back at Hogwarts, in a secluded corridor not far from the kitchens.

"Ginny, I..."

"Harry, could..."

"You go first, Gin honey."

"No, that's okay, why don't you go first?"

"Really, I want to hear what you have to say."

"Harry, I'm going to go crazy if you don't talk. Please, spit it out."

"Okay... I take it you covered the same topics as we did. Including the unusual ones?"

"Uh, you mean... alternate forms of sexual behavior?"

"Right. That."

"Yeah... that's sort of what I wanted to talk to you about."

"Really? Okay."

"I really do love you, Harry"

"And I love you, Ginny. But..."

"Is this some sort of 'not in that way' breakup speech?"

"No! It's just that, these classes have me... thinking, that's all. What else is there to experience? I mean, I thought settling down to a more or less ordinary life after the past seven years would be a relief. Now, I'm not sure I can handle that much normalcy...even if it's normalcy by Wizarding standards. I still want you to be there, though. I don't think I could manage if you weren't."

He wrapped both of her hands tightly in his, and Ginny once again felt the oddly pleasurable sense of his possessiveness wash over her. She sighed, though with only partial relief. They might be on approximately the same page, but she still wasn't sure if they could wring a happy ending out of this. "That sounds familiar, actually. Does experiencing other things include feeling... curious... about different intimate arrangements?"

"That's a good way of putting it."

"You sound more intrigued than anything else."

"Well, if you're suggesting what I think you're suggesting, it's not too unusual a fantasy."

"Since we're not dealing with Legilimency here, I think maybe we should come right out and say things."

"Right. Ladies first."

"Bugger."

"Interesting choice of words, Ginny."

It took them a while to stop laughing.

"In my case, not exactly. But really, Harry...I can't help wondering what it would be like to be with a girl. I'm in love with you, though, and I don't want to be with someone behind your back. This would have to be something you approved. Preferably, something in which you're... involved."

"And of course, I would expect you to do the same...approve, that is. And be involved, if you like." Harry added, "Although this is beginning to sound a bit crowded, for all it's intriguing."

"I see what you mean...and maybe there's a better way. You know, Madam Hooch told me some very interesting things today after class...about Veneramorphogy."

"I really don't think I want you to repeat that."

"Good, because I don't want to say it again. But the gist of it is, if the person is predisposed, they can learn to change their sex organs from male to female at will."

Harry thought that sounded like the most brilliant thing he'd heard all week, but decided to proceed calmly. "It could be a solution. How can you tell if you're predisposed?"

"Well, she is, and she knows the detection spell. I convinced her to test me. Unfortunately, I'm not."

For reasons Harry couldn't quite put his finger on, he didn't find the revelation about Hooch the least bit surprising. "Damn. I don't suppose you could tell if I am, or not?"

Five minutes later, Ginny was swearing at the results of Harry's test.

"There's always Polyjuice," Harry offered.

"I suppose we could do that as a last resort. But it would mean stealing hair or whatnot from either strangers...or maybe weirder yet, people we know...and impersonating them without their knowledge. After all, I don't think we'd get too many volunteers if we told them what we were about. What if we found out things about their bodies that were embarrassing to know? And before you suggest it, I have no intention of fucking myself...in any sense!" She sniggered at her own joke.

Harry favored her with an appropriately exaggerated eye roll for that before moving right along. "True. In a way, I'm glad. I really don't think I'd fancy being female, though I'd be willing to do it to please you, my pet."

Ginny sorted through various ideas. "What if we could find one person we both found attractive, someone who is able and willing to make the changes? If he or she agreed, they could be female for me, male for you, and we could, um, share."

Harry looked thoughtful. "It might work. Instead of this being something that could separate us, it would be another thing we have in common. If we could find someone we both found reasonably appealing, and..."

Before he could finish his thought, voices in an angrily whispered discussion began to whisk their echoes down the hallway. The pair slid from the bench they had been occupying, and Ginny pulled Harry behind a tapestry with her, unable to resist the temptation to eavesdrop.

"Pansy, I'm not asking for another chance in the way that you're thinking. Please, hear me out."

"What other way could there be, Draco?"

"You know, it's not unheard of for three to be company, rather than a crowd."

"What?"

"Come on...you've read the Little Green Book."

Pansy still looked blank.

Draco sighed. "You do know the term 'threesome,' my dear? Boy meets girl, girl finds another boy interesting, all three come to a mutual understanding? It's not unheard of for even married couples to occasionally maintain certain *friendships* formed at school."

She began spluttering indignantly, showing just what she thought of the idea even before she managed to squeak out, "You're a sick bastard!"

Draco found he wasn't particularly disappointed, and damned glad he hadn't had to draw her a picture. It had been looking like a near thing. "And you're a thick cow with very little brain and less imagination!" It was terribly satisfying to finally tell her that.

Pansy responded with a resounding slap to his face, and hurried away, muttering the unimaginative mantra, 'Sick, sick, sick!'

Harry and Ginny had been exchanging significant glances throughout the confrontation. At the final slap, Harry's lips thinned speculatively. He looked pointedly at Ginny. Slowly, he inclined his head toward the corridor (where Draco still stood, muttering and rubbing his offended cheek.) Then, he raised his eyebrows interrogatively.

Ginny pursed her lips, reflecting as she looked into the middle distance. Draco had certainly managed to relate quite civilly to them for an entire term now. Of course, he was still a bit of a stuck-up prat, but he was a damned good looking stuck-up prat. And he'd make a hell of a pretty girl. Her eyes snapped back into focus on Harry, and she slowly nodded.

Draco spun around upon hearing the soft brush of fabric being moved behind him. As Harry and Ginny came into view, he huffed a sigh of resignation.

"I assume you heard that," he said, studying his fingernails boredly.

"Bad luck, Draco," Harry said, with just enough sympathy to sound sincere without suggesting mockery.

"Not gloating?" he asked, taken aback. Once before, in the heat of battle, they had addressed each other by their given names. Since returning to school, it had been back to surnames, though with cool courtesy rather than contempt.

Ginny shrugged. "Why should we? I'm not inclined to break the lovely cease-fire we had last term. Besides, you can do better," she finished, resting her hand lightly on his elbow. Gauging his reaction to her touch.

He looked at Ginny's hand cautiously then glanced at Harry for signs that this was some sort of trick. He was surprised to find his former nemesis smiling warmly, though with a look in his eyes he couldn't quite place. Tension began to build, but it wasn't the sort of tension that made Draco feel inclined to escape.

"Care to talk about it?" Harry invited, placing a hand on the other boy's shoulder and guiding him over to the bench he and Ginny had recently warmed.

"There's not much to say," Draco replied stiffly, but curiosity moved him to take the proffered seat. It was with a pleasantly odd stirring inside that he noticed Harry and Ginny had taken up seats on either side of him, body-heat close. "Pansy started seeing Blaise. You heard what I suggested."

"And displaying her narrow-mindedness, she refused to so much as give it a second thought," Harry concluded, tsking and shaking his head in the general direction in which Pansy had retreated.

*Now that was an interesting response*, Draco thought. "Not even a first thought, really. But you have to consider the source," he remarked disdainfully.

"Why do you bother with her, then?"

"It was sort of arranged. I never minded until everything that happened at the end of the war. She was already beginning to favor Blaise, and after that, it seemed rather a waste to contemplate spending my life with someone just because she had the right connections." He decided in for a Knut, in for a Galleon, and simply blurted out the rest. "But, for form's sake, I suggested... experimenting. And you saw how that went over." Draco noticed that his audience was moving in closer. My, wasn't that a much more pleasant experience than he would have imagined...had the thought ever crossed his mind that he'd like to be the filling in a 'Gryffindor's Golden Couple' sandwich.

Okay, to be honest, the thought had at least flickered across his mind. But he just assumed it was Slytherin kinkiness asserting itself indiscriminately.

"Would you mind if I performed a spell on you? I promise, it's not uncomfortable, and you won't be harmed in any way." Seeing his hesitation, Ginny added, "I can demonstrate on Harry first, if you'd like to see what happens."

Draco considered this. "No... I trust you... Ginny," he finally managed. All three of them thrilled at his use of her name.

Ginny uttered the incantation and watched as a ball of light formed over Draco's knees, turning a soft, spring green hue.

Harry inhaled sharply, noting how different that was from his result. "Does that mean..."

Ginny ended the spell and broke into a smile. "Draco, did you read about Veneramorphogy in your Reproductive Health text?" Her arm crept around his waist, settling over his opposite hip in a distinctly friendly caress.

"Yes... but they weren't terribly specific about it, except to say that it's a type of metamorphological sexual magic that the predisposed wizard or witch can learn," He decided he liked where this seemed to be going, an idea reinforced as Harry's hand made a slow traverse of his back, coming to rest on the opposite shoulder.

Under the circumstances, Draco felt he would be more comfortable with his left arm around Ginny's shoulders and his right around Harry's waist. Not being one to tolerate much discomfort, he adjusted his position accordingly. Raven and russet heads settled in beside platinum in intimate approval of the change.

Ginny's smile widened. "It's a fascinating bit of magic. Let's just say, if you ever wanted to know how the other half lives..." she trailed off, running a finger down her own neck to toy with the side of her breast, allowing her companions to watch her nipple rise beneath the fabric. She hadn't realized how thrilling it could be, having two pairs of intense, jewel-like eyes riveted to her like she was some exquisite dessert...and there were two forks on the plate. Who needed Quidditch for excitement?

Understanding dawned, and Draco's face stretched into a sly grin. "I have been told I'm rather too pretty to be a boy, but I never realized it could be an asset."

"We know someone who would be willing to teach the particulars of that skill...though the arrangements might not be possible until after we graduate," Harry breathed softly into Draco's ear. This was definitely beginning to look like one hell of a great plan. Beginning to smell like one too, he thought approvingly, letting his nose trace a path down his pale companion's neck, picking up lingering traces of cologne.

"I don't suppose there is anything else we might want to do in the meantime?" Draco purred. Lack of sexual imagination on the part of Gryffindors was such a hurtful stereotype, he reflected.

"I can think of..." Ginny began then found her words cut off by Draco's supple, skillful lips. It occurred to her that Draco-as-himself would be a nice diversion until he learned the skills that would allow her to play with a female version of him. *Damn, am I ever glad he decided to be one of the good guys*, she thought giddily.

After not nearly enough time in the sweet, rosy alcove of lovely Ginny's mouth, Draco felt a firm hand cup his jaw. "Ginevra, pet, you said we would *share*," Harry scolded, in a low, sexy, teasing tone of voice.

Chocolate and emerald eyes met in the silent discourse at which they were gradually becoming adept, confirming that this plan was, indeed, to their profound satisfaction. Then chocolate eyes captured silvery ones in their smoldering regard, promising more in the near future before deflecting his palely scintillating gaze.

It was worth exchanging chocolate depths for emerald ones, Draco thought in the dizzying seconds that Harry's eyes drew him like lodestones before he was pressed into a commanding, masculine kiss. The lack of concrete knowledge of how to proceed in what was clearly unfamiliar territory in no way detracted from the confident desire in the mouth that roughly possessed his.

Ginny watched the two men kiss in thrilled fascination, thinking she would have suffocated under the weight of vicarious passion had they ended the clinch any later.

"I think we wasted at least a term, not doing that sooner," Draco sighed once they separated.

"Oh, I don't know... Had either of you tried anything like that before now, I imagine Nurse Pomfrey would have had a hell of a job putting all the pieces back together," Ginny joked, and the laugh the three shared seemed to seal the deal.

Harry wanted to clarify one more thing before they made this official. "How discreet does this need to be for your sake? Ginny and I have each other if the rest of our House decides to act up." Ginny may be his love and his priority, but Harry decided he wasn't going to leave their Slytherin pet hanging out to dry, either...in fact, sharing him with Ginny made it essential.

Draco tossed his hair saucily. "Crabbe and Goyle are completely loyal to me, and would sort anyone who might decide to give me trouble on account of our arrangement. But it shouldn't be a problem. Becoming a plaything for just a couple of random Gryffindors would be a bit of a step-down. Becoming a plaything for *the* Gryffindor couple could be counted as rather a coup."

Ginny decided it would be her turn to squeeze in the middle at some point, though for now she was content to let Draco link the three of them together as they rose from the bench. "Do you think we can wipe that smug look off his face, Harry, my love?" she asked.

"Absolutely. I'm thinking surrender and utter abandon would look good there," he speculated, firmly grasping the platinum tresses at the back of their new toy's neck so as to position his face for inspection.

Arm in arm, the three sought out a place to get better acquainted, mentally reviewing the appropriate prophylactic charms and thinking whoever had decided to teach classes on sex was bloody damned brilliant.

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#### *Author's Notes:*

Sadalmelik is a star in the constellation Aquarius.

**ankh:** hieroglyph meaning 'life.' It resembles an elongated 'o' sitting atop a capital letter 't'. Sometimes referred to as the 'Anstate Cross.'

**sa:** hieroglyph meaning 'protection.' It looks a bit like ankh but has two legs instead of one, and no crossbar. Detailed renderings of it show what looks like a bit of rope coiled around the narrowest bit, and two slight protrusions from the sides of the rounded portion.

And Albus thought the fit had hit the shand at the beginning of this mess...

You know, Clara has been a right pest. She wouldn't let me go until she had a proper backstory, and this seemed the place to put it. I swear, OFCs can be more trouble than they're worth sometimes!

## 7: Revelation

### *Chapter 8 of 9*

Snape's crankiness--Explained! Now, is something going to be done about it?

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#### Chapter 7: Revelation

Snape woke up disgustingly early Saturday morning. He had no one to blame but himself for having assigned a 6 a.m. detention, so naturally, he decided it was Miss Granger's fault. It seemed a good idea at the time...he could have the house-elves bring him breakfast, then sit back to comfortably interrogate her while she was out-of-sorts from having to read that essay on an empty stomach. He also reflected it was a prudent preventative measure, in case the little irritant got sick reading to her nasty old professor instead of showing off in front of whichever young buck she was trying to impress in class. Speaking of sick...

It might, indeed, be amusing to abscond with the Hangover Relief potion. (He was still a bit sore that his colleagues, theoretically friends, had tried to drag him into a potentially embarrassing conversation last night.) It would yield a lovely sense of superiority, especially considering he could do without any remedies. Three, or maybe five, firewhiskys on a more or less empty stomach about four hours ago couldn't faze him. That light, fuzzy sensation behind his eyes was just lack of sleep and minor annoyance, and the general crummy feeling was nothing a shower couldn't fix. At least, that's what he insisted internally while managing to blearily spill half a bottle of cologne on himself trying to shave, a mistake even a thorough shower couldn't quite wash off.

He hastily threw on his full professorial get-up, not wanting to look as if waking up at the crack of sparrow's fart had any adverse impact on his well-polished image. It didn't matter at the moment, since he couldn't let himself be seen emptying the warded cabinet in the infirmary reserved for remedies only teachers had access to, or be caught in transit. But he would be ready to impress, no, intimidate, that fuzzy headed know-it-all when she came to darken the other side of his desk in about twenty more minutes. He didn't care how bright she was, she wasn't going to get the better of him, and if she hadn't figured it out before now, she'd realize it the moment she walked into his office.

Severus had only taken about five bites of the breakfast the elves had brought him when he realized he'd put on his robes inside-out and forgotten to comb his hair...

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Remus Lupin yawned. He probably should have gone to bed promptly at the end of his rounds, but he was feeling peckish and didn't care to sleep for only an hour or two before having to wake up for breakfast. After swinging past the kitchens, he decided to wander out the little postern door not far from one of the sets of stairs down to the dungeons. It was generally a nice, quiet place to watch the sunrise. The Astronomy Tower provided the traditional view, but he could do without the slightly dizzy feeling he got ascending it.

*Good old sun,* he thought fondly as he wandered along the ground floor hallway. *Seeing you will mean the end of this odd week. Hopefully everyone and everything will be back to normal again.*

From the corner of his eye, Remus noticed a flutter of fabric. He turned just in time to see Severus whisking off in the direction of the dungeons, looking a little furtive. That wasn't too unusual; what was odd, however, was that he looked incredibly disheveled, and...was that cologne he smelled?

Lupin didn't have the luxury of mulling this over, as his attention was immediately diverted. Somewhere around a bend in the corridor, he could hear a 'click' and soft voices. Apparently there were other early risers in the castle. He could just make out, 'good job you know how to get into that room,' and something about, 'head boy' and 'a nice broom ride.' Oh, and some giggling.

Perhaps someone hadn't gotten to bed last night... at least, not to their own bed.

If running across Snape looking like a teenager sneaking into the house the morning after wasn't sufficiently bizarre, Lupin now found himself face to face with Harry, Ginny, and...Draco? Were all three of them really sidling out the door he'd planned to use...*together?*

"Good morning, Professor," Harry said. His voice was just a little too calm for someone with a distinct 'cat who got the cream' gleam in his eyes. "We were just on our way for a little sunrise flight, weren't we?"

Ginny and Draco echoed him, sounding like butter wouldn't melt in their mouths.

Since when were they so friendly? There was something suspicious going on here, if only Remus could put his finger on it. None of them appeared to be under any form of duress, however. If anything, they looked quite happy, in a sleepy, satisfied sort of way. And the air seemed to almost vibrate with the scent of teenaged exuberance. Good grief... he recalled frequent pheromone clouds as part and parcel of being that age, but they seemed to have an awfully robust stock of them built up, for three people who otherwise smelled like they'd just had a nice, refreshing bath.

"Yes... seems a good morning for it, doesn't it?" he said a little uncertainly, not really being sure what sort of morning it was since he was absolutely knackered and kept getting interrupted on his way to enjoy the sunrise.

Ginny yawned and leaned on Harry. Both Harry and Draco looked at her with concern.

"We can always wait until later if you're still tired, Ginny," Draco said solicitously.

"No, I'll be fine once I get going." As they turned, Draco stumbled a little.

"Steady, Draco," Harry said, catching his blonde companion around the shoulders. "Bit shaky on your legs this morning, aren't you?"

Draco took to the stabilizing arm as if they'd been bezzzy mates since day one of first year. "Nothing a little ride won't fix, Harry," he said, which unaccountably made Ginny start to giggle. They quickly took their leave of Remus and slipped out the door.

Just before it clicked shut, he could have sworn he'd heard Draco say, "Clever of you to remember those Cleansing Charms."

That was *really* peculiar. And a little disturbing, if he'd only let his mind wrap around it properly.

He considered asking Severus if he knew anything about all this, but stopped short of it upon seeing Hermione Granger duck into Snape's office with a substantial roll of parchment, shutting the door behind her as quickly as if she were hiding something.

Professor Lupin had the oddest feeling that, for at least the third time this week, he was definitely missing something.

There would be a sunrise over snow tomorrow to look at. For now, he *really* needed sleep.

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Hermione made herself as neat and presentable as if she'd had all morning to wash, dress, and eat, instead of just half an hour. She wouldn't give Professor Snape the satisfaction of seeing her yawning and bedraggled. He wouldn't see her bedraggled, anyhow. Yawning might be harder to control.

She fingered the vial in her pocket and alternated between nibbling at a sticky bun and at her lower lip as she made her way down to the dungeons. Maybe it would be better to simply take the punishment and forget her curiosity, for once. As annoying as Snape could be, she did quite respect him and admire his expertise, to say nothing of his record of what she would grudgingly term heroic accomplishments during the war. She didn't like the idea of discovering anything that would tarnish her fairly flattering image of him. Yet she couldn't quite bring herself to dump the potion out.

Maybe her parents should have named her Pandora.

She knocked a little tentatively, curiosity just overcoming trepidation. She hoped whatever his kink or fetish was, it wasn't too disturbing.

"Enter," came the familiar, slightly annoyed voice.

Hermione took a quick slug of the potion, wiped her lips, and darted in.

Snape was steadying a rack of vials on a crowded table, and barely spared her a sour glance before turning to assume a seat at his desk.

"Contraceptive potions...in bulk?" she asked incredulously, recognizing the pearlescent purple stuff from the description in her textbook.

"Madam Pomfrey's had a run on it. If you think you're getting points for identifying it, you're mad. Stop stalling and read your silly essay, since you've been so eager to talk about deviant behavior this week," he snapped at her. As if he were utterly bored and had no desire to devote any more attention to her than was necessary, he picked up a quill and began wounding a poor, defenseless essay with numerous red slashes.

Hermione began to read, darting glances at him from time to time and wondering when the potion would kick in.

My, he looked... different this morning. 'Wild' wasn't quite the word... He was as formidably dressed as ever, yet still seemed ever so slightly tousled and just begging to be...

Snape noticed her voice trail off. "Did I give you leave to stop, Miss..."

He looked up too late. Her wand was out; her eyes looked glazed. *'Incarcerous!'* she exclaimed, giving the spell a slight twist. He found his wrists tied behind him, ankles bound to the legs of the chair, as she cast a Silencing Charm to prevent noise from escaping the room.

"What the hell are you doing, Miss Granger...besides PREPARING TO BE EXPELLED?" Snape roared. "Untie me this instant!"

"But sir... that's not what you *want*," she said, sidling up behind him and slowly drawing his wand from his sleeve. "That's not what I want. Oh, no...I can't believe this," she whispered, moving to stand between his knees and curl her fingers into his hair.

"What have you done?" he choked out. He could almost taste something sugary on her breath as she leaned in close. Then, he tasted a good bit more, but it was a little difficult to analyze with all the blood rushing to his crotch and her delectable mouth playing with his until he started playing in return. Good gods...the way she was sucking on his tongue, he could feel his eyes cross behind closed lids.

"I...I brewed a potion from the little green book," she said with a sigh once they separated, her breath coming faster as she toyed with the buttons of his collar. She unfastened them slowly, stroking his neck lightly. Tickling him.

This wasn't quite how he'd envisioned finding out just what inducement the Slytherin girls had employed to secure Miss Granger's help.

Snape let out a gasp, then a strangled squeak. Every brush of her fingers against his ticklish neck shivered like little icy lightning bolts straight to his balls and cock, causing him to squirm. "I must say... you are going to go down in history as having committed the most creative misdeed ever to warrant expulsion," he said in a quivering voice. "Perhaps if you untie me immediately, I will see that your punishment is limited to daily detention for the remainder of your school career." He didn't get a chance to threaten anything more, because her mouth was now latched onto his again, reminding him rather forcefully just how much he enjoyed sticky buns.

This was going to be a problem. Somewhere in all that snogging, his 'they are all snot-nosed little brats' glasses had fallen off. He was looking at a student, but seeing womanly curves and a face that looked excited, passionate, and in no way snot-nosed or bratty. *Be careful what you wish for*, Clara had said. And here he was, about to be taken advantage of by a quite nice looking, of legal age, witch.

Perhaps Trelawney could learn a thing or two from Quill.

Hermione slid her hands lightly down his legs to his ankles. Resting her head on his knee, she gazed adoringly into his eyes, sighing softly as she slowly undid the buttons at the ankle of his trousers.

"What did you take...a lust potion?" Snape asked, amazed at her expression. Not to mention absolutely floored by the sensation of her breasts pressing...no, rubbing...against his shin. Good Lord. Okay, she was more than just nice-looking, judging by *those*.

"No... it reveals kinks and fetishes...evidently by moving the drinker to satisfy them." She loosened the bonds enough to slide off his boots and socks, making him jump as her fingers reached up the leg of his trousers. She cradled one of his long-toed, slender feet in her lap, gazing at it in awe. "You have beautiful feet, sir," she cooed, crouching to feather soft kisses over his instep and toes as her tiny fingers danced delightfully along his arch to the ball of his foot. Within seconds, the bonds were superfluous. Snape was steel hard and absolutely helpless with both arousal and laughter.

"Impossible," he managed to gasp, before dissolving in giggles again. "I only...know of one potion...hee hee...that works in that manner...stop!...it's ineffective unless the parties involved have...ah, ha, ha, eee!...a preexisting affinity...oh!...for each other." Gods, she was good at this! He knew the potion lasted all of five minutes...he'd brewed it upon request in the past. He also knew, from disappointing experience, it only worked if the persons involved at least found each other attractive. How much of him would she decide to tickle in five minutes? Could he keep from having a very embarrassing reaction if she did?

"But I... that is," she faltered as she climbed into his lap and realized just what, exactly, she was sitting on, "you're so intelligent, that's incredibly attractive, and I respect you a great deal, and oh, sod it, I fancy blokes with big noses in the worst way." She slipped her hands under his shirt and stroked his sides lightly, an act rewarded by hearing his breath escape him in a trembling, silent laugh as he desperately tossed his head, trying to escape her ministrations. "And buttons... mmm. Buttons are sexy."

Really?

Some of that potion must have been in her mouth when they kissed, because he suddenly found the idea of seducing this clever, wild beauty with his voice...and buttons...incredibly appealing. "Go ahead, my wanton little know-it-all... touch them. Caress them. Lick them, if you like," he whispered. "Let me see those pretty lips in action as you sample the mother-of-pearl ones on my shirt."

Hermione whimpered in submission, unable to resist the silky voice and pull of the fascinating fabric fastenings any longer. She nuzzled them, brushed them with her lips, tongued them, ran her teeth over the shank, reveling in the little bumping vibration of metal and thread against her incisors. It was enough to start her squirming frantically against him. She grabbed for her wand and managed to free him without removing her mouth from his neck, wanting to get her arms entirely around his body.

Since Snape couldn't give her an 'Exceeds Expectations' for nonverbal magic under very distracting circumstances, he reached for her instead. Where his hands landed was purely accidental. He was trying to push her away, he tried to convince himself, but got distracted wondering why all the boys in the school who were even remotely pubescent were wasting their time ogling Rosmerta.

*Willpower, Severus!* "You really need to stop. If you were discovered restraining a teacher and more, you could be expelled." *And it would be really embarrassing, to say nothing of messy, to...*

"Ahh...Hermione!"

Too late.

Severus stood up quickly, almost dumping her to the floor. "Turn around," he ordered shakily.

She obeyed, realizing what must have happened when he murmured a Cleansing Charm. *If he's so embarrassed, why didn't he perform the charm silently?* she wondered, her head swimming with the excitement of it.

"Leave. Now. Don't breathe a word of this." It would be almost impossible to look at her ever again, much less interact with her enough to administer any sort of punishment. He wasn't about to report this. After all, he didn't know if he could keep from revealing he'd wanted every minute of it from the moment she touched him, despite his protestations.

Not to mention that, pathetically, it was the most pleasure he'd ever had from any woman.

"You said we had to have an affinity for the potion to work. I'd like to explore that affinity. I NEED to." She picked up one of the vials of contraceptive potion from the rack and drained it.

Seduction, Gryffindor style. All the subtlety of a train wreck. "It's not my fault you're all worked up with no place to go! I didn't ask to be tied to a chair and pawed over," he growled, though it came out a bit less indignant than he would have liked.

"Well, I *am*...asking, that is."

"Stop being daft."

"Do you think I'm joking? I'm frustrated as hell, especially after a week of hearing and reading about nothing but sex, sex, and more sex, after an entire adolescence of not having it! I've read two complete compendiums of modern erotica, and I can't get it out of my head! Not to mention being *over* my head in people whose sole hobby is



fornicating in every imaginable corner of this building! Even Neville's gone and done it!" she exclaimed piteously, thinking on how cheerful he'd been when she caught him wandering back from the greenhouse last night—even after she'd told him it would be necessary to deduct points.

"Don't bloody well talk to me about frustration! Not until you've been in that exact situation for over twenty years!"

Hermione didn't need a piano to fall on her to work out what that implied. "You're kidding."

"Unfortunately, no. And now, according to you... Oh hell. I can't even say it. It's too pathetic, falling behind Longbottom."

"You mean, we wouldn't have to worry about those prophylactic charms that are said to decrease sensation?" she asked, unaware she was licking her lips in a very anticipatory manner.

He hadn't thought of it that way. No, mustn't think of it that way. *Severus, you've never given in to despair despite over two decades of consistent rejections. You've refrained from accepting a pity fuck, a prostitute (well, except for a bit of tickling, but that doesn't count), or favors in exchange for passing marks... You can resist an attractive, intelligent, incredibly randy witch who is of the age of consent...um, just because it would be unethical.*

*Right. Only if you throw her out NOW.*

"Go eat breakfast, Miss Granger, and find someone who won't get sacked on account of your actions for your next experiment," he said flatly. If there was one sure way to stiff himself out of finally getting laid, appealing to her sense of honor would do it.

She sighed, picking up her parchment and preparing to leave. She couldn't help talking, though. As usual.

"It just seems such a waste... We've both admitted to finding each other attractive, I've been practicing all the exercises in the Green Book..."

*All of them?* Snape thought faintly, recalling what some of those exercises were.

"...especially the graduated insert ones, to prevent physical discomfort or embarrassment my first time. I even developed a few of my own, based on information from the books I ordered before the class started." She sighed again, quite heavily.

"You're serious, aren't you?" he asked, gaping at her.

"Of course," she continued without missing a beat. "I've gotten to the point where I can actually throw a banana about a foot with just my vaginal muscles," she said proudly.

"Do you know what this means?" Snape asked, his voice rumbling dangerously in its lowest registers.

"What, sir?" she asked innocently.

"Riddle knew exactly bugger-all about effective coercion," he said with a groan, and swept her into his arms and carried her through the door in the back of his office to his quarters.

---

Most of the professorial miscreants of Hogwarts crept into the Great Hall by lunch time. The relatively abstemious Quill and hardy souls McGonagall and Flitwick had managed to stagger in to breakfast to maintain appearances before the students. Otherwise their pact to get well and truly pissed together had left most of the crew unsuited to bipedal locomotion before 11:00 a.m.

"Anybody know if that antisocial bastard in the dungeon has any Hangover Relief potion?" Hooch whined weakly.

"Sweet Circe, Rolanda. Whatever did Severus do to you to warrant such an epithet?" Albus asked mildly.

"Nothing...that's probably why she's upset. He was so wound up in his 'uptight monastic of the castle' persona last night that he didn't even have the common courtesy to get blitzed in a nice, comradely fashion with the rest of us," Aurora grouched.

"Now, now, not everyone's idea of a good time is getting blind drunk," Quill admonished gently.

"Just because you're ever so chipper this morning," Rolanda muttered. "Bloody 'We can get our arses out of bed for breakfast' Ravensclaws."

"Oh, go to Poppy for something and quit tormenting the whole table," Filius snapped irritably. Really, insulting his house was uncalled for. Bloody 'can't hold my liquor despite the unfortunate surname Hooch' Gryffindor!

"Poppy's out," she complained.

"There are children present," Albus warned. "I suggest you take your meals in the staff room or your quarters unless you can conduct yourselves with more propriety."

Minerva (part of the 'I showed up to breakfast, damn it' brigade) frowned. "Let's think on this a wee moment, friends... if Severus didn't stay out all night, and wasn't here for breakfast, where is he?"

"If he were a mate, he'd be brewing Hangover Relief potion," Hooch moaned, to no sympathy whatsoever.

Had Remus been present he would have mentioned seeing Severus that morning and no one would have thought any more of it, except to speculate on whom, exactly, the Potions master had been getting disheveled with last night. But since the weary Defense professor was currently sleeping the sleep of the slightly bewildered, he was in no position to provide alibis, truthful or otherwise.

"Don't you remember, Minerva? He had a detention to supervise this morning," Flitwick said with a yawn.

Minerva looked from Albus to Filius, still feeling uneasy. "Oh, aye. With Miss..." Her face froze. "What did Mr. Chance say about that spell getting people what they needed?"

Quill's report on last night's activities and Dumbledore's own extensive time spent with the Sorting Spell caused something to click in his mind. His normally cheery visage suddenly went rather wan. "Minerva... a word with you in private, if you don't mind?"

"All I know is, for years we've been saying that wizard needs to get..."

Albus and Minerva didn't wait to hear the end of Sprout's sentence. They shoved back from the table as one in a flurry of fluttering robes and chair legs screeching on the paving stones, and headed off to the dungeons.

Quill's face collapsed into a series of disbelieving wrinkles. "Oh, shite, Severus lad...you didn't...crap, you did..." With a spryness that indicated she was, indeed, keeping in shape, Clara hustled off after Albus and Minerva.

Down amidst the student tables, Harry frowned at the exchange between professors, which he had been unable to hear, and their behavior, which he couldn't interpret.

"What do you think *all that* was about?" he asked Ginny...who sat snuggled against Harry even while trying to soothe Draco's slightly jealous glances by mouthing endearments across the room at him.

Before she could voice her own puzzlement, Ron walked up with Luna and interrupted. "Where've you two been? And has anyone seen Hermione yet today?"

---

They drifted off to sleep...for just a minute or two, really. That's what it felt like. Except when Hermione's eyes drifted open, she found herself staring at a clock that read 'almost lunch time.'

"Severus, wake up," she urged him. He was like dead weight pushing her into the mattress. If he nuzzled any deeper between her breasts he'd start burrowing in.

"Mmmm," he hummed happily, nibbling his way up her neck for another long kiss.

It took a while for the liquefaction of Hermione's brain to subside once he came up for air. "It's lunchtime," she said hazily, needing a moment to recall why this was important.

He recognized that he was being asked something relating to the mouth, and promptly concluded it must pertain to kissing this angelic creature with the soft, fluffy halo once more. So he did, settling himself onto his back as he did so and pulling her atop him in a viselike embrace.

Being squished like a human teddy bear lent remarkable clarity to Hermione's thought processes. They had to get dressed and present a more teacher-student appropriate appearance...and quickly. However, getting Severus' attention for anything but another snog was proving futile. She tried a different tack. "The Headmaster is going to kill you!"

"Can't," he reasoned cheerfully. "I'm already dead. This is heaven, isn't it?"

*Oh, God,* she thought frantically. *This must have been what happened to Merlin. If a wizard waits too long for his first shag, it erases his entire personality.*

"Name the uses of dragon's blood," she snapped.

This seemed to cause something to click. He began rattling off the answer, and by number five, he noticed the clock. "Shite! I'm going to become the next teaching ghost of Hogwarts."

"Not if we get dressed, and quickly," Hermione said, grabbing her jumper and tossing him a shirt. Severus covered it with his teaching robes, since almost half the bottom buttons were popped off, and hoped he wasn't as flushed and bright eyed as she was. It would be a dead giveaway.

Hermione tried to get back into her jeans, hoping the sleepy, pleasantly dazed expression would wear off his face before anyone else could see him. They'd either know what had happened straight off or send him to Poppy to be tested for mind-altering substances.

---

"Wait a moment, Minerva, Albus," Clara cautioned. "Let's not burst in there like Aurors executing a raid."

"We can wait for you to catch your breath..." Minerva began, tight-lipped.

Quill narrowed her eyes at Dumbledore. 'Altai's,' she mouthed at him.

Albus stared at Clara several long, significant moments. Finally, he addressed Minerva. "That is not the point. Whatever has or hasn't happened in there, I don't want a scene. We aren't saving a helpless child from a practiced lecher, nor dealing with the aftermath of a scheming young tart pursuing a lonely and susceptible man. They're both intelligent adults who've spent the better part of their lives involved in a very ugly struggle, with little opportunity to explore the more pleasant side of life. Any disciplinary action that needs to be taken will be discreet and sensible."

"I talked to Severus on the way home last night. He's been under a terribly strain lately," Clara asserted gravely. "And Miss Granger is such a very diligent student. It's entirely possible they may have had a slight emotional outburst. Pressure, you know. Not the sort of thing that would happen under normal circumstances."

Minerva was plainly trying not to let the arguments move her, though Quill's words kept bringing to mind pictures of Hermione as a skinny, fuzzy little first year bent under the weight of an overloaded book bag...reminiscent of Severus thirty years before, who had looked all the more pitiful for being underfed. "All right, we'll do it your way," she said resignedly, looking at the Headmaster.

"I daresay we will," he retorted. "After all, I haven't retired yet."

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Hermione opened the door to find herself face to face with Headmaster Dumbledore and Professor McGonagall. She scarcely noticed Professor Quill walking by behind them...reading, as usual.

"How fortunate we've found you here, Miss Granger," Dumbledore said as he took in her appearance. Oh, dear... the look in her eyes was fairly unmistakable, though a look alone did not a conviction make. "Professor McGonagall would like to speak with you."

Dumbledore brushed past her into the office, and there was nothing she could do about it. She only hoped Severus *must try to think Professor Snape, mustn't slip up if, no, when Professor McGonagall starts asking questions..* had heard the Headmaster's voice and was braced for his arrival.

Snape had heard and scrambled to present the cool, implacable front afforded by Occlumency. That is, until he saw the expression on Dumbledore's face, an expression he'd only seen one other time.

He was about to do as he had done on that occasion...namely, sink to his knees and beg leniency, though not for himself, this time...when Albus stopped him with a word.

"Have a seat, Severus."

There was no hiding anything at this point. He couldn't have used Occlumency if he'd tried, though one look at Hermione and he could have managed a truly spectacular Patronus. And somehow, in his inimitable fashion, Dumbledore saw it all.

"Severus, you've never sought proper assistance in dealing with the terrible strain of the past few years. I know it wasn't really an option before, but now I am going to have to insist that you immediately take steps to deal with your mental and emotional health. It seems clear to me that you have just experienced an inappropriate emotional outburst, and will report to infirmary promptly. You should be able to resume your duties Monday, but I must warn you: any repeat of today's *outburst* before Poppy certifies you completely fit again, and I will be obliged to take much stronger action. **Disciplinary** action."

There was no way he didn't know. The old man knew everything. He probably knew about the ruler. And yet he was sending him to the Poppy instead of presenting him with the business end of his wand.

"Thank you, sir. I assure you, there will be no more incidents of this nature," Snape finally managed quietly.

"I wouldn't fret about it too much, my boy. I believe I can guarantee that Poppy will sign off on your clean bill of mental health the morning the current seventh years

graduate," Albus said. He wasn't twinkling, but his expression was optimistic as well as admonishing.

Any repeats before Poppy certified him fit... the morning of graduation?

Severus had a really odd look on his face as Dumbledore escorted him to the door and nudged him in the direction of the infirmary. It was partially that expression which had saved him. Albus could recognize the expression of someone who'd truly lost it.

In more than one sense.

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Professor McGonagall knew that look.

It was a combination of the falsely contrite 'I'm going to try to save someone else by confessing to something implausible' expression she'd seen on Miss Granger during the first year Troll incident and an 'I've just been on cloud nine and only half come down' sort of look. Together, they comprised a good approximation of the patented Gryffindor Lioness expression of possessiveness, and she'd a fair idea of whom, exactly, Miss Granger had staked her claim to.

"Let's talk while we're walking, shall we?" the professor suggested. This was going to be more awkward than she thought.

But before Minerva could attack or Hermione defend, they bumped into Professor Quill. Almost literally.

"Oh, good afternoon, Professor McGonagall, Miss Granger. Such a coincidence! I was just thinking of you...Miss Granger, that is. I suppose you've already made your plans for after graduation, haven't you? You're quite the promising Ancient Runes student, and I've had it in mind to take an apprentice. I might want to retire someday, you know," she said cheerily.

McGonagall narrowed her eyes at Quill. This was an almost Albus-like tactic.

"I have put in applications at the Ministry, pending my N.E.W.T.s," Hermione said hesitantly. "Nothing I've got my heart set on, though." Ancient Runes were all very interesting, but she hadn't quite the knack for translation that made her want to do it for a living. Still, teaching wasn't an unappealing thought, especially since she'd be living at the castle...

"That's remarkable, Professor Quill," Minerva piped up, subtly shaking her head slightly at her colleague from over Miss Granger's shoulder. "I was just about to tell Miss Granger that I've been seriously considering the need to train a replacement Transfiguration Professor. After all, Albus has been talking about retirement, and it would be nice to know I have someone ready to take my place, once I've taken his."

Hermione was gobsmacked. Not that Professor McGonagall had never hinted at the idea she'd make a fine apprentice, but this was not at all where she'd thought the conversation would be going. Was it really going to be that easy?

"Miss Granger, perhaps I should make myself more clear. Are you interested in my offer of an apprenticeship?" McGonagall asked pointedly, when the only response her earlier statement yielded was rapid blinking.

"Of course, Professor McGonagall!"

"Then, you must conduct yourself especially well these last few months of the term. I know that N.E.W.T.s present a great deal of stress, but there is no excuse for unbecoming conduct. After all, should you need receive another detention *such as today's*, I would be forced to conclude you aren't proper apprentice material." Minerva gave her a very sharp look, indeed.

"Perhaps Miss Granger should see Madam Pomfrey periodically over the next few months...just to ensure that her emotional well-being isn't in jeopardy from the strain and whatnot," Quill suggested mildly. She had a slightly resigned look on her face, but otherwise seemed unperturbed at having missed out on an apprentice.

So it wasn't going to be that easy. Obviously, they had some clue what was going on and weren't going to let it be repeated during the school year. Hermione sighed inwardly, wondering if Se...Professor Snape...would be willing to arrange a meeting at some point in the summer. Preferably sooner rather than later.

"Yes, I do believe you should see Madam Pomfrey today," Minerva said decisively. "And mind what I said, if you're in earnest about accepting my offer."

"Certainly, Professor," Hermione promised solemnly. After all, she'd at least have her chance come autumn...assuming Professor Snape survived his encounter with the Headmaster.

"Once you are living in the castle as an apprentice, you will be obliged to do as Professor McGonagall bids, of course. Though you will have some days and evenings to yourself, between your lessons and your share of rounds and whatnot... Being a mature witch of good judgment, I'm sure you will find good company and suitable diversion during your free time," Quill said cheerily from behind her book.

Hermione decided it was better for her sanity if she convinced herself that Professor Quill hadn't winked when she said that.

Minerva decided to help Clara find an apprentice so the poor old girl could retire before going altogether barmy.

---

Professor Quill was staring into the pages of her latest tome/walnut crusher as Severus wandered by on his way to his mandatory 'checkup.' Of course, her peripheral vision remained excellent, as always.

"Might want to try to tone down that silly grin, Severus dear," she said mildly. "The students will think you've been letting the fumes get to you."

"You're going to blow your cover, Clara," he replied, following her advice.

"Not to anyone but you. Congratulations, by the way. Just one word of warning..."

"What would that be?"

"With regards to Gryffindors...once you turn them on, you can forget about turning them off."

Severus couldn't stop grinning all the way to the infirmary.

---

There was no trace of anything but a perfectly respectful student and professor as Miss Granger crossed paths with Professor Snape after a quick visit to Madam Pomfrey.

"Good day, sir. I hope you are well."

"Good day, Miss Granger. I'm afraid it appears I've gone a bit around the bend."

"What a coincidence."

"The Headmaster assures me I'll be back to normal by graduation day this year."

"The coincidences continue to accrue, Professor."

"Indeed."

"I'll be staying at the castle one week on from the end of the term. Professor McGonagall would like me to do my share towards closing up the school for the summer and select my rooms for next year... when I start my Transfiguration apprenticeship."

"Congratulations are in order, then. May I be so bold as to suggest we celebrate your new job... say, the evening after you are officially no longer a student here?"

"Yes, I think that would be entirely appropriate. Especially since we'll both be 'cured' by then."

"What are your plans for summer?"

"Well, my parents have scarcely seen me since the summer before last. Since I'll be returning here this autumn, I really think I should spend it with them."

"Perfectly reasonable. But I'm afraid it shows up the fact that I have, indeed, gone a bit mad."

"How so?"

"This will be the first summer in about sixteen years that will be entirely too long for my liking."

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Author's Notes:

You have no idea how long (or how much) I agonized over the 'Will they or won't they?' question. I've never written anything student-teacher before and very nearly had Severus successfully send Hermione away. Finally, my husband looked over my shoulder at the screen and said, "She's of age, for crying out loud, and she's drooling all over him. Just put them out of their misery already!" (I think there was an implied 'especially him!' at the end of that.)

So, you can thank my man for the fact that you didn't have to wait for the epilogue (and graduation) those sillies to get together. Or blame him, if it was so silly for you.

## Epilogue: Dumbledore Saw It, Feigned Barminess, and It Was Good

*Chapter 9 of 9*

Just tidying up a little before leaving Hogwarts. Albus insisted, citing that: (a) his school was borrowed without his permission, (b) his professors and students were unduly agitated by this little exercise, and (c) he didn't want to turn the place over to Minerva looking like a tip, because (d) he fully intends to retire shortly on account of he's too old for this malarkey.

Disclaimer: Do you think that, if the characters could vote on who was to own them, they'd choose me? No, I didn't really think so.

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Epilogue: Dumbledore Saw It, Feigned Barminess, and It Was Good

Graduation that year was rather interesting...to say the least.

Madam Hooch had been prevailed upon to start giving Draco lessons as soon as N.E.W.T.s were over, on the technicality that, while still more or less the school's responsibility, their marks had already been decided and they were therefore no longer students. They respected her need for a certain level of discretion. Veneramorphmagi may not be explicitly rejected by the Wizarding world, but they weren't exactly widely admired and accepted, either.

The evening before the graduation ceremony, Harry hustled Ginny into the Head Girl's room, which Hermione would not be occupying for some time due to helping Professor McGonagall Transfigure chairs. At the door, he conjured a silk blindfold and put it on her.

"Harry, are you going to tell me what's going on here?" Ginny asked, deliberately feeling at some sensitive spots as she pretended to look for his guiding hand.

"No, my lovely...I'm going to show you," he whispered, carefully directing her questing fingers upward until she found another face. That hair felt familiar.

"Hello, Draco," she said, smiling and trying to peek out from under the blindfold. Harry tapped her admonishingly on the head and started directing her hand again.

"Keep guessing," Harry said, his voice rich in amusement. Ginny heard a familiar giggle as her hands slid downward to touch... oh, my...

She gasped, and ripped off the blindfold. There was... well, it was sort of Draco. Except for the breasts.

"Hooch assured me I'm good to go," he...she?...said in a slightly more feathery version of her usual voice. "Harry was such a love...he bought me these in commemoration of my first transformation," *she* continued, smiling and turning proudly to model the green silk demi-bra, thong with pearl back, and matching suspender belt, which held up a very flattering pair of sheer gray stockings on her slender legs.

Ginny sidled up to 'Miss' Malfoy slowly, unable to suppress her anticipatory grin. "Just one more thing you need, gorgeous," she said, pulling a tube of lipstick from her pocket. Draco extended her lips in a pretty pout, and Ginny stroked the color on. "Perfect," she breathed, and wasted no further time pulling her blonde paramour into a kiss.

Draco sighed as she allowed Ginny to steer her towards the bed. "How much time do we have before we have to leave the room?" she asked Harry anxiously, gray eyes devouring the sight of Ginny's fingers rapidly unbuttoning her blouse.

"About two hours, by my calculations. Don't worry, I've warded the corridor leading to this point...there'll be time to make a quick change, if necessary," he quipped. It was at least rumored by now that the three of them were more than just friends, but they hadn't yet decided how open to be about Draco's abilities.

"You know, we still haven't decided whose date I am, officially," Ginny reminded them as she began to explore the altered curves of Draco's body. Hmm... it might be easy to be jealous of her more slender figure, except that Ginny noted she still had the fuller breasts.

"It depends... is Mr. Malfoy or 'Miss' Malfoy attending the ball?" Harry teased.

"You're graduating too, lover... why are we the ones getting the present? Don't you want to join us?" Draco asked Harry as Ginny pushed her back against the pillows.

"Perhaps later, pet... For now, I think it will be present enough to watch," he answered, sprawling casually over the room's single chair and propping his dark head on his hand. In scant moments, his smile grew substantially wider. The room was apparently getting warm; never taking his eyes from the spectacle on the bed, he loosened his tie and undid the first two buttons on his shirt.

Yes... watching was very, very good.

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Hermione and Severus did not attempt to maneuver around any technicalities. They conducted themselves perfectly, though with a distinct reduction of irritability that contributed to speculation as surely as suspicious conduct would have. The day of graduation, they dutifully received their clean bills of health from Madam Pomfrey (who was still in the dark as to what Albus and Minerva were about, and decided she'd prefer to remain that way) and passed the time in the same facsimile of cool restraint that had seen them through the rest of the school year.

Hermione even managed to feign mild disappointment that her parents couldn't stay for the entire graduation ball. Secretly, she decided the questions would be a bit less awkward if she waited until she and Severus were officially colleagues (and officially had a relationship) before making any sort of announcements.

For the present, she would be content to stand as close to him as possible in a semi-private corner, talking. It was a passable way to wait for an opportunity to steal away into a very private corner for other activities.

"I think I need my eyesight checked. Please tell me that's not what I think it is," she begged in disbelief.

"I presume you are referencing...I can't believe how difficult it is to say this...Mr. Potter with Miss Weasley on one arm, and Mr. Malfoy on the other?"

"In coordinating dress robes, no less."

"Probably Draco's idea."

"Kinky little bastard."

"I was talking about the robes. Look at their faces...it's obvious Potter runs the show, and probably instigated it."

"That isn't makeup he's wearing, is it?" Hermione wasn't certain why she was shocked at Draco apparently wearing more cosmetics than she even owned.

"As for makeup, you obviously haven't noticed, but Draco has always used Cosmetic Charms and potions to disguise the odd blemish. I shouldn't wonder if he prepares his own...Merlin knows he's adept at it."

"I never realized he actually *earned* high marks in your class."

"Some days, more so than you, my dear. You only had Longbottom to rescue. He had to manage Crabbe, Goyle, and sometimes Parkinson."

Harry whispered something in Ginny's ear, then Draco's. It was apparently amusing, as they both snuggled against him, giggling.

"Now I wish there really was something wrong with my eyes."

"At least this means we don't have to worry about attracting any attention if we slow dance. I think the riot resulting from the dunderheads finally catching on to what those three are up to will prove an adequate diversion."

"Hmm. How long before we can slip out of here and exercise our restored mental health?"

"Far too long. In the meantime, may I have this dance?"

---

Molly Weasley wasn't beside herself, but that was only because she was desperately pretending Draco wasn't as attached to Harry's left arm as Ginny was to his right. She had evidently decided the best way to do this was to address Harry only, desperately maintaining eye contact as if she hoped that somewhere in those bemused emerald eyes there would be a charmed message board reading, 'Sorry, Mrs. Weasley, this was all a joke in very questionable taste.'

"Mum, you do realize Draco's not invisible, and we're ALL very happy," Ginny said distinctly.

Molly prattled on faster, pretending very hard not to hear her daughter. Draco caught Ginny's eye and shook his head in amusement.

"Would it help to know just how much we have in common?" Draco said in her feathery girl voice. As his curves subtly changed, Harry and Ginny finally appreciated just why so much care had gone into tailoring their coordinating robes.

Arthur grabbed a suddenly weak-kneed Molly around the waist and found her a chair, glaring and shaking his head at the unlikely trio as he hurried to fetch her something to drink. It wasn't worth trying to make her face reality. He couldn't help but think it was just as well they'd only one daughter, and that their sons weren't subject to change without notice. Women remained, in his estimation, sources of infinite bewilderment.

"Nice job unleashing that son of yours...and I use the term 'son' loosely...on my family." Arthur addressed Lucius in a steely tone, stopping him cold in his approach to the happy trio.

"Do you think I approve of this *appalling* situation?" Lucius seethed. "If that freakish, disrespectful spawn of mine thinks he's going to inherit after debasing himself with..."

"Before you do anything irrevocable, Lucius, there's something you need to know." Narcissa proceeded to take her husband aside and enlighten him as to where, precisely, their boy had acquired his predisposition.

Lucius not only reconsidered his decision to disinherit Draco, but started spending Friday nights at home.

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"Didn't Minerva teach you how to dance?"

"Of course."

"I'm quite certain that's NOT where you put your hands, Miss Granger."

"Shall I move them, Professor?"

"Gods, no."

"Ooh, an exhibitionist... so, you like being felt up at a dance?"

"A long-unfulfilled fantasy of mine...careful, or you'll end up involved in another longstanding fantasy."

"What might that be?"

"Sneaking out of a dance to have a quick shag behind the statue of Barnabas the Barmy."

"And that's supposed to encourage me to be careful?"

---

"What is this, 'Snog-a-Slytherin' day?" Ron asked mildly. Harry and Ginny were pleasantly surprised at his lack of rancor.

The truth was, once Ron had realized that Harry and his little sister were doing something...he'd Obliviate himself rather than know for certain exactly what...with Malfoy, he had decided to resign himself to it. In fact, it would probably work to his advantage. Mum had never quite forgiven Bill for marrying Fleur, Charlie for turning out to be a pooker, Percy for being an unmitigated prat, or Fred and George for dropping out of school.

With Ginny on the outs and Harry responsible for it, he was now officially her favorite child.

"If you're looking for one of your own, I'd stay away from Pansy. She doesn't believe in playing well with more than one other," Draco advised with a grin.

Ron favored that with an undignified yet more or less appropriate gagging sound. "I was talking about you three attached at the hip and Hermione grabbing Snape's arse under his robes."

"What!" Draco exclaimed, straining to look over the tall redhead's shoulder. Sure enough, Granger was doing a very poor job of disguising the fact she was groping the professor rather thoroughly while they danced, and Snape was doing an equally poor job of not looking almost cross-eyed with pleasure.

"Jealous?" Harry asked Draco with a smirk. Under other circumstances, he would have been disturbed at this turn of events; considering whom he was shagging, he decided tolerance was the better part of not being a major hypocrite.

"Of which one?" Luna whispered earnestly to Ron, who just shook his head.

"No, handsome. I'm annoyed that Bulstrode wins the pool," Draco pouted appealingly. "We all wondered why Snape's been in such a good mood lately. What are you grinning about, you smug little spitfire?" he turned his remarks to Ginny.

With a triumphant gleam in her eyes, she replied, "I won *our* pool as to why Hermione was so chipper."

Ron, turned to Luna. "Luna, honey, I won't be able to afford a ring for you until my Auror pay kicks in... but will you marry me?"

Luna smiled happily, reflecting Ron had been easier to snag than she had hoped. "Of course! But why ask now?"

"Well, if I don't hurry to stake my claim on a catch like you, someone else will snap you up. After all, you're plainly the sanest one of the lot," he reasoned.

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"Hey, Granger."

"Hi, Bulstrode." Hermione found that Millicent Bulstrode's voice no longer made her flinch, though she would never quite consider those 'dulcet tones.' She didn't even feel the need to glance around the room for Severus, in case she needed backup.

"Listen, I just wanted to congratulate you. It's quite a coup, you know. Seducing a professor is a major power play and you didn't even *need* to," she remarked approvingly.

In truth, she should have been highly irked as a matter of form at a Gryffindor snagging a Slytherin professor, even though no members of his own House had any particular interest in him. However, seeing as how he'd ended the lockdown of the dormitories as soon as his mood improved, Hermione's little accidental seduction made her appreciated rather than otherwise by the silver and green contingent.

"Thank you. Um, while we're on the topic, how is Goyle?"

Millicent smiled broadly and winked. "Not the brightest wand on the shelf, but still one of the longest."

*Note to self: Don't give Bulstrode the opportunity to talk about her love life. Ever.* Hermione thought while trying to refrain from gagging.

Millicent hadn't noticed fortunately, as she had cast an appraising eye over Snape. "He's a bit on the thin side for my tastes, but horses for courses and all that. Speaking of which, good thing they hired Weasley to teach Care of Magical Creatures this year. Otherwise it's a dead cert I'd never have gotten my license to raise Granians. My Grand-Uncle promised one of his best studs to whichever of his nieces or nephews was licensed first, and I've won out. Greg's got the land, and I've had a bit of good luck with a wager...enough to buy two decent broodmares to start with. So, what are you doing now that you're out of here?"

"Actually, I'm not out of here...I'm apprenticing with Professor McGonagall, to replace her as Transfiguration Mistress."

"You sly thing... So, the first years can thank you for the fact that Potions will only be misery instead of pure hell next year." With that, much to Hermione's relief, Millicent smirked at her and sauntered off to start publicly molesting Greg again.

---

Neville had steeled himself to face his grandmother with Padma. He'd written Gran just before graduation, informing her in no uncertain terms that he had met a witch from a respectable pureblood family and had every intention of marrying her. He only mentioned Padma's name once, and didn't elaborate on its origin. Even Anglo-Norman bloodlines like the Malfoy's were considered a bit foreign by Augusta's standards, and if this was going to turn into a confrontation, he preferred it to happen before a roomful of people. That way, Gran would probably refrain from doing anything for which he'd be obliged to disarm her.

"Gran, I'd like you to meet..."

"Neville, is this your young lady?" Augusta Longbottom interrupted.

"Yes, Gran," he said, tensing for an argument. "Her name is Padma Patil. You recall, her twin sister Parvati is in Gryffindor? Padma, this is my grandmother..."

"And she is a witch? A proper witch?" Augusta asked worriedly.

"Yes, from Ravenclaw, graduated with honors if you noticed," Neville explained, mystified at his grandmother's reactions.

"Welcome to the family, dear!" Augusta exclaimed happily, and gathered the two shocked sweethearts into an enthusiastic embrace.

Augusta really wouldn't have disowned her only grandson for his choice in witches, though she probably would have treated the girl quite formally for a year or two as a

matter of appearances. After all, the Longbottoms were one of the most absolutely English Wizarding families, with the most exotic addition to the bloodline being a warlock from Northern Ireland about a century ago.

After seeing that Potter-Weasley-Malfoy abomination, she was just relieved that Neville fancied witches exclusively.

---

"Those aren't..." Severus trailed off breathily.

"Aren't what, my dear professor? You wouldn't be referring to my... feathers, would you?" she asked, fingering the elaborate clip in her hair from which several slender plumes trailed.

"Jobberknoll feathers, if I'm not mistaken."

"Absolutely... after all, they're going to be getting at the truth tonight, in the sense of provoking uncensored reactions. I'm amazed it took you this long to notice."

"Well, they aren't the largest feathers, are they? The poor things are hard-pressed to hold their own against that mane," he chided silkily, stroking the semi-tamed ringlets openly. Now was looking like a good time to toss restraint into the nearest bin.

"Be a good little Potions master, or I won't let the pretty plumes come out to play with you," she teased in return.

"Don't toy with me, you precocious bundle of cheek, else I won't give you your graduation present." He guided her fingertips carefully into the pocket of his robe, just deep enough to feel the soft, filmy contents.

Hermione shivered with delight. "Oooh... It's silk. I assume it's purple?" she asked, barely able to contain the excitement in her voice.

"Of course," he purred.

"Well, that certainly answers the question of where my 'Collected Modern Erotica: Volume II' went," she mused.

"You really should be more careful as to which books you let slip from your book bag," he agreed. "Particularly when you insist on leaving markers between the pertinent pages and underscoring all your favorite passages." Of course, he didn't believe for a minute that she'd accidentally dropped that book in his classroom, any more than she'd expected him to.

They discreetly slipped away to the dungeons for a long overdue appointment with a purple silk scarf and some feathers.

---

"What the hell is going on here?" Rufus Scrimgeour confronted Albus in a quiet corner of the Great Hall turned ballroom. Of course, he could have used a Sonorous Spell and addressed him while standing on the High Table, and it might have proven only a minor distraction from the various romantic combinations playing themselves out throughout the room.

"Why, Rufus, I do believe it's the Graduation Ball," Dumbledore said, beaming his best 'aren't I a charmingly barmy old fellow' smile at the Minister of Magic.

"Drop the 'Dumb-ble-dore act," Scrimgeour growled. "I want to know who incited this... *'sexual revolution'*?"

"It's been a good thirty years since *the* sexual revolution," Hooch muttered to Sinistra. "And by the looks of him, he missed out."

Aurora snorted into her drink, but otherwise refused to comment. Rolanda could really be too much at times.

"Oh, yes, I had entirely forgotten to thank you for the Ministry mandate to teach classes on Reproductive Health this term. You know, Madam Pomfrey is delighted at how much less fearful of their natural body functions the young girls are, and how seriously our adult students are taking their responsibilities to prevent unintended pregnancies and the spread of unmentionable ailments." If anything, the Headmaster's smile grew wider.

"Ministry Mandate?" Anyone noticing Scrimgeour's paleness at that moment might have found *The Quibbler's* vampire conspiracy articles a bit more interesting. Albus reflected that Rufus may have been savvier and more polished than Cornelius had been, but he was still in no danger of breaking the apparent mandatory intelligence cap for high level bureaucrats.

"Good, you remember it! Although I agree wholeheartedly with the revised order...excising the more detailed supplemental materials from future classes. The texts are sufficient, without all that advanced information for the professors to convey."

"If you're looking for the source of that order, I think you would do well to address the fellow who heads the Department of Education and Certification," Minerva interposed. "He signed off on the original paperwork, after all, and he's taken credit for the program."

By sometime tomorrow, a low-level bureaucratic haunt was going to be very happy.

"What about them?" he asked, with a sharp look at three very famous (or infamous) students sitting just a little too close for plain chumminess. Meanwhile, he was mentally calculating just how much heat he could deflect onto the head of the Department of Education and Certification, and thanking all and sundry otherworldly powers that the school had been closed for the year prior and thus, all parties involved were of age and fully responsible for their own actions.

"Oh, yes... well, being such diligent students in all respects, of course they did independent research," Dumbledore replied airily.

"Of course... yes, it was entirely their idea. Not even inspired by anything related to the Ministry or the school. After all, we're talking about some popular war-heroes here... hmm, under significant stress as well. Likely just blowing off steam." Scrimgeour walked away muttering, trying out different statements useful for spinning the situation and no doubt devising some plot by which he could turn it to his advantage.

"Minerva," Albus said tiredly as soon as Scrimgeour was out of earshot, "you have exactly two years to train Miss Granger to replace you. I have an overdue appointment with a lovely little island in the Mediterranean where the average temperature is so warm, I need never think of socks."

Minerva was quite through being shocked, at least for the foreseeable future. "I'll try...but if it has to be three years, can I make it up to you by providing regular shipments of spiked Pepper Imps?"

"Throw in Rum Jelly Slugs and a mature, well-rounded lady with a penchant for distinguished, bearded wizards, and that will be acceptable."

"Deal on the slugs, but don't expect too much on the other half of that," Minerva retorted.

"Don't underestimate his appeal, Minerva, dear," Clara whispered as she walked by. As McGonagall looked on, Quill raised an eyebrow at Dumbledore, who took her hand and raised it to his lips.

Correction: Minerva could be shocked at least once more tonight.

---

"Miss Lovegood, so nice to see you this evening! Are you enjoying the ball?" Professor Quill asked genially.

"Oh yes, Professor," she replied happily. "Ron proposed to me tonight!"

"Well, congratulations are in order, my dear," Quill replied, her tone unchanging but her eyes narrowing a little. "What sort of plans have you made for your future?"

"He is training to be an Auror, and I haven't really decided yet, though I do love writing."

"You are quite a good writer, Miss Lovegood, not to mention one of my best students. Your unique manner of thinking makes you ideally suited to arriving at the sort of insights that are necessary to translate lost languages. Have you ever considered teaching?"

"Not really... but now that I think of it, I really do enjoy being around children. Once I've been teaching long enough, they'll all seem like children to me, won't they?" Luna asked brightly.

"It happens sooner than you think," Quill replied, her lips quirking in a creased grin. "If you're still interested in the idea and do well enough on your N.E.W.T.s, would you consider being my apprentice?"

"It would be an honor, Professor Quill! But I was hoping to have a fair-sized family, at least three children. Will it be hard to manage, what with teaching?"

"Life is hard to manage, my dear. You just keep your man in line, and he'll prove to be a help in that. Are you quite sure he's good husband and father material, then?"

"Certainly. I admit, he hasn't got any more tact than a Jarvey, but he has a good heart. And he's really not that hard to manage."

"Just so you know what you're getting into, from the first," Quill said gently. "Where is the lad? I'd like to congratulate him on his good judgment in this matter."

Luna pointed him out, and Professor Quill deftly navigated the crowded room until she could interrupt his Quidditch conversation with Harry.

"Mr. Weasley, a word, if you please?" She worded it as a request, but her tone made it plain refusal wasn't an option.

"Yes, Ma'am?" *Who was she again? Oh, right, Quill...Ancient Runes*, he managed to recall.

"I understand you plan to marry Miss Lovegood. I would like to offer my congratulations...and to let you know, Miss Lovegood is to become my apprentice at the end of her seventh year. It is my intention that she shall replace me when I retire. If you interfere with her further education, her teaching career, or in any way cause her the least unhappiness, you'll have the business end of my wand to deal with! Believe me, in my day I was able to take out better than a mere Auror. Until I'm dead, my day isn't over."

Ron managed to stutter that he hadn't any notion of interfering or causing Luna unhappiness, unnerved at how the sweet old lady in front of him had suddenly turned into something rather scarier than Snape.

Satisfied with his wide-eyed reaction, she bade the shocked Mr. Weasley good evening. Luna's judgment was probably right; she had an uncanny knack for identifying worth in unlikely places. Still, it didn't hurt to put the fear of Isis in the boy.

Despite the fact that she was unable to be involved in the lives of her descendants in anything but an oblique manner, S. Clara Quill would be damned if she'd take any chances with her great-granddaughter's happiness.

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*The following academic year...*

"I'm amazed that Miss Weasley still meets with Mr. Potter and Mr....I use the title rather loosely...Malfoy every Hogsmeade weekend," Minerva remarked. She had made herself at home in Filius' office that quiet evening, enjoying the relative flexibility of not yet being Headmistress while she still could.

"Well, she's of age and not on school grounds; it's not as if we could forbid it, no matter how Molly would like us to!" Pomona chortled. "Rosie says the boys booked the Honeymoon Suite at the Three Broomsticks for every pertinent weekend until the end of the academic year, with a standing order for Flooed-in room service and triple Silencing Charms!"

"I mean I can't believe that the three of them made that arrangement in the first place, or that they're maintaining it," Minerva clarified. It was a good thing no one else had taken up Hooch's offer to discuss alternate lifestyles to that extent; otherwise they might well be looking at a sacked flying instructor and a REAL parental uprising, rather than Freddy Chance's manufactured one.

"If I were feeling uncharitable, I'd ask Sibyll if she'd seen that coming," Filius said, his overly innocent expression firmly in place.

"Thank goodness she can't bring them to the Valentine's Ball!"

"Has anyone seen Draco as a female, just out of curiosity?"

"Yes," Sprout said tersely. She and Rosmerta had a bit of a spat about that...seems 'Miss' Malfoy was quite dishy. Or was that 'the other future Mrs. Potter?"

All Pomona knew was, anyone who considered homosexuals 'confused' was dead inaccurate so long as Veneramorphmagi were around.

"Speaking of Balls, people are going to be talking about *that* Graduation Ball for years."

"I shouldn't wonder if it ends up in some future edition of *Hogwarts: A History*."

"Well, if it did, it would be in a substantially edited form, I imagine!"

"How is Molly handling it, incidentally?"

"She's on holiday."

"On holiday?"

"In Egypt. You know, the land of 'd' Nile."

Filius thought it only logical to point out to Minerva that Pomona couldn't apologize for that alarmingly bad pun until her head was Transfigured back to normal. Minerva, not willing to act with this degree of leniency, finally restored her Hufflepuff colleague's mouth and ears. She refused to change the rest of Sprout's head from Puffskein form until she promised to think twice about such atrocious wordplay from now on.

"Filius!" Professor Vector exclaimed at the door of Professor Flitwick's office, startling the three happy gossips within. She had opted to keep her maiden name at work, though asking after Freddy was now an acceptable conversation starter. (Of course, her response was still usually accompanied by a bit of ducking and blushing.)

"Yes, Septima, dear?" he asked, peering between Minerva and Pomona as they glanced over the rims of their drinks at their colleague. It had been some time since Septima had encountered an emergency worthy of alerting her old Head of House during her rounds.



"I'm afraid I've caught a couple in a most indelicate situation," she said gravely...then spoiled the effect by giggling uncontrollably.

"The same offenders *again*?" Filius queried in exaggerated dismay.

"They're simply incorrigible," she gasped out amid helpless laughter.

Minerva slugged back the rest of her Gillywater and drew herself up imposingly. "It's no laughing matter, my friends," she intoned, feigning gravity far better than Septima, though her lips twitched. "One of my Gryffindors is proving to be a hopeless scofflaw, and I simply cannot tolerate further incidents of this nature!" She stalked off, wand drawn, in the direction Professor Vector indicated.

Pomona finished her stout and plonked the glass down on the desk. "They never learn, do they?" she asked rhetorically.

"Not in my experience," Filius sighed. "Shall we watch?"

"Wouldn't miss it for all the Chomping Cabbages in China." Sprout laughed, and they hurried after Minerva.

Muffled moans and whimpers told the professors the miscreants were near. Minerva wordlessly Transfigured a handy urn into a bucket of water, to which Filius helpfully added a Cooling Charm, insuring it was nice and icy, just before she flung it into the shadowed alcove. For good measure, Pomona shouted, "Oi! Get a room, you two!"

A feminine shriek and several very masculine curses met their ears. Still defiantly clinging to each other, a dripping Professor Snape and Transfiguration Apprentice Granger emerged from behind the statue.

"Taking lessons from Peeves, Minerva?" Severus asked icily...to match the water soaking him. He pulled Hermione tightly against his chest, hiding her drenched front. He didn't care if all the persons looking on were either already spoken for or not thusly inclined; he wasn't about to share the lovely view of wet fabric clinging to his witch's delectable nipples.

"A Wizard ought to be at least sixty before reverting to teenaged behavior, Severus," Minerva countered. "Listen to Pomona and get yourselves into a respectable bed."

"It's not as if we were in the street where we might scare the Thestrals," he retorted, sending Flitwick off in a gale of merriment. That expression already had a long, gray beard when Filius was a little lad playing Gobstones on a rug in the Ravenclaw common room.

Hermione giggled, slightly abashed, as she employed the appropriate charms to dry them. "Or make them jealous," she added, giving Severus a significant look from under her eyelashes.

"On that note, good night," he said hastily, sweeping his cloak around Hermione and whisking her off down the corridor.

"What would you care to wager they'll be pawing each other all the way back to the dungeons?" Flitwick asked, shaking his head.

"It's not worth wagering on a certainty. You can't offer better than a Knut to the Galleon, with the odds!" Pomona joked.

"Some people's children," Minerva quipped, glancing over her shoulder one last time. Giggling could be heard clearly from behind a very vigorously moving cloak as the couple moved unsteadily towards what were, effectively, 'their' quarters in the dungeon.

Back in Filius' office, the three professors had one more round before turning in.

"I swear, those two have decided to embark on an early second adolescence," Filius chuckled.

"More like a belated first," Minerva said fondly. "But we simply can't excuse them altogether. For their indiscretions, I do believe they should be made to teach 'Reproductive Health' to the fifth years, next time around."

"Hear, hear! To 'Sex Ed,'" Pomona said enthusiastically, and they raised their glasses high.

FIN

*Author's Note:*

My deepest thanks to LariLee, who held on to this rollercoaster ride until the very end. She is an absolute jewel!

The ride is over, folks--please check around your seat for personal belongings before exiting the story, and have a great day (or night, where applicable.) Thank you all for the lovely reviews! (For those who haven't reviewed, thank you for stopping by and having a read-through! Hopefully you haven't been too traumatized by all this...)

Finally, thanks to all who have taken up the Sex Ed Challenge gauntlet! Voting starts August 26th and closes September 4th at Potter Place, so read the stories and make your choice. :-)