

## Scuttling Script

"Professor Flitwick!"

The harsh and overloud voice of the Hogwarts Potion Master startled Filius as he was marking the Charms homework of the second year Hufflepuffs. Turning to the fireplace in his office, he cheerfully asked, "Yes, Severus?"

"Please come to my office. I have an . . . issue that I believe you can assist me with."

Acknowledging the summons, the diminutive professor turned to the door of his office as the fireplace gave the muted pop of a broken communication.

Nodding pleasantly to a passing group of Slytherins, the professor idly wondered what Professor Snape wanted. The head of Slytherin House rarely interacted with the head of Ravenclaw House. The most contact they usually had in any given school year was requests to pass the salt during meals.

Presently, Filius made it to the Potions Master's office and knocked. At Snape's invitation, Flitwick entered the office and smiled up at the brooding professor. "What can I do for you, Severus?"

Snape waved one hand toward his desk. "I was marking the assignment of the Slytherin sixth years. In the process of marking Mister Malfoy's, I discovered it was forged. I attempted a few revealing spells, but could not determine who had written it. I would ask that you see if you can determine the author."

Filius looked at him in amazement. Snape rarely asked for help of any variety. Though to be honest, this WAS Flitwick's area of specialty. Turning to the too-tall desk, he climbed Snape's chair and studied the parchment sitting between stacks of other parchments crammed between quill holders and inkwells. It certainly looked like Draco Malfoy's handwriting. The signature looked authentic as well. Turning to the other professor, he asked, "It appears to be authentic. How did you determine it's forged?"

Snape's sour expression puckered a little further. "I was attempting to mark one of the answers." At Flitwick's blank look, he waved irritably. "Circle 'powdered unicorn horn' in answer five."

Blinking in confusion, Flitwick took the quill near at hand and located the requested words. Once the nub of the quill touched the parchment within the confines of the paragraph in question, the

words began to scramble away from the quill.

Grinning in delight, the professor spent a few seconds chasing the short paragraph around the parchment. The paragraph as a whole continued to move away from the quill, the edges writhing and looking for all the world like the legs of a centipede scurrying away from sunlight. He noted that the words moved over other paragraphs without interruption. For a moment, he thought he'd had it trapped in a corner of the parchment, but the words simply crawled over the edge to the reverse side. When he pulled his hand away, the paragraph quickly made its way back to its original location.

A bit of judicious experimentation revealed that this paragraph was the only one that had been affected.

Pulling out his wand, the Charms professor first removed the ink he'd spread all over the place. Next, he cast a few revealing charms and quickly found evidence of a powerful "False Script" spell. It was indeed a forgery, but it was very well done.

Watching intently, Snape mumbled, "It had to be that insufferable know-it-all Granger girl."

Flitwick looked up. "Why do you say that, Severus? So far I cannot determine who might have done this." He was rather fond of the Gryffindor witch and disliked Snape's preliminary assumption of guilt.

Snape frowned even harder, though Filius would have sworn it was a physical impossibility only five seconds earlier. "The entire homework is correct with the exception of that one answer. As you've already determined, that is the only paragraph that reacts in such a way when it is touched."

"Because this is the only incorrect answer, you've determined that it had to be Hermione who answered it?" Filius asked in confusion.

Snape nodded curtly. "She's the only other student who could have gotten questions seven, nine, and ten correct."

Flitwick bit his lip at that answer. It wasn't that she was the only one who DID get them correct, it was that she was the only other one who COULD HAVE. He'd long been told that Snape wasn't entirely fair in his methods, but to have the professor practically admit it was still surprising. Shaking off the errant thoughts, he merely nodded in acknowledgement of the professor's logic.

Turning back to the parchment, he cast a series of increasingly powerful charms to determine the true author. He ended up learning three things: it was a clever variant of the *Confundus* Charm hiding the information he was looking for, he learned the general makeup of the charms causing the entertaining actions of paragraph five, and whoever was hiding their identity was better at hiding it than he was at determining it.

Giving up in defeat, he turned to the increasingly irate Potions Master and announced, "Though I have determined it to indeed be a forgery, I have no idea who did this, Severus. I'm sorry."

Snape's lips pressed together. "Thank you for your help," he responded flatly. Though unspoken, the addendum, "useless though it was," still made it through.

Deciding to answer only the spoken portions of Snape's answer, Filius nodded cheerfully. "My pleasure, Professor Snape. You have a good evening, now."

Flitwick slowly made his way back to his office, deep in thought. He eventually agreed with Snape's determination that it was probably Hermione Granger who had masterminded the prank. He knew there were a few Ravenclaws who could have created the charm, but none of them had the ongoing feud that the Gryffindor Trio had against Draco Malfoy. On the other hand, it was unlike her to pull this kind of prank, brilliantly executed though it was. Now if Ron Weasley had goaded her into it . . .

That reminded the Charms professor just as he was entering his own office. Pulling a blank parchment out, he wrote a long letter to Fred and George Weasley, explaining the prank (he was sure they'd appreciate it), the observed actions of the writing, and the probable combination of charms to make it work. He finished his letter with:

I strongly suspect Hermione Granger to be the creator of this charm, though I have no proof. I would suggest that you two attempt to learn, confidentially, the accuracy of my supposition, seeing as how you're more likely to get the truth from a student than I am.

Incidentally, I would recommend the marketing name of "Scuttling Script".

Yours, Filius Z Flitwick

He sealed the parchment with a muttered charm that only the owners of Weasley Wizard Wheezes could successfully counter.

Standing, he whistled a cheerful tune as he walked toward the Owlery. He wanted to send this off as quickly as possible.

It wouldn't do to make his business partners wait, after all.