

What about the Birds and the Bees?

by DawnEB

The staff of Hogwarts are introduced to some changes in both the curriculum and school administration.

Staff Meeting

Chapter 1 of 3

The staff of Hogwarts are introduced to some changes in both the curriculum and school administration.

AN: I've not read the other challenge entries (yet) so I will apologise in advance for any similarities. All I can say is deranged great minds think alike ;D

Don't own anything you recognise, don't mean any harm and not earning anything but pitying looks.

Life was looking up for Severus Snape. He hadn't expected to survive past the defeat of the Dark Lord, but he did. He certainly didn't expect to get a full pardon from the Wizengamot, even with the evidence left by Dumbledore himself about the extenuating circumstances of his death. The last thing he expected was the Order of Merlin, 1st Class (with pension) for his actions during the final battle. He strongly suspected he owed that to Colin Creevey, whose photograph of Snape, with blood pouring down his neck and carrying the barely conscious Hermione Granger against his chest, flanked by Harry Potter and Ginny Weasley on one side and Ron Weasley and Draco Malfoy on the other as they emerged from the smoke of the final conflict, was plastered on the front page of every periodical.

Following Voldemort's last ditch attack, Snape's timely intervention had not only saved the lives of the young people present but had been enough of a distraction for Potter to do what he had been groomed for since he was 18 months old. At some point in the melee, Snape had dodged a hex which winged him, taking a piece out of his earlobe. It was the copious but ultimately insignificant bleed from this injury that caused Snape's dramatic appearance as they emerged. Miss Granger had fainted following the Dark Lord's demise when her erstwhile boyfriend had turned and planted a rapturous kiss on the lips of not her but Draco Malfoy, and so it had been left to Snape to remove her from the battle site as the respective couples followed him out. Still, it made a good publicity shot.

Even so, life was not as good as it might be. After more than two decades as 'That Creepy Greasy Git Kid', then 'That Spiteful Greasy Git Professor' followed by being 'That Greasy Git That Killed Dumbledore', there wasn't anyone in the Wizarding World that hadn't at least heard of him in none too flattering terms, and his chances of finding gainful employment had turned out to be virtually nil, despite his hero status. He had no savings to fall back on, and the small amount that all OoM (1st class) recipients received had been barely enough to keep food on the table. When a Hogwarts owl had arrived at Spinner's End shortly after the delivery of a yet another pile of bills, Snape had almost wept at the job offer enclosed, but not entirely through relief. Another thing he had not expected; to be re-employed in the place where he had killed his boss.

So here he was, back in the familiar black robes, striding down the familiar corridors towards the staff room one week before the start of the new school year. As the newly confirmed Headmistress, Minerva McGonagall wanted to introduce the staff old and new to a number of changes that had been implemented by order of the Governors with backing from the Ministry. These were to address issues that had arisen or been highlighted following the events of the last few years. Opening the door and striding through, he caught the welcoming smiles and frowns of his old colleagues, and the somewhat nervous looks of the new staff, most of whom he had taught at some point in the past.

Snape made straight for his favourite chair which, thanks to his scowl and a few prompting hand gestures from Professor Sprout, was vacated by its previous occupant before he reached it. Accepting a black coffee heavily laced with brandy from a poker faced Hooch, he settled back as if he had never been away. Shortly after, Minerva entered, leaning heavily on a stout walking stick. With a small smile she sat down and spent a little time greeting old colleagues and introducing new ones. Finally, she looked towards Snape.

"I'm sure I don't need to introduce you, Severus," the Headmistress said to him before addressing the room, "but Professor Snape here has agreed to return to us in a threefold position. Not only will he be reprising his role as Head of Slytherin, but he will be taking the Advanced level classes in Potions as well as the Defence Against Dark Arts position." Snape nodded noncommittally at the smattering of greetings and comments made in his direction following this pronouncement, then returned his attention to his mug. Minerva shuffled her notes and moved on to the next subject.

"As you may well be aware, the Ministry has been looking at the matter of education as part of its efforts to restore and rebuild following the recent conflict. In conjunction, the Board of Governors has been looking at ways of improving the general education here at Hogwarts. In their words, they have decided that we have been too cloistered, and the children in our care too often come to us from backgrounds that, to put it politely, are a little behind the times about certain matters and attitudes. As a result, there will be quite a few changes here, some of which will be temporary, some of which are experimental, and some of which are compulsory." Minerva flicked her wand at a nearby table, and a stack of parchments started to distribute themselves amongst the staff.

"As you can see, the most obvious change will be the addition of an Upper house. This will consist of those young people who have had their academic progress disrupted over the recent past, and will offer an opportunity for them to prepare for and take the NEWTs they missed. In addition, a number of them will be taking part in an experimental program that leads to a new qualification, the Certificate of Aptitude and Technical Surety, or CATS. Those who have elected to be the guinea pigs for this will be attending in a more practical capacity, similar but not the same as a Teaching Assistant or Apprentice."

After covering a number of smaller changes, Minerva paused to sip at her tea, and the faculty started to flip through the notes in front of them. There were a number of mutterings and agitated looks as a particular item was reached, and Minerva called everyone's attention back to her before any outright reaction could foment.

"I see you have all come across the new curriculum item. No, I'm afraid it isn't a mistake; in their infinite wisdom, both the Governors and the Ministry have decreed that we should include a minimum of one lesson a term to each year from the fifth year upwards, to include each of the topics listed." Holding up a hand to quiet the sounds of objection, she continued, "I know, I know, and I agree with you all. It is just ridiculous that we be expected to teach the basics of sex education in such a way."

The staff settled back, confident that the formidable witch before them would no more allow this to happen than Dumbledore would. Minerva continued, "It is obvious that a single lesson would be a waste of time for both pupils and staff, so I have taken it upon myself to expand upon the basics, and integrate it at some level throughout the lesson plans for each relevant subject from fourth year up...oh dear, would someone get Professor Vector a tissue, please?"

Minerva allowed the kerfuffle over Vector snorting her tea out of her nose to die down a little before she once again took up the subject of the new curriculum. "This was initially suggested as a basic explanation of the physical mechanics to be offered to sixth and seventh years. Typical of the patriarchal thinking we have to deal with, as if telling a room full of seventeen-year-old girls about the onset of menses when most of them have already been experiencing them regularly for the last three years or more would be of any use." At this, the majority of the witches began nodding in agreement, while the wizards had the good sense to keep their heads down and make no move that might be construed as contrary.

With the shift of approval towards her, Minerva expanded on the subject. "My revised class plan includes most of the senior teaching staff and will involve a more intensive course over a two-week period each term to be integrated with the current subjects on offer. After an introductory lesson to give pupils in each affected year an overview of what to expect, we will launch into the first combined class with Care of Magical Creatures breeding habits and the like. There are elements that will also need to be linked to Herbology, Charms, Divination and, of course, Potions."

Pomona Sprout looked over the outline for her classes and broke into a smile. "What a wonderful idea. I will make arrangements for the additional plants today, and Greenhouse One is virtually idle at the moment, so the season won't be a difficulty." Hagrid too was nodding. "I can't see a problem w' Care o' Magical Creatures, neither. A coupl'a cages o' nifflers should do the trick." Snape looked at his list. As there was little in common with DADA lessons, the few items on his list consisted of contraception and pregnancy related potions, most of which would be theory of the effects and counter effects as the facilities at Hogwarts were not up to the brewing of such sensitive potions, regardless of any talent or lack thereof in the students.

As he leaned back, satisfied to see how easily he'd got off, Snape noticed Flitwick peering at his parchment, flicking it over and looking around to see if he'd dropped a sheet. This caught Minerva's eye. "Ah, yes. Some of you may have noticed your list is a little sparse. That is because there are few suitable tie-ins at this level. However, I was wondering, Filius, if you could be prevailed upon to offer a couple of lessons on your specialist subject?" Flitwick was well known in certain quarters for his expertise in Tantric magic. The little wizard was starting to look quite pleased with himself until Minerva added, "A theory only class, of course." He looked a little deflated, but inclined his head in acknowledgement of his agreement.

Snape began to feel tension behind his eyes. It was a pain he had hoped to never feel again, a pain that manifested just before Dumbledore would say something like, 'I'm sure you won't mind giving up a little of your copious free time to give young Harry Occlumency lessons. Just as a favour, you understand,' in a way that meant he knew his life would be even more of a misery if he didn't comply. Squeezing the bridge of his nose to ease the pressure, he looked up only to have Minerva fix him in the eye. He knew he was caught and waited to learn his fate.

"Severus, as I'm sure you will agree, this subject must be handled in such a way as to minimise the potential for classroom distraction and disruption. As an exponent of such teaching methods, and having been most vocal in your condemnation of acts of 'independent extracurricular research' in places like the rose garden, the Astronomy Tower and the broom sheds in the past, I'm sure you will agree that you are by far the most qualified to take on this challenge. Of course, most of the more *delicate* issues will be handled by Poppy Pomfrey, to spare your blushes."

"I can hardly be the only choice for this, Headmistress." Snape protested. "If preventing undue stimulation in the classroom is an issue, why don't you get Binns to teach the subject?" Minerva stopped in the act of pouring a fresh cup of tea. "Oh, dear me, no. Binns got so... *excited* just discussing raising the hemline on witch's uniform robes by an inch that it took Filch all evening to clean up the ectoplasm. That's why he wasn't informed of the meeting this afternoon. I dread to think..." Minerva cut herself off with a shudder.

As the Headmistress firmly turned her attention back to her cup, Snape realised that the subject was now closed. His tenure was not yet secure enough to make threats or demands. Minerva had him over a barrel, and what was more, she knew it. It was going to be a long term, and it hadn't even started yet. What else could possibly go wrong?

New Beginnings, Old Wounds, Friends Old and New

Chapter 2 of 3

The staff of Hogwarts are introduced to some changes in both the curriculum and school administration.

Professor Sinistra was waiting in the small reception room where Harry, Hermione, Ron and Draco stepped out of the fireplace. She smiled welcomingly at them and suggested they wait to one side as she was expecting several others to be along any minute. Sure enough, it wasn't long before the flames turned the distinctive green of a Floo connection. Out stepped Justin Finch-Fletchley, who moved quickly to one side in order to step forward and steady fellow Hufflepuff Megan Jones as she stumbled through.

Draco nudged Hermione and made a tiny nod of his head towards the newcomers. Hermione took a discreet look their way to see that Justin had kept his hand somewhat possessively on Meg's elbow. She rolled her eyes; Draco was worse than her old dorm mates, Lavender and Parvati, whenever there was anything gossip worthy in the air. Instead, she attended to Crookshanks where he sat sulking in his carrier, until a cheery greeting made her look around in time to see Dean Thomas, Seamus Finnigan and Blaise Zabini come through in quick succession. Dean and Seamus chatted animatedly as they greeted the others, but Hermione was distracted by the sudden tension in her best friend's boyfriend beside her.

Draco and Blaise stood looking at each other, neither giving anything away. As the tension started to mount, Harry, Ron and Professor Sinistra became aware of the situation and watched alertly for the first sign of trouble. For a second that stretched interminably, the two Slytherins looked each other in the eye. At some invisible signal they both strode forward, grasping the wrist of the other's wand hand and slinging the free arm around the other's shoulder. From the corner of her eye, Hermione spotted both Sinistra and Harry slip their wands away as surreptitiously as they'd drawn them.

While the two young men held each other close, Ron became noticeably fidgety. Oblivious, Blaise and Draco pulled apart slightly, only to hold each other at arms length, hands on shoulders. Blaise spoke first. "You pillock! Why didn't you tell me? I thought...no, it doesn't matter what I thought, but you should have told me, *trusted* me, Draco."

Draco looked abashed. "I'm sorry, Blaise, so very sorry. I wanted to tell you. *I needed* to tell someone so badly, but I was being watched, and I didn't want you getting dragged into it too. I'm so glad to see you well, my friend, I..." A loud 'ahem' from behind Zabini interrupted Draco.

Ron watched his boyfriend as he clung to Zabini, and it was blatantly obvious he was getting jealous. Now that he had caught Draco's attention, he said, "Do you want to see where our dorms are, or are you going to be *catching up* out here for a while?"

Draco rolled his eyes and took a small step away from Blaise. "That's okay. There'll be plenty of time later. Let's go see what this 'Upper House' is like, shall we, love?" At this, Blaise raised his eyebrows and mouthed, "Love?" but Draco just muttered, "Later," with a grin as he put an arm around Ron's broad shoulders and allowed himself to be dragged through a set of arched double doors into another, larger room. Zabini trailed behind, amusement plain on his face.

Ahead of them, they could hear Dean exclaiming, "Yeah, it was a surprise running into Zabini in *The Leaky Cauldron* like that, but we all had some time before using the Floo to get here, and he was telling us that the Patil twins are coming back too, Parvati to take her NEWTs, and Padma to do one of these new CATS, so we had a couple of butterbeers, and he was so cool, friendly like, not like when we were in school, well, I suppose we still are in school, but it's not the same... Lisa Turpin! It's good to see you again. How's the boyfriend?"

Draco leaned into Ron, perhaps a little more cosily than necessary, to ask "Does he ever take a breath?" Ron just dropped an arm around his waist and squeezed, happy to see so many of his mates still alive and thriving after everything.

Professor Sinistra called them to attention. "Students of the new Upper House, this is your common room. In the Upper house, there are no longer any divisions by Founders' Houses, so you will all socialise and study together. You will have an individual bedroom instead of the usual dormitories. There are other differences too, but it would be best to explain it to everyone together, and we expect some to arrive on the Hogwarts Express. So, go grab yourself a room, and you should ensure you are prepared to attend in the Great Hall for the Sorting and feast in about half an hour. Anything not mentioned in the start of term speech will be explained when you return here. When you are ready, the Great Hall can be accessed by going through the anteroom you arrived in, down a flight of stairs and into an antechamber. The door on the left of the chamber leads into the Great Hall from behind the staff table. Now, have you all got that? Yes? Good." With that, Sinistra left them to it.

Snape was looming in the Entrance Hall. He did not, as others supposed, get a perverse joy out of watching the faces of children lose their high-spirited grins as they crossed the threshold and spotted him. Well, perhaps a small thrill of *satisfaction*, but not *joy*. No, the reason he was stationed here was that Minerva had requested he gather the new Upper House students who had elected to arrive on the Express and show them to their quarters. As each one appeared, he gestured curtly over the milling crowd for them to join him at the bottom of the staircase. As the last one arrived, he strode down through the students, who parted before him, shrinking back so that they didn't come into contact with his billowing robes. His charges followed quickly in his wake.

As they entered into the relative peace of the Great Hall, Snape called back over his shoulder. "I'm taking you to your new quarters. As members of the Upper House, you will no longer be sorted by your old Houses, but share a tower that can be accessed via the antechamber behind the High Table. There will be various other privileges and duties that apply, but you will be informed of these later." He led them into the antechamber. "For the moment, please gather upstairs with those that have already arrived and...aah!" Snape struggled to keep his balance as an orange blur shot out of the shadowed archway at the foot of the staircase and used his shoulder as a springboard on its way to a door opposite the one the gaping students were crowded in. Just as it disappeared through an almost indistinguishable flap in the woodwork, a wail of '*Crooooooks!*' marginally preceded a hurtling body that ran pell-mell straight into the already unbalanced wizard to land in a tangle of limbs and billowing robes.

Snape struggled to maintain his grip on his wand as he curled forward into his assailant. Although there was a wooden floor rather than a stone one in this room, he would still rather not crack his head on it. He attempted to extricate himself, but what with the way both sets of robes tangled around his legs and a mane of hair assaulted his face while the other person writhed around on top of him, he wasn't having much success. Finally, he managed to reach up and clear the hair to look at the other's face. "Miss Granger, please stop struggling and we might get out of this situation much more quickly." Hermione looked horrified to see who it was she had landed on, but ceased her wriggling immediately. Snape tugged the robes loose from the tangle. "Now, if you could get up and off of me?" Snape drawled icily, and Hermione jerked into motion in a fresh attempt to get up. Snape gasped in pain and grabbed her by the hips to prevent further damage. "Don't! Just... roll to the side." he hissed through gritted teeth. She quickly complied, stood, and offered her hand to help him rise. Surprisingly, he took it.

Snape glared at the onlookers. "This is not a sideshow. Everyone upstairs, now! You will be required to attend the Sorting in approximately fifteen minutes. Not you, Miss Granger." Hermione stood nervously as everyone else quickly climbed upstairs. As the last one disappeared from view, Snape limped over to a window seat that was hidden behind a tapestry and sat down. He closed his eyes and gripped tightly to his thighs, uncharacteristically showing his pain.

Hermione stepped closer and held out her hand as if she was going to place it on his shoulder, but stopped short. "Are you hurt? Let me see. There might be something I can do." He snorted in an undefined way, so she reviewed the tumble to try and surmise what the problem was. He had seemed fine at first. She replayed the event in her mind. Snape grabbing at her hair, pulling the robes free, telling her to get up. Suddenly, she saw herself pulling her knees up sharply to get into a crouch, and she realised the problem. Ouch. "Um, Professor, I'm dreadfully sorry. Would you like me to get Madam Pomfrey?"

Snape had recovered enough to stand once more. He straightened his robes. "No, thank you, Miss Granger. Whilst it is the kind of injury I would rather not have had to get used to, I regret to say that I frequently suffered it during meetings in the not-distant-enough past."

Hermione gasped and whispered, "Death Eaters."

Snape answered, with a rueful quirk of the lips that might have been a smile, "No, Miss Granger. I was too well thought of there to be inflicted with such treatment. I was referring to Order meetings. Let us just say that Tonks' clumsiness is sometimes a little too convenient when I'm around."

Hermione hid her smile behind her hand. Knowing the cheeky Auror, he was probably right. Snape cleared his throat. "Miss Granger, on a more serious note, it behoves you as not only a 'hero of the Wizarding World' but one of the Upper House, to set a good example to others. Why were you hurtling down the stairs in that dangerous fashion, howling like a banshee? Could it have been anything to do with that flying fur ball that assaulted me shortly before you did?"

Hermione's eyes grew big. "Crookshanks! Where did he...I mean, I'm sorry for my behaviour, and I shall endeavour to act with a little more decorum in future. But can you tell me, sir, which way did he go? I'm worried he went off to pick a fight with Mrs Norris."

Snape smirked. "Yes, I believe Filch had a few things to say about your familiar when he heard you were coming back. Don't worry, Mrs Norris rarely leaves the walls of the castle, and your cat availed himself of the cat flap into the grounds." Hermione looked surprised. "Don't tell me that there is something you **don't** know about Hogwarts, Miss Granger." He gestured to the door opposite the one that was open to the Great Hall. "That door leads to the grounds, and it has a charmed cat flap that recognises familiars that belong to pupils or staff. It was put in by D...it was put in for the convenience of Professor McGonagall in her Animagus form. By his actions, Crookshanks must remember it from his time here previously. Now, if you and yours are done assaulting me, I must prepare for the Sorting. Remember what I've said about being a good example. Good day, Miss Granger." With a nod he swept out without a trace of his previous discomfort, leaving Hermione to wonder at the teasing, almost friendly, conversation they had just had, if not the professor's hesitation to mention Albus Dumbledore.

The Upper House exited the antechamber into the Great Hall, then stood around, uncertain as to where they were to be seated. Fortunately, Headmistress McGonagall spotted them and called them forward. "Hello, it is good to see so many of you taking your education so seriously. There is much yet to explain, but for now I will just tell you that you should take a seat at your new table. Have a good feast." The Headmistress gestured to where a long table had been placed in front of the raised platform where the staff table was. It was, like the High Table, set at a 90 degree angle to the four House tables. They sat themselves around it. Draco and Blaise sat with their backs to the High Table, and Ron sat on Draco's other side. Harry and Hermione opted to sit opposite them.

The tables were settling down when Hagrid came bustling in, carrying the smell of rain and wet grass with him. He gave Harry and Hermione a wink before taking his place at the staff table. A couple of seats remained empty, one between Madam Pomfrey and the Muggle Studies professor, the other closer to the middle between Professors Flitwick and Sprout. Hermione didn't realise the significance of this placing until Professor Snape sank into the chair. She blushed slightly, thinking of pain she had inadvertently caused him. Draco spotted the tinge of colour, and glanced over his shoulder to catch Snape looking down at Hermione before he turned his attention to something Professor Sprout had to say. Draco grinned evilly. "Ooo, Granger's got the hots for Tall, Dark and Snarky then? Who would have guessed?" As Ron looked back and forth between her and Snape, an incredulous look on his face, Hermione's colour rose further. Draco tried to keep a straight face, but chuckled and reached over to push Ron's dropped jaw up and close his mouth when Blaise *snorked* at everyone's expressions.

Harry spotted the warning signs as Hermione bristled. He hid his quick grin and took off his glasses, pretending to clean them with his napkin. As he hoped, she ignored him and unleashed a hissed torrent of indignant denial at the hapless fellows opposite her. "It's not like that! I happened to run into the man as I chased down the stairs after Crooks, that's all."

This time it was Blaise who spoke. "Yes, I heard about that." He turned to Draco and Ron with a straight face. "She might deny it, but we haven't been here an hour yet and she's throwing herself into the man's arms and climbing all over him." He raised his eyebrows significantly, and the other boys all nodded solemnly. As a strangled squeal of frustration burst from Hermione, all four young men burst into laughter, and she allowed herself to be cajoled into joining in the joke.

Although they couldn't hear what the commotion was about, the staff looked on indulgently, amusement and curiosity evident on every face except Snape's. He sat with his head forward enough for the curtains of his hair to fall and obscure most of his expression. Anyone glancing his way would have assumed he was wearing one of his customary sneers, but his expression was neutral. His thoughts, however, were far from calm. He had watched the exchange with a strange feeling of satisfaction and pride. Whatever their backgrounds, these young people were forging a new life and friendships despite everything. If this was the outcome, he could finally see the merit in his past efforts and sacrifices.

It was a bittersweet feeling. Snape had never expected to live through Voldemort's second-coming, especially after his part in his mentor's sacrifice. Dumbledore would have been proud to see the seeds he planted taking root. Snape only wished things could have worked out differently so he'd been here to see it. He pushed such maudlin musings to the back of his mind as the doors opened and Madam Hooch brought in the new crop of first years to be Sorted. He smirked. Something else Dumbledore had been right about; the players may change, but Hogwarts went on the same.

It was much later. The Sorting and feast had ended hours ago, and everyone was tucked safely into bed. Snape's late round of the Slytherin dormitories had revealed the usual amount of lost and unhappy children. Whatever the cause, he subtly cast a mild Cheering charm or the like on each of them so they could settle down. He made a mental note to check back on them to see how they were coping, then moved on unnoticed. He might not *molly-coddle*, but he didn't like to see them suffer unnecessarily.

With the rounds finished, he had been unable to settle. He hadn't found returning to the castle as bad as he had expected; even the return of the pupils had not affected him. The Sorting had been uneventful, the hat being quite circumspect in its song, then Minerva had stood to speak. After welcoming everyone, the Headmistress introduced first the new Upper House, then the appointment of himself and Professor Vector as Heads of Slytherin and Gryffindor respectively. The food had been served as lavishly and unimaginatively as ever, and then everyone filed off to their respective Houses and rooms. It was in the lull that followed it had finally hit him hard; Dumbledore wasn't coming back.

He'd always been there, almost a part of the castle itself. From the first time he'd stumbled forward, big-eyed and lanky-limbed, to sit under the Sorting Hat through to the thrice-damned time on the top of the Astronomy Tower, Dumbledore had always been there. And now... he wasn't. Snape couldn't settle down to read, and he was beginning to feel like the caged beast his constant pacing back and forth mimicked. He grabbed his cloak and headed off into the grounds, to clear his head.

Hermione Granger sat in the window seat of the lower antechamber. She gazed at the window, deep in thought. It was not until all the excitement had died down and everyone had started to drift off into their own rooms that it had hit her. On an intellectual level, she realised that it would be very different coming back to Hogwarts this time, but somehow she hadn't been expecting just how much things had changed. She could see it was, on the whole, much the same as when she had walked through the doors and seen the enchanted ceiling of the Great Hall for the first time. However, now her perceptions had altered. She was a young woman, a veteran of conflict, a fighter, a lover. She had felt great loss and joy, had her beliefs, trust, love, hopes and desires all tested in the conflagration. She wasn't that little girl anymore, and she couldn't help but mourn the loss.

Unwilling to imprint her mood onto her new room on the first night, Hermione remembered the seat Professor Snape had revealed earlier in the evening after their unfortunate encounter and slipped down to mull over her mixed feelings. She was sure that, once she was in the new routine, she would be fine. In the meanwhile, she watched the rivulets run down the window pane as they formed from the fine rain.

Snape strode across the lawn towards the castle, clutching his cloak close to him. He had been planning on walking along the shore of the lake for a while, but the weather was so dismal as to drive him back indoors. It wasn't that it was raining. To be honest, his mood was such that fighting along in a windswept torrent, his hair and clothes soaked through and plastered to his skin, would suit him nicely. No, it was rain typical of the season: light and persistent, hardly noticeable until you felt damp and uncomfortable. Insipid. Grey. Unable to clear his head or his mood in such drab elements, he headed back to the nearest entrance.

As Snape pushed the door open, the breeze caused the fire to flare and the lone candle to flicker. Something moved behind the half-drawn curtain, and as he latched the door, Hermione Granger leaned out to see who had entered. "Hello again, Professor. I'd ask what brings you back here, but I'm sure you would tell me it was none of my business." A small smile took any bite from her words. Snape looked back at her. After the Final Battle she had been one of the ones who brought forward evidence in his favour. He had never thanked her for that, and she had never sought him out; she had never avoided him either, he suddenly realised. He might regret it later, but just for tonight he felt the need for a little human contact.

"Indeed, Miss Granger, it is none of your business, but from your own, unexpected, presence here I'm sure you can surmise why I am... restless. May I sit?" A look of surprise crossed her face, but she quickly moved up towards the window. The seat was formed in the traditional way, low benches of stone projecting from the deep walls as they cut in to a tall narrow window. A long flat cushion pad was provided for each seat, another along the wall to lean back onto. The space narrowed as it neared the window, and so it was that Hermione found herself hemmed in when Snape sat on the end of the opposite seat and stretched his long legs out. She had never sat this close to the man before, and she studied him as she wondered at his changed demeanour.

He looked up to find her staring and shifted a little nervously. "What is it?" Snape asked. "Have I got a smut on my nose or something?"

Hermione shook her head with a gentle smile. "No, it's nothing like that. It's just... you seem different; you've changed."

He looked towards the window for a while and, not looking at her, he said, "So have you. We all have." When he said nothing more, she too turned her face to the window in silence.

A log snapped in the fireplace, and they both jumped slightly and pulled themselves out of their reverie. Unable to casually rise without asking him to move, Hermione chose to engage in some polite conversation to lighten the mood. "I must say I'm surprised to see you back here, Professor. I can't see what ProfHeadmistress McGonagall could have offered to induce you to leave your life of leisure as a war hero to suffer us 'dunderheads' again." Snape knew she meant no harm by it, but her ignorance of his situation stung and he bit back.

"Miss Granger, I must admit, I'm a little curious as to why you are here, also. You have taken your NEWTs and passed them with flying colours. It seems to me that you would be better off finding yourself a proper position, an apprenticeship even. Instead you have cloistered yourself here for another two years to gain the Ministry's sorry excuse of an alternative to a properly indentured placement. Could it be you are procrastinating, putting off your entry into the real world?" He leaned in and dropped his voice as he continued, "Do you still fear *failure* like you did in your third year?"

He stared into her eyes, expecting her to break into an indignant refusal. Instead, a small line appeared between her brows as she drew them in. "It seems that, although you have only just returned to Hogwarts, it is *you* that leads the cloistered existence, sir." Snape raised an eyebrow, but otherwise made no reaction to her comment, so Hermione went on. "Apprentice, tyro, neophyte; call it what you will, there just aren't enough suitable and genuine placements out there at the moment. A lot of Masters have been... lost, and many of the older ones remaining are unwilling to take on someone fresh out of school. On the other hand, employers are crying out for competent people people with the ability to put book learning into practice. Again, there are losses to be covered." Snape gave a sharp nod of understanding. Not all losses happened through conflict. There had been more after Voldemort's defeat as collaborators both with and without The Mark were detained, leaving still more gaps to be filled.

Hermione sat up a little straighter, and he was reminded of how she would do this before upbraiding miscreants when she was a prefect. He suspected it was a posture Messrs Potter and Weasley were more than familiar with. Probably the young Mr Malfoy as well, now he spent so much time hanging onto sorry, around Weasley. When she began to speak again, her tone was a little sharper, too. "I agreed to take this new qualification for several reasons. For one thing, there is the need to show I'm not just a know-it-all bookworm, but a competent if not skilled practitioner as well." She had fixed him with a challenging look as she said this, and he inclined his head to both acknowledge his culpability for labelling her a know-it-all, and to hide the smile that threatened to breakout at her comment. "Then there is the aforementioned lack of apprenticeship opportunities specially for Muggle-borns. What is more, two years is the maximum length of study and assessment; it can be completed in six months if necessary. Finally..." Hermione's voice dropped, and she twisted the fabric of her robe nervously before she continued, talking into her lap, "I suppose there is some truth in your suggestion that I'm putting things off."

Snape snorted in surprise at her admission and, misunderstanding his reaction, she rose to defend herself. "Don't you think that, with everything that has happened over the last couple of years, I should be able to take the chance to step away from the pressures of becoming part of the 'real world'? A chance to stay cloistered here with my friends and try to grab a little of what we lost through the actions of Voldemort and his ilk?" Her hands were gripping tightly to her robes now, and Snape leaned forward to loosen her fingers and smooth the abused fabric. If she was surprised by his actions, she didn't show it, but looked at him questioningly.

Picking up one of her unprotesting hands in his, he held it between his palms as he spoke gently to her. "No, Miss Granger. I would be the last person to deny you this respite. Just don't let it become a form of self-immuration like... some people have." A moment of quiet understanding passed between them, ending when she gave a slight squeeze of her hand in his. He carefully released it back into her lap, then lightened the mood. "So, are you telling me that a determined young woman, friend of the *Boy-Who-Lived-To-Annoy-Me*, has had no offers of an apprenticeship?"

Hermione smiled. "I did say *genuine*, Professor. Surely you know me well enough that I'd not take a placement that wouldn't offer me less than a full opportunity to prove how much of an overachiever I am, rather than the easy ride of a celebrity?"

Neither noticed the dark figure that had been standing on the stairway slip silently back up the stairs as they continued to banter lightly for a while before parting.

AN:Okay, I will admit right now, my brain was hijacked. Firstly, Snape-in-my-head had a few issues he wanted to air (he didn't think I made him deep and meaningful enough, but at least I managed to subvert that brooding-in-the-pouring-rain thing :D). Secondly, he got Granger-in-my-head to join him and try to set this up as something more than a friendship between them - wait and see is all I can say.

Thank you Tempest of Dreams for leaping in to help with the beta work, and to Brian for lightening my mood with 'I didn't know Voldemort had an ilk. Does it have antlers?'

Hands-on Sex Ed?

Chapter 3 of 3

The staff of Hogwarts are introduced to some changes in both the curriculum and school administration.

"But 'Mioneeeee."

"No."

"Pleeeeeease."

"Stop that."

"Oh, come on, 'Mione, you know you want to. For old times sake?"

"Keep your hands off, Ron."

"You know what I need, and what harm would it do?"

"What about Draco, Ron?"

"Draco doesn't care. It's his fault I'm in this state, as well. In class, he had his tongue in my ear, and he put my hand on his..."

"Stop right there, Ronald Bilius Weasley. I really **don't** need to hear the details."

Professor Snape, who was standing on the other side of the half open door didn't need to, either.

He had been heading to the Charms classroom to pick up the notes Flitwick had written up for him to include in the first Sex Education class. The diminutive Charms teacher had neglected to bring them down to the staff room after his last class of the week, and as Snape had to pick up the 'educational materials' that had been sent to Madam Pomfrey's office by St Mungo's anyway, he'd offered to pick them up himself. Which is how he came to be outside the door in time to hear most of the disconcerting conversation between Filius's classroom assistant, Hermione Granger, and one Ron Weasley.

Now Snape was in a quandary. Previously, such a conversation would fall into one of two categories. If they were students, he would fly in there, deduct points and/or issue detentions, and do his best to traumatise the miscreants so they wouldn't even *think* about the subject again until they left Hogwarts for good. If it had been staff, he would probably withdraw discreetly (after collecting any useful information that might persuade said staff members to cover a Hogsmeade trip or something equally tiresome for him). However, Miss Granger was *almost* staff, working with both the Charms and Transfiguration teachers as a classroom assistant for her CATS accreditation. Weasley was taking his NEWTs, but as a member of the Upper House was no longer subject to either point deduction or detentions.

While Snape pondered what to do, the conversation continued.

"Look, Hermione. All I have to do is this..." **ziiip** "...and slip my hand in..."

"I'm warning you, don't do that, Ron."

"Come on, Hermione, loosen up a little bit."

"Ron, I'm not going to warn you again..."

"Just close your eyes, 'Mione, and I'll slip my fingers in..." ***'Snap!'*** "Aaaaaaeeeeiii!"

Snape had been about to leave the increasingly troubling scene when he heard the sharp report and Weasley's scream. He rushed into the room, intrigued to find out exactly what was going on. The picture before him was not what he expected. Weasley was trying to shake what looked remarkably like a Muggle mousetrap off his hand, while Hermione stood watching his antics, her arms folded firmly across her chest.

"Are you all right, Miss Granger? I heard a commotion as I arrived to pick up some notes." Snape smoothly covered his sudden appearance. Miss Granger's glare never left Weasley.

"Everything is fine, sir. Ron here was just trying to pick up some notes too. Unfortunately, he didn't realise that I was trying out one of the newest *Weasley Wizard Wheezes* products. Here, let me show you."

Ron had stopped flailing his arm and was attempting to lever back the spring. Hermione grabbed his hand, whispered a word and the trap dropped free. He yelped and stuck his fingers in his mouth while Hermione brought the device over to Snape, seemingly oblivious to her friend's pain. "See here? It's being marketed as a way of keeping dieter's fingers out of biscuit barrels or bags of sweets, but it works well in book bags too. Ron fell foul of it when he tried to borrow my Transfiguration class notes. He forgot that the only ones I'd have would be the *Teacher's Notes*, and not *something I would be able to share with him or anyone else*." Hermione hissed the last of this in Ron's direction, and he sidled out of the room, muttering something about getting some ice and borrowing Megan's notes.

Hermione turned to Snape. "You said something about notes, sir?"

"Yes, the first of the much-whispered-about Sex Education classes will be beginning on Monday, and I'm collecting together all the last minute details to review over the weekend. Will you be attending, Miss Granger?" As the words left his mouth, he could have bitten his tongue. It was surprising how much he let his guard down around this young woman. Although they didn't see much of each other except in public places, he had formed a connection of sorts with her over the month since term began.

Hermione seemed amused. "Why, do you think I'd benefit from the classes, Professor?" she asked mock innocently. Snape refused to rise to the bait, busying himself at the Charms teacher's crowded desk instead of replying. Finding the notes weighted down under an inkwell, he turned to leave, but at the door he paused. After a moments contemplation, he spoke.

"About Sex Education, Miss Granger. I think you may find several of the practical, *hands-on* aspects of the lessons more rewarding and stimulating than reading about it books." Hermione's eyes grew large and her mouth formed a surprised 'O'. Snape suddenly realised the accidental suggestiveness of his remark and chose to leave quickly. As he pulled the door fully open, he was confronted by Ginny Weasley, who was clutching a book to her chest and looking up at him with an expression very similar to Miss Granger's, except with a hint of dismay added. Before he could do anymore damage to his own reputation, he simply sneered at the girl and swept off down the corridor.

Being Saturday morning, the Upper House common room was relatively quiet. Hermione sat on one of the big comfy sofas with her legs tucked under her as she read a book. Suddenly, someone leapt over the back to land with an *'oof'* in the space on one side of her. Blaise stretched out his legs, crossed at the ankles, and put his hands behind his head as he leaned back. "Morning, Hermione. Good book?"

Hermione sighed and pulled the ribbon from her hair to mark her page before she put the book to one side. "Actually, not really. It's one of those formulaic raunchy romances. Parvati lent it to me, suggesting it might stop me moaning about the lack of romance in my life." Hermione felt the cushions on the other side of her dip, and looked over to see that Draco had taken the remaining seat on the sofa, while Ron sat in the armchair to one side. "Oh, so you two have decided to emerge into the light of day, have you? Why don't you share why you slept in, so those of us without a love life can live vicariously?"

Draco leant back into the chair mirroring Blaise and grinned at Hermione with a wink. Ron's face went as red as his hair. "It's nothing like that! We were studying." Ron blustered as Blaise and Hermione shared a knowing look. "It's true! Megan lent me her Transfiguration notes, and seeing as I can't write too well at the moment," Ron waved his bandaged fingers at her accusingly, "and as Draco needs them too, we were working together."

Hermione raised an eyebrow. "Don't blame me for your fingers, Ron. I warned you not to fiddle with my stuff. You're lucky to get away with just those bruises. If Professor Snape hadn't come in just then..."

"Ooh, Hermione. Are you telling all about Professor Snape, then?" Ginny threw herself into the armchair opposite her brother. Harry perched himself on the wide arm and put his arm across the back behind her. As many of the Upper House shared classes with the seventh years for most subjects, it wasn't unusual to find seventh year 'study partners' popping into the common room. Headmistress McGonagall had made it quite clear that this was fine, so long as 'the proprieties were observed'. Ginny spent whatever free time she could manage 'studying' with Harry, but today she obviously just wanted to chat with her friends. She continued. "I mean, clandestine meetings in empty classrooms to talk about *hands-on* sex lessons..." She let her words drift off meaningfully.

Surrounded by her so-called friends, who were all making suggestive 'oohs' or melodramatic gasps, Hermione was about to protest that it was a mistake, he hadn't meant it to sound that way. However, before she could open her mouth, a small voice in the back of her mind spoke. 'Didn't he? Severus is usually so precise in his language. He is only ambiguous if he wants to misdirect you.' The pause was long enough to register with her audience.

"No, Hermione, say it isn't so. Is that why you were so upset with me yesterday afternoon? I was in the way of some kind of-of... tryst?" Ron had gone pale at the idea. The others sniggered at his outburst, and Hermione surged to her feet.

"I refuse to be drawn into this silly speculation. Of course there's nothing going on between Professor Snape and me. The very idea! And as for us 'trysting', I had no idea he was coming to the classroom, and I wouldn't have even been there when he did if you hadn't delayed me, Ron. Now, as if having a non-existent love life wasn't bad enough, listening to you lot inventing one for me is too much, so if you will excuse me..." Hermione flounced off.

"Whoa, we seem to have hit a raw nerve there," Draco said as Hermione disappeared up the stairs to her room.

Blaise looked thoughtfully at the point where Hermione had disappeared from view. "The lady doth protest too much, methinks," he quoted. Harry snorted and Ginny laughed outright.

"I can't see her throwing herself at Snape just because she's frustrated. I mean, he's more than twice her age, and that's just for starters," Ginny said.

Harry looked thoughtful. "I dunno. Hermione has never been one to be swayed by what's 'popular'." He was interrupted briefly by a "*coughLockhartcough*" before he continued. "I mean, she did all that research and nagged me about my attitude towards Snape and towards Slytherins in general so that when the time came I was able to overcome my anger and distrust and...well, you know the rest. But she didn't leave it there. She made me come to terms with things. She's only like that with things that get her blood up. I'd thought it was just about helping me win and survive, but now I'm wondering if there's more to it." Harry laughed. "Not that I'm saying there *is* anything in the suggestion, either."

Ron stood and moved to the seat Hermione had vacated, next to his boyfriend. Some others drifted over in their direction and filled up nearby chairs. "Nah," he said with a shake of his head, "if that's all there is, I can't see our 'Mione falling for the git."

Blaise shifted in his seat. "Actually, there might be more. I didn't think much of it before, but I saw them together on the first night back. I couldn't hear what they were saying, but they were *very* close, and he held her hand for a while." Blaise started to relate what he'd seen to his attentive audience.

On Monday, Snape threw himself into his seat in the staff room and nodded to Hooch who had made the sign for lifting a glass. After choking down a mouthful from the tumbler she handed him, he considered that she wasn't called Hooch for nothing. She went back to sit with Sprout and Pomfrey at the table in the middle of the room. They watched him expectantly as he finished his glass.

"So, how did it go, then?" Pomona asked finally.

Snape leant forward and dragged a hand down his face. "That bad, eh?" Hooch said with a snort.

He finally looked up at the three witches. "No, actually it went quite well. All I had to do was call them to order, and give them a quick overview of the topics I would be covering and which topics would be covered in more detail in some of their other classes. Then I handed out several of the leaflets supplied by the Ministry and St Mungo's and told them to read them for the remainder of the lesson in silence. I handed out the course material as they were leaving and told them to read chapters one and two before the next lesson." The witches broke into a smattering of playful applause, and Snape made an exaggerated bow to them. "Anyway, that was the sixth years. I have the fourth then fifth years for an hour each after lunch, then the combined seventh and Upper class. I'll be glad when it's all over."

The witches murmured sympathetically. The Muggle Studies teacher, Ellactix, moved over to join them. Soon the staff room was full of chatting teachers taking a short respite from their pupils before going down for lunch. Snape looked up to see Hermione enter. Although Minerva had allowed that those placed as classroom assistants for their CATS should be afforded most of the privileges granted to the other assistants, Miss Granger rarely spent time in the staff room. She held a sheaf of parchment and was obviously looking for someone. He felt vaguely disappointed when her eyes caught his but passed on. She moved forward and handed the parchments to the Transfiguration professor with a few words.

Her errand complete, Hermione looked back towards Snape. She gave him a smile and made a small gesture of greeting with her hand, but before he could nod in return, a young man tapped her on the arm to catch her attention. A few moments later he'd linked his arm through hers, and the two moved off, presumably to the Great Hall for lunch. A few of the older witches nudged each other as the couple left. All grist for the rumour mill, Snape thought with a sigh.

Hermione allowed herself to be led from the staff room and down to the Great Hall. Aloysius Alworthy was one of those pleasant nonentities she knew in passing, and she was surprised when he had sought her out to discuss what she thought about the CATS. He proved to be an equally pleasant companion at the table, and she found herself agreeing to continue the discussion that evening over coffee in the common room. She reflected that the evening of playing victim to the beauty charms the Patil twins had cajoled her into trying may have been worth it after all. Not that she felt she could have anything of a romantic nature with Aloysius, but he was the first male to show any interest in her since her return to the castle. 'Unless you count Severus,' the increasingly annoying little voice chipped in.

The afternoon slipped by quickly. As Hermione cleared up after the departing third years, Prof. Flitwick came up, nodding with approval. "A nice action you have there, m'dear a lovely smooth 'swish' with just a hint of 'flick'. Well, that's it for me for the day, so I won't be needing you back until tomorrow after lunch." Hermione gave him a broad smile and moved to collect her things from behind his desk. "It's the seventh years and Upper Sex Ed class about to start. Are you going to attend, Miss Granger? I have to admit, I wish they'd had something like it in my day."

Hermione thought for a moment. She hadn't been planning to, but maybe she should see what it entailed. This first lesson was with Professor Snape, who would be giving an overview of the planned lessons. It was being held in the Defence classroom, two floors down. She checked her timepiece, pinned to her chest like a medal. If she hurried, she could just make it. "I think I will. Thank you, Professor." Hermione said as she swept from the room.

Having walked down one floor, Hermione had to wait until the next staircase swung into place. As she set foot on the first step a rich voice called out to her, "Good afternoon, Miss Granger. Are you heading to my class?" Snape had just been exiting his office on the second floor when he had spotted her on the stair, and on impulse he had hailed her. Hermione nodded. "Then let me accompany you you can't be late if you arrive with the teacher now, can you?"

As Hermione entered the DADA classroom with Snape, she turned and muttered a few words of thanks before finding herself a seat. In that brief moment they both were distracted, a number of significant looks passed around the room.

Snape walked up to the front of the class and turned in his trademark billow of black. "I will have no foolish giggling in this class, and no nudges and winks when you think I'm not looking. This is a subject that **will** be taken seriously. Do I make myself clear?" He glared around the class as they all nodded at him. "Good. Quills and parchment out. The main topics we shall be covering this term are on the board, and you will take notes as I detail them." Snape waited a few seconds until the rustle of parchment died down. "Now, I shall begin."

As the end of the lesson drew near, Snape rose from his chair behind the desk to draw everyone's attention to him. As they all looked up from the pamphlets in front of them, he spoke. "It is time to pack up for the day. Put your things away, and come to the front in an orderly fashion to collect your new course work books. You're next lesson with me is Wednesday morning, so see to it that you have read the first two chapters of each by then. You are dismissed."

Snape leant his hip against the desk and watched as the class queued to pick up their books from the piles on the front of his desk. He frowned as Weasley and Malfoy stood in line. He'd spotted Draco as he furtively groped the male Weasley during the lesson. He would have to think of a suitable way to punish them for that transgression, preferably by the next lesson. In the meanwhile, he would let them think they had got away with it

Hermione was the last to collect hers. "Thank you, sir. You were right. I think that I will find several of the topics in this course most interesting. I will see you on Wednesday, if not before."

Snape nodded with a smile. "My pleasure, Miss Granger."

AN My thanks to my beta, Tempest of Dreams, for all her work and suggestions, as well as giving me the nudge to try and get this done by the deadline when I'd given up on it. Love to Brian for child wrangling, amongst many things.