

Picking up the Pieces

by Stefdarin

One fateful night, an associate of the Order learns a young woman is still alive when all had believed her dead. Albus and Minerva learn their beloved niece wasn't killed by Death Eaters fifteen years ago and send Severus to retrieve her. When sparks fly between them, Severus discovers that although Serena isn't dead, she has been subjected to a curse. It's up to Albus, Minerva, and Severus to help Serena put all the pieces of her life back together. But the wizarding war is underway, and they are all soon wrapped up in events threatening to spiral out of control.

****This story twists around and is interwoven with both HBP and DH.****

The Sign

Chapter 1 of 7

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Disclaimer: You know the drill... I don't own any of the Harry Potter characters... I am just using JKR's world to play in. Also, all songs contained herein or referenced belong to the artists who created them.

Many thanks go to Sempra, who patiently shows me the way.

The Sign

Mundungus Fletcher, a squat, straggly man, was dressed as a witch with a black veil covering his face. He hunched over and limped toward the Leaky Cauldron, trying to look more the part of the hag he was portraying to hide his identity. The probability of getting away with this deception was increased by the fact that darkness was falling quickly. He needed to sell some of his wares to gain enough money for his new business venture, and things had been slightly hard since the death of Sirius Black. Mundungus had made his last trip to number twelve, Grimmauld Place a treasure hunt to earn an extra Galleon or two.

Sirius was no longer there to stop him, not that Sirius had held anything in his hated house dear, but Dung worried about the others in the Order of the Phoenix. Members of the secret society were all on orders to guard Harry Potter. The boy was a particular target of Lord Voldemort, now at large.

Dung shuddered just thinking the name. No, he didn't think Dumbledore or Potter would be too happy with him for taking Black family heirlooms, no matter how little they had meant to Sirius. So, here he was, about to enter Diagon Alley and get rid of the evidence.

Suddenly, to his left, a large sign rolled down the side of a small, gray building. It looked like a small night club as he searched the sign for a name. Achelous? Strange name for a night club, he thought to himself. But it was in a particularly good spot, right across from the Leaky Cauldron, yet still where the Muggles could see it. He

supposed it might be owned by Muggles; however, this close to Diagon Alley, it could be owned by magic folk. Dung shrugged and lumbered on, but the name on the rolled sign caught his eye. Serena Celestia. His brow furrowed in thought. Now why did that name sound so familiar?

In the far reaches of his mind, Dung repeated the name. Serena Celestia. No... could it be? He recalled a name. Samuel. Samuel Celestia. But Sam had left England long ago and died in the last dark days of Voldemort. Again, he shook; he really needed to stop saying the name in his head.

Still, now that he thought about it, he seemed to remember Sam having a daughter. In spite of this, Dung believed she had also been killed. Slowly, the image of a woman with dark hair and green eyes played before his eyes. Serephenia Celestia, Sam's wife. The name brought a tinkling sound of laughter to his head. An image of a beautiful woman danced along with the sound. She had had a mysterious power, an ancient power. Oh, yes, the Dark Lord would have wanted her. Perhaps that was why they had died in the end.

Mundungus needed to know. Maybe, if this was who he thought it was, the information would be worth a little gold in his pocket, but he had to be sure. Names weren't always reliable. With this last thought, he crossed the street and approached the double doors. Reaching a hand out, he tried the door. Drat! Locked. Quickly, he looked left and right and then slipped into an alley off to the side.

'Time to see if there's a back entrance,' he told himself.

Rats scurried away, squeaking, as he moved quickly and quietly in the falling twilight. Crates were scattered along the alley, though he saw no people, thankfully. As he approached the back of the building, he heard movement. The sound of something large sliding was followed by a *crack* around to his right.

"John, please be careful with that. If you need help, just ask," said a breathy female voice.

"Yeah, well, since Charles isn't here, and you're a woman, I don't have a choice, do I?" questioned a male voice disdainfully.

"Sure you do. We always have choices, John. Honestly," the woman began, exasperated. "I can help you, or you can wait until Charles comes back," she finished indignantly and sighed.

"But it's too heavy" he started.

Suddenly, the woman tut-tutted and grabbed one end of a large amplifier, beginning to lift it. The man named John just caught the other side before the large item toppled onto the smaller female.

Sluggishly, they made their way into the building, and Mundungus shifted his position to get a better look. A large pile of crates was stacked high to the left, close to the door, and from there, Dung could see inside. The man and woman were unloading what looked like quite a few musical instruments and some heavy sound equipment. Dung peaked through the gaps between the crates, and through the doorway, and saw the couple set down the large amplifier. The man looked red in the face from the exertion, but the woman seemed nonplussed. She smiled at the gentleman, who rolled his eyes.

"You know, if I didn't think you'd draw a crowd, I would have never agreed to this," John told the woman. Dung heard a tinkling laugh in response.

"Yes, well, I'm only doing this as a favor, and I owed one to Charles. Just to get you both started. After tomorrow, there will be no relying on me. It'll all be you two . . . Want-Tobee Enterprises, owners of Achelous," said the woman, and she laughed again at what seemed a private joke.

The man named John smiled at her. "You know, Serena, I really wish you would stay. You are marvelous, you realize." The smile started to turn wistful.

"Oh! You do like to tease. But you know I mustn't do this much. Besides, I am only doing this because I owe Charles; otherwise, I would move on." Her face turned somber as a thought struck her. "You do realize what the *Daily Prophet* said the other day, don't you?"

John frowned. "No."

Serena simply laughed. "Oh, yes, I forgot you don't take it. But Charles does," she stated, sobering again.

"Yes, well, I am still not used to it after all these years. He being a Squib and me a Muggle. But we do try to get on with both worlds. At times, it's a bit trying, really." John frowned again.

"Well, with the placement of Achelous, you are going to have to get used to it fast. Although, I think this is a wonderful spot. Best of both worlds actually. That way you can do whichever entertainment you want. I've always thought more Muggles should be aware of us. But then not all Muggles think alike, do they?" She asked this last question sadly.

John saw it coming. The sadness again. So he did his best to cheer her up.

"There, there, deary. No long faces!" He wiggled his eyebrows, and she giggled. "Ahh, that's better."

"Yes, well, the *Prophet* announced that *'He'* was back," Serena stated, emphasizing the he.

"Really!? Mary mother of... all that's holy," John sputtered. "So they really have been deluding themselves, haven't they?" he asked incredulously.

Serena nodded. "Yes, it would seem Dumbledore and Harry Potter have been telling the truth all along. Of course, I have believed it for a long time. There is a feeling in the air. Darkness is coming, I can sense it." Serena said this last bit with a faraway look.

John looked at Serena, knowing what she meant. "Yes, you did try to tell Charles, did you not? And I dare say he was still skeptical." He broke off as another man approached where they stood.

"Now what are we talking of so seriously?" he asked.

This man was short and stocky with a thick mane of blond hair. John, on the other hand, was tall, lanky, and had a reddish tint to his hair. The two men couldn't be more opposite in stature or manner. Dung noticed Serena smiled as she surveyed them both.

"Oh, Serena has just told me the *Prophet* announced *'He'* was back." John looked at his friend suspiciously. He still wondered if his friend didn't believe it, even though Serena had been insisting for weeks now and had been trying to keep a low profile. He was surprised she had agreed to sing in their club as their first opening act. Yet, Serena had her own way, and truth be told, she was a bit stubborn about some things. When it came to helping a friend, even fairly new ones, she was determined.

John didn't think risking her exposure was worth their new club. However, Charles didn't think like John, and he was dying to get their new business started. When Charles had found out who Serena was, he had not hesitated to ask her to help them.

Serena had accepted his request with one condition. No signs, no flyers. Word of mouth only. If Charles wanted to advertise, he could, but only the club or the other acts. Not her name. Surprisingly, Charles had agreed. He'd told John he had heard Serena sing in the States, in a club similar to theirs. He had heard about it from a friend of a friend, and when he had gone there, the place had been full of bursting. Charles had said it had been worth it.

"Yes, well, they may have mentioned it..." Charles started nonchalantly. "Anyway, the sign's up!" he exclaimed.

Serena looked at him in delight. "It is? Oh, let's pop out and take a look!" she exclaimed with glee and turned to go out the back door, but Charles stalled.

"For Pete's sake, it's just a sign," he began. Yet somehow his tone didn't match his eyes.

Serena narrowed her eyes at him suspiciously, noting the slight fear in his eyes. Quickly, she turned to go out again and hurried around the corner. Mundungus backed up just in time as the group went past with Charles stuttering at the end.

"Now listen. I know what you're going to say." He paused and then continued, "But it'll only be up for one day."

"It was my only stipulation, Charles," Serena fumed, and Dung heard cold fury coming from the breathy voice. "You do realize I'll have to change it."

"Only one day, deary" Serena cut him off.

"NO! If you want me to help you, then it's got to come off!" Serena seethed. "I don't think you realize the reason I asked you for this one thing, and I refuse to go into it. Just know I have my reasons."

With her last statement, Serena took out her wand and aimed it at the sign. A jet of blue light flashed and suddenly the sign had changed. It simply said, 'Welcome to Achelous, Jonathan Want and Charles Tobee, Proprietors.' For a moment, Charles looked angry, but then Dung saw him work to change this.

"Very well, I just hope"

"Yes, well, I can see we all are hoping for different things," Serena cut him off with anger in her voice, but then she seemed to get her emotions under control. "Charles, I know it's hard, but you have just got to trust me on this. If you want, I'll change the sign to the act after mine, but my name cannot be there." She pointed to the sign. "Besides, I have no doubt you will have a full house, regardless. Even if it starts out quite empty. I thought you remembered what it was like in the States," she queried, intense green eyes staring him down.

Charles bowed his head. He knew she was right. "I'm sorry, Serena. Perhaps I just got carried away, excitement and all." He smiled sheepishly.

Serena managed a small smile. "Sorry I let my anger run away with me. But I have my reasons, and I'm sorry I have to leave it at that. The less you know, the better off you are." With this last proclamation, she looked to John, and although she smiled, he thought she still looked sad.

Mundungus moved back behind the pile of crates when they turned to start back towards the pile of instruments. As Serena walked past, she slowed and glanced at the pile of crates. Dung drew in his breath, though he knew she couldn't possibly see him. Then she shook her head a little and went inside.

Dung released the breath he hadn't realized he'd been holding and reviewed the facts. Serena Celestia had to be Sam Celestia's daughter. She was almost the image of her mother. If she had power like her mother, Dumbledore would definitely want to know. Dung smiled. He wondered how much gold he could get for this information. It was going to be a very profitable night indeed. With that thought, Mundungus made his way to the Leaky Cauldron so he could Apparate to the gates of Hogwarts.

Relation

Chapter 2 of 7

Mundungus conveys his information and Minerva gets upset.

****Rating is for later chapters.****

Thanks to my wonderful beta, Semptra.

Relation

Mundungus Disapparated to the gates of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry with a crack. He knew the gates would be locked. Therefore, he sent his Patronus to the Headmaster. "*Expecto Patronum*," he called, and a silver goose erupted from the tip of his wand.

Patiently, he waited for the Headmaster to come. The wringing of his hands was the only nervousness he showed. Then, he heard a muffled sound beyond the gates and squinted to make out who it was. Finally he saw the form, clothed in black with a billowing cape that made him look like a bat. Severus Snape approached the gate and stood there looking down his hooked nose at Mundungus.

"And to what do we owe this incommodious pleasure, Mr. Fletcher?" Snape questioned him with condescension.

"Please, Severus, I have some information for Dumbledore. I think he would really want to know this," Mundungus stated.

"Well, you can tell me, and I can relay the information to the Headmaster. I believe it is very late, and the professor needs his rest," Snape said coolly.

"Now, now, Severus, my boy... please let our associate in. Perhaps he would like a spot of tea," Dumbledore said as he came up to the gate behind Severus.

Severus gasped and turned slightly. "Headmaster..." he began, but Dumbledore waved him away and opened the gate for Dung to enter.

There was a twinkle in Dumbledore's blue eyes as they met Severus' black ones. Snape tightened his hands but said nothing.

"Please, please... let's go to my office, shall we?" the Headmaster asked as he led the way. Dung followed, and Snape, seething, brought up the rear.

On the way to his office, they ran into Minerva McGonagall. Her hair was in a loose braid down her back, and she was wearing a tartan dressing gown. Her square spectacles were perched primly on her nose, and she tilted her head up to look at the Headmaster apprehensively.

"What's going on? Is everything alright?" Minerva launched quickly, her thoughts going immediately to a smiling boy with green eyes and black, tousled hair.

"Shush, shush, Minerva. Everything is fine. Harry is fine. Mr. Fletcher, here, simply has some information he thinks we may desire," Albus told her. Then, Professor McGonagall also joined the parade to Dumbledore's office.

Suddenly, Mundungus hoped he was right about this. Dumbledore was one thing, but Snape and McGonagall were another. They had not always trusted him, and honestly, he couldn't blame them. The last time he was supposed to guard Harry Potter, the poor boy had been attacked by Dementors. Then Potter'd had to go to trial because he

had used magic, and well... Dung didn't want to continue down that road. He shuddered a bit at the thought.

When they reached the Headmaster's office, Albus gave the password, "Licorice Snap." Swiftly, the gargoyle guarding the entrance jumped aside to reveal a spiral staircase. Once at the top, they all entered the double, heavy oak doors.

"Please have a seat," Dumbledore told them as he flicked his wand, and three cushioned chairs appeared.

Minerva settled into one, as did Mundungus into another. Severus, however, remained standing with his arms crossed over his chest, as if in defense against the world.

Albus sighed. "Severus, really, please sit down... unless you have somewhere else you need to be right this moment," Dumbledore finished tiredly.

Severus continued standing a moment, looked to the side as if thinking, 'oh, all right!' and sat down with a swish and flurry of black robes.

"Thank you." Albus smiled and took a seat behind his large desk.

Behind him, Mundungus heard gentle... What was that? Snoring? As he turned to look, he noticed the portraits of previous Headmasters lining the walls. They all seemed to be asleep. Well, it was rather late.

Dumbledore flicked his wand again, and a teapot on a trolley immediately began to pour steaming tea into four cups. Each cup floated to a recipient, and as they sipped, Mundungus started to fidget. Finally, Dumbledore put down his cup and stared at Dung with a small smile.

"Well, Mr. Fletcher, to what do we owe this midnight rendezvous?" he asked with interest.

"Yes oh, that um," Dung stuttered. "I was on my way to Diagon Alley to..." "What?" he thought frantically, "meet a friend, and I noticed someone putting up a sign on a new night club across from the Leaky Cauldron," he finished.

"I see. And you thought the Headmaster could do with a bit of dancing so you ambled right over," Severus mocked.

"Severus..." said Dumbledore stoically, eyeing the younger man, and Snape settled again.

"Umm... I thought the name of the singer listed on the sign sounded familiar. So I slipped around back to see if it was who I thought it might be," he began and told them what he had overheard.

"Magic!? In front of a Muggle?" Snape questioned offensively at the part about the sign.

"Yes, but the other one was a Squib, and I think this John fellow is aware of magic folk," Dung repeated.

"Well, was the singer who you thought it was," asked Albus.

"Yes! Oh, yes! It has to be. She's practically the spittin' image of her mother," Dung told him excitedly.

"Then, what is her name?" asked Minerva, who until now had been silent.

"You realize I had to be sure. I thought I heard she had died. Only remembered the father's name," he continued.

"What is her name?" They all asked the question simultaneously, stopping Dung from going off in a rant again.

"Oh, yes, that! Serena Celestia," he finished, and there was a sudden sharp intake of breath to his right.

They all looked at Minerva and noticed she had turned dreadfully pale. Her hands started shaking, and Albus rose swiftly to take the cup and saucer from her. He set it on the tea trolley and quickly turned, taking her hands in his.

"Minerva, my dear." Dumbledore searched her face earnestly. She looked so pale, and she shook almost violently, bordering on shock. Soon, she seemed to draw strength from his hands, and her breathing, which had been somewhat shallow, began to steady.

"Albus? The name... it can't be! But...how? And he said...her mother...she looks like her mother..." Minerva pointed at Mundungus and searched Albus' eyes frantically.

"How could she!? How could she do this to me?" Minerva began ranting, her voice climbing higher and higher with anger. Her shock turned to rage, and her body trembled with the force of it. Abruptly, she wrenched her hands from Dumbledore and stood up. Frenetically looking at Dung, she asked angrily, "Where is she?"

"I just said..." he began, cowering at the woman's fury and jabbing a thumb over his shoulder.

"No, no... I meantoh, never mind!" Minerva moved toward the door.

Albus reached out a hand and placed it on her shoulder. "Minerva, I know you are angry. But flying off like this will not help your grandniece," he reminded, and Minerva gasped again.

She whirled around, eyes full of ferocity, and snapped, "Well, someone had better go get her! And that no good sister of Sam's! I'll, I'll!" she sputtered as Albus took her hands and led her back to her chair.

Reluctantly, she sank into the softness, staring blindly ahead but remaining ramrod straight. After a moment, her green eyes rose to meet Albus' blue ones. He noticed the tears beginning to glisten there, and he sat on his desk facing her, squeezing her hands.

"I thought she was dead, Albus." Her voice came out as a hoarse whisper.

"As did we all, my dear Minerva," he spoke softly and sadly gazed in her eyes, squeezing her hands again.

"Adelaide," she began, and a grimace crossed her face. "She told me Serena was dead... she showed me the pictures. Why, Albus?" Minerva pleaded, her heart aching. "Of course, she always did dislike me. I guess I just never knew how much," she stated ironically.

"Shhh, there, there, my dear." Albus placed a hand on her shoulder as Minerva halfheartedly pulled her hands from his and covered her face. Albus then moved back behind his desk.

"Was there anything else, Mr. Fletcher?" Dumbledore asked of Mundungus who simply stared, open mouthed, at the shivering form of Minerva McGonagall.

Shaken from his dumbfounded state, Dung looked at the Headmaster. "No, well, I simply figured you'd really want to know, since I seemed to recall her mother had some sort of ancient power..." he began, and Minerva's head snapped up.

She looked at Mundungus and then quickly turned to Albus. "Albus? You don't think she... Serena could have..." She let the words stop falling from her mouth. "I mean... when she was here there was no" she started, then stopped and frowned.

"Indications? Yes, yes, I know. But you know as well as I do that a power like that takes time to show, and even then, if they aren't aware," he told her, and she nodded gravely.

"Excuse me? But what?" Dung began to ask. However, Albus cut him off by turning to a cabinet behind him.

Dumbledore retrieved something from a box and offered it to the other man. Dung held out his hand, and Albus placed a purple bag containing galleons in it. Dung's eyes seemed to glitter. He no longer thought of his question and looked up at the Headmaster.

"Thank you, sir!" Mundungus could hardly believe his luck. "There must be sixty galleons here," he thought.

Professor Snape, who had watched all of this with growing concern, rose and walked to the door at a look from Albus. "Thank you for the story, Mr. Fletcher. And now it would seem the rest of us would like to retire." As Snape opened the door to usher Mundungus out, Hagrid was standing there, poised to knock. Snape rolled his eyes in exasperation.

"Ahh, Hagrid, my boy! Would you be so kind as to show our associate out?" Dumbledore's eyes twinkled. "You've got the slug root I asked for, I see." Albus' eyes rested on some slimy tendrils hanging from a bucket being carried by the half-giant.

"Yes, sir, Professor Dumbledore, sir. And I would be deligh'ed to show Mister Fletch'r out. Righ' this way!" Hagrid placed the bucket on the floor by the door and waved for Mundungus to follow him.

"Oh, yes, right!" Dung rose quickly and strode to the door. "Pleasure... um, thanks for the tea, Albus," he said as the Headmaster gave a simple nod.

"Good night, Mundungus, until we meet again," called Albus, and Dung was gone as Severus closed the door.

As they listened to Mundungus and Hagrid descend the stairs, Severus cast a silencing charm on the door and turned back to the others. He looked at the other two and stated, "As you were saying?"

Albus looked at him with the ever familiar twinkle. However, there was also intensity in the older wizard's gaze for Minerva, who had started wringing her hands. "I think we should explain, Minerva." Albus looked at her steadily.

She closed her eyes, nodded gravely and then began, "Seraphenia, who is Serena's mother, was my niece. She worked for the Department of Mysteries and met Sam Celestia, who worked for the Ministry of Magic's counterpart in America, when he was stationed here as an Ambassador for Magical Cooperation."

"In my family, a certain power is passed from mother to eldest daughter. Occasionally, it skips a generation. In my generation, my sister, Melissa, had the power, and she passed it on to her daughter, Seraphenia, who it seems, has passed it on to Serena," she told them.

"What power? How can you be sure the girl has it?" Severus asked, intrigued.

"By what Mr. Fletcher said, Serena is being very cautious. If she had the power, she would guard it and, therefore, would not take to singing too often in public. The man, Charles, mentioned seeing her sing before. That the night club had been filled to bursting. When Mr. Fletcher mentioned this, I had no doubt. Her mother was always very careful not to mention it or draw attention if she could help it," Minerva continued.

"But..." Severus began.

"Yes, yes... you see," Minerva went on exasperated, "my ancestor was a Siren. You are well read, I believe, you know what Sirens are and the power they possess." Minerva looked at him a little incensed.

Severus took in this last bit of information with a thread of shock. Yes, he did know what a Siren was, but he had no idea they still existed. "But, how is she not corrupted? All the stories I've ever read or heard indicate Sirens bring peril to those who answer their song. Yet, Charles is still alive, and he didn't mention anyone else" Snape contemplated as Minerva cut him off.

"Yes, well the folklore in my clan states the Siren, Thestia, fell in love with Thaddeus McGonagall, who was deaf. Her song could never lure him to peril. With each generation thereafter, the power was passed and further dispersed. Each female in which the power is centered differs from the next. It can be very strong or very weak. The magnitude depends greatly on the powers of the witch in question."

"With Seraphenia, she knew she had the power at a very young age, and she loved to sing. This seemed to cause a few problems when she was a teenager until she learned to control it. I believe her study of this control led her to the Department of Mysteries, and then, eventually, to Sam."

"When they had Serena, I did wonder, but while she did have vast magical abilities, she didn't show any indications of having the power of Siren song, even when she began here at Hogwarts." At this point Minerva's green eyes grew darker, the irises dilated. "Then, Sam got called back to America and took them with him, and... everything seemed... to come apart." Her voice broke a little, and Minerva looked down at her hands.

Without looking up she continued, "About a month after Sam and the girls left, I received an owl from his sister, Adelaide. Informing me they had been attacked. I got there as quickly as I could but" She shuddered at the memory and tried to swallow the lump forming in her throat. "They weren't there; only Adelaide was at the estate, and she seemed very upset to see me. Of course, I remembered her from Sam and Seraphenia's wedding, and I gathered she disliked me, but I never knew why." Minerva shook her head, looked back up at Albus and Severus and noted the tears hovering in Albus' eyes.

Letting out a deep breath, she went on, "Anyway, she huffed and told me they were dead, that it was too late to do anything and threw pictures of all three at me as proof." A dry sob burst from Minerva, and Albus took her hand again. "Oh gods, they were so awful... who could have done that to a child!? Adelaide said they were Death Eaters..." Minerva looked up, her eyes resting on Severus this time. Severus' eyes reflected pain for the anguish emanating from her every gesture. "That they cast the Dark Mark. She said the American Ministry arrived in time to engage the Death Eaters but killed all in the struggle that followed."

"Adelaide told me" she broke off momentarily, struggling to regain some of her usual level-headedness but went on, defeated, "where the children were buried... and... and I went to the graveyard. I laid my flowers and tokens on their plots. I... she...They were all so young...Why?" Minerva looked into Albus' moist blue eyes, and her tears began. Huge drops gathered at the corners of her eyes and spilled down her face.

As she wept, her mind raced frantically over the facts. Something had happened which she didn't understand. She had seen the pictures, she had been to the graves, yet she had just heard, somewhat, verification that Serena was still alive. 'But... how and why?' she thought anxiously.

Albus watched Minerva's eyes dart back and forth. Her trembling increased. Panic was rising within her as a realization struck her. A realization she was having a hard time comprehending. Accepting Serena's death had been heart-breaking for her, he knew. But, how would she deal with it if that death had been a lie. And a lie to what gain, he wondered.

"Minerva, my dear" he started.

"No, Albus, don't," she cut him off. "I need answers... I need...oh gods, can it be true? After all these years... She was my heart, Albus! It feels like its being torn open again. You know... you remember," she tried to continue as her voice rasped, the words torn from her throat, "what it was like... we were like." Minerva covered her face with her hands as her shoulders shook.

As Minerva sat there in her grief, she felt her hands being pried from her eyes. But it wasn't Albus this time. She looked up into the soulful black eyes of Severus. He had come down on one knee and knelt there, searching her face.

"Minerva... let me," he said simply. "I will not fail you. I can get the answers you seek. I will help you uncover the truth. Please... I have never seen you so distraught. I know

I can find the answers."

Severus held both of her hands in his as he finished his appeal. Minerva was touched. Albus had always told her Severus had his full confidence, but she had never known he could have such compassion. It was true; they did not always see eye to eye, but apparently they were of one accord when it came to family.

Severus' hand over hers steadied her, and Minerva's trembling decreased. "Severus, how?" she asked as her eyes searched his.

"Well, we will be in need of a plan," he intoned dryly as a small smile played about his lips for just an instant.

Minerva thought she must have lost her mind. She could have sworn she saw Severus smile, but when she rubbed her tearful eyes and looked again, it was gone. She shook her head to clear her thoughts as Albus watched the two people he cared for most in the world finally come to an understanding, the twinkle shining madly in his brilliant blue eyes.

Aloha

Chapter 3 of 7

Minerva reflects on the last moments she was able to share with Serena, and Albus feels guilty for the way things came to pass.

Many thanks go to my beta, Sempra, for being so patient with me.

Chapter 3: Aloha

Minerva rested on a crimson, velvet sofa, staring into the fire. Severus was gone. While finishing up their plans, he had been summoned. Albus would be up soon; he had gone to properly store the slug root Hagrid had gathered so she was alone with her thoughts.

Her thoughts were bothering her. They chased round and round in her head and soon changed to memories. Minerva drew a shaky breath as her eyes filled once more. She really needed to get a hold of herself. She hadn't cried this much in years.

Gently, she brought her knees up beneath her nightgown and hugged them to her chest, curling into herself as she gazed, unseeing, into the fire. In her mind, she traveled back to the last time she had seen Serena. She could remember it like it was yesterday, even without a Pensieve.

Their chamber looked the same, and the early morning sunlight was filtering in through the expansive crimson and gold-draped windows. The scent of fall was in the air: autumn leaves and apples. A red sofa sat facing a warm fire happily burning in the grate, and Minerva had cleared off the dark wood coffee table in front of the sofa to make room for the tea they would have soon.

An eleven year old Serena, wearing green robes much like Minerva's and a tartan scarf, with her burnished, deep mahogany curls tumbling down her back, stood with her arms folded over her chest. Her deep, green eyes were narrowed in a bit of a frown, and her mouth was pursed in a little pout, tears balancing precariously on her lashes.

"But I don't want to go, Auntie Minerva! I want to stay here with you and Uncle Albus. It's not fair!" Serena angrily swiped with trembling hands at the tears threatening to spill, and her emerald eyes flashed with fury. She was a McGonagall all right, and she had the temper to prove it.

"Love, I promise, Albus and I will come visit you in a month's time. It won't be so long. In the mean time, you'll be meeting new friends and learning about a different country. But think of your mother and father. They love you very much, and it would break their hearts to know you didn't want to go with them," she told the child quietly. Minerva thought of her own heart but pushed it aside.

Seraphenia had been very adamant for Serena to move with them instead of remaining at Hogwarts. But then Serena was her child, after all. Also, Sam had talked of his school in the States, and she knew he very much wanted Serena to attend and to meet his sister. Minerva's eyes darkened at that thought.

For a moment, Serena looked taken aback at Minerva's words. A look of guilt crossed her face, and she glanced down at her hands as they flipped over each other. Minerva saw worry in the young girl's face when she looked up again. "Please don't tell them what I said. I don't want to hurt their feelings, it's just..." she whispered.

Minerva smiled and spoke gently, trying to calm her, "Shhh, shhh, I know, lass. It'll be our secret." With this, she made a gesture as if she was turning a key over her lips and tossing it away. A small smile curved Serena's mouth, and she ran to embrace her aunt in a fierce hug when Minerva held her arms out. As their hug ended, Minerva settled Serena on the sofa beside her.

"Now, I believe you are here for us to have tea. Are you not?" Minerva smiled at the little girl, and Serena looked up with excitement.

"Can I call for it, Auntie Minerva? Puuullllleeeeeaaaasssse?" Serena clasped her hands in front of her chest and cocked her head to the side, attempting her most angelic look.

Minerva laughed. "My love, you know how that look gets you most anything with me, you great manipulator, you." She smiled and nodded.

Serena hopped off the sofa and went to the desk to retrieve a small, silver bell from its resting place. She rang it once, and it made a musical tinkling sound. "When a bell rings, an angel gets its wings. We can always use another angel in the world." She beamed and put down the bell delicately, then called in a singsong voice, "Blossie, oh, Blossie?"

With a 'pop,' a little house-elf appeared, wearing a tartan plaid tablecloth which was fitted almost like a toga and held in place by a red brooch at her shoulder. "Little miss calls for tea? Yes, yes, very wonderful tea!" The elf was followed by a tray of tea things which settled onto the coffee table.

Serena clapped with delight and told her happily, "Oh, thank you, Blossie, ever so much."

Minerva smiled at the child as she made happy exchanges with Blossie. Her heart lurched a little. She was going to miss her so much. As Blossie popped away, Serena's wistful eyes met Minerva's and concern rested there. Minerva watched as Serena moved toward her with determination and took her hands. Their hands felt warm, and Minerva felt the ache in her heart ease.

"Serena..." Minerva began, beginning to frown at the girl but stopped at the look Serena gave her. Serena wanted to do this for her, she knew. Minerva was constantly

astounded by the unconditional love she saw in this child. She loved her more than she could express. Also, she was touched that Serena knew her pain, even for one so young, and would still take some of that pain from her to help Minerva while the lass was aching herself.

Serena leaned forward, and they embraced each other in a heartwarming hug. As they leaned away from each other once more, Serena observed the tray of delicious items to eat. She sniffed the air, and her lips turned up at the familiar scent of jasmine tea, her favorite. There were also ginger newts, apple tarts, pumpkin bread pudding and cinnamon chocolate bread. Her nose wrinkled a bit at the pungent aroma of spice in the air. Her aunt had definitely outdone herself with the selection.

Sighing, Serena said, "I so love the fall."

Minerva smiled at the elation in her grandniece's voice and was glad she had arranged this time for her and Serena. Albus, Sam and Seraphenia would be up soon. Then, the children would leave, and she would once again feel the void Serena currently kept filled. However, she was determined to make this tea between them very happy, not sad.

"You know, Auntie Minerva, I was reading about one of the states the other day. Hawaii, I think it is called. It is a group of islands out in the Pacific Ocean, and the weather there is very warm. It stays that way all the year long. I think some day I would like to visit there because it is warm. But, I don't think I would like Christmas without any snow." Serena looked at her aunt who, in turn, looked back at her thoughtfully.

Minerva simply replied, "I see." She then put an apple tart and ginger newt on her plate.

"They also speak another language there," Serena continued. "So when people go there to visit, they use the Hawaiian greeting of 'aloha' which means 'hello' and 'goodbye'. It also means love and affection as well as, 'breath or essence of life,' among other things. So I thought if we said 'aloha,' instead of goodbye, it wouldn't really be like we were saying goodbye, right?" Serena looked questioningly at Minerva, but then her look turned serious. "I mean... because... well, we will see each other very soon so we aren't really saying goodbye," she finished apprehensively and took a sip of her tea.

Once more, Minerva pushed aside the tug of her heartstrings. "I think that is a wonderful idea." She smiled affectionately at her.

Over the course of an hour, they chatted about a variety of subjects. From how large the United States was, to Animagi, where Minerva changed into her tabby form and sat purring while Serena stroked her back, to Quidditch and how Serena hoped to see the cup in Minerva's office at the end of the season.

Blossie had just vanished their tea tray when Albus, Sam and Seraphenia came in chuckling over a joke Sam had heard at the Ministry. Sam, a tall wizard with an athletic build, black hair and bright blue eyes, smiled down at his daughter. "Okay, sunshine, are you ready to go?"

Serena's face fell a little but brightened again quickly. She looked to Minerva, who nodded slightly, and they both moved to close the distance between them. As they embraced, Serena's words were muffled in Minerva's robes, "mmuulooha."

"And aloha to you, my little lass," Minerva rubbed her back, squeezed, then pulled away. Her heart was aching, but not as bad as it had been before Serena had taken her hands. As she watched the little girl, Minerva saw Serena put on a brave face and nod solemnly at her parents.

Seraphenia, tall and willowy, who had deep burnished curls and deep green eyes like her daughter, turned to Minerva and smiled playfully. "I see she has told you about Hawaii."

"Yes, I thought it was a splendid suggestion. We will be seeing you all very soon." Minerva found her hand in Albus' and looked at him. His eyes sparkled.

"Ah, the tradition of 'aloha,'" Albus said brightly. "A very good tradition it is!"

Minerva thought she caught him wink at Serena, who covered her mouth with her hand to stifle a giggle and then worked to replace it with a smile that wasn't too bright to hide their conspiracy. Serena then winked back at him when she thought Minerva wasn't looking.

"Aunt Minerva, we'll miss you. And you too, Uncle Albus." Seraphenia gripped them both in successive warm, willowy hugs. This was followed by Sam's warm embrace of Minerva, and a hand shake and clap on the back to Albus.

Slowly, the group made their way to the gates of the castle. Serena gave Albus and Minerva another brief hug and murmured 'aloha' once more. She then placed her arms around her mother's neck and looked back longingly at her great aunt and uncle. Finally, with a double crack, the three Apparated away.

Minerva's shoulders drooped a little, and her lips formed a thin line. Albus slid his arm around her and pulled her close. "It will be less than a month, my darling."

"I know, my love, but, oh...how I'm going to miss them," Minerva said sadly as she looked, unseeing, down the road to Hogsmeade.

A single tear rolled down Minerva's cheek. Still she stared at the fire. Sleep wasn't coming anytime soon, and she hugged her legs again.

Albus entered their suite quietly. He noticed Minerva on the sofa and saw the single tear on her cheek, the far away look on her face, and his shoulders came down in defeat and guilt. Hadn't he been the one to tell her it would be less than a month until they would see the children? His mind floated back to a moment in time fifteen years ago.

He had paced and paced... and paced some more. He was in anguish waiting for news, any news. His wife had been gone a little more than a week and still he had no word from her.

He regretted not having been able to go with her, and he worried for her safety. Death Eater attacks had escalated over the last few weeks. Even in America. He shuddered. 'The children,' he thought. All he could do was hope they were alright. When Minerva had received the letter from Sam's sister, it had not been very informative. It only said they'd been attacked by Death Eaters, nothing more.

The number of attacks and the running of the school did not allow them both to answer Adelaide's letter. So, reluctantly, he had sent Minerva to check on the children. Pensively, he sat behind his desk, tired of pacing. He stared at the large stack of Ministry correspondence he needed to answer and sighed. Perhaps it would take his mind off his worries. However, he had a knotted feeling in his stomach that simply wouldn't go away. No communication was not like Minerva. Although it took a long time to get here from across the sea and owls were impossible. 'Maybe I should send Fawkes,' he thought. Alas, the distance was great, even for a phoenix. Albus sighed again and attempted to settle into his task.

Suddenly, his office door swung open and cracked loudly against the wall. His head snapped up with a start, and he took in Minerva's disheveled appearance. He felt his heart drop to his stomach and was instantly by her side.

Minerva's deeply green eyes sought him out and watched him with red-rimmed intensity. When he was next to her, he put his arms around her waist, and she sank to the floor, pulling him with her.

"Albus..." was all she managed to croak. Her only word, torn from her lips as they sank, and he knew. Her anguished cry conveyed to him all the dark realities he had been trying to deny for the last week.

He held her to him tightly, his heart tearing in two as the sound of his wife's tortured sobs finally broke the surface. She clung to him, burying her face in his chest and let the storm erupt, finally, from within her. A harsh groan emerged from his throbbing chest, and his choked sobs joined Minerva's as he let go of the pain harboring in his chest. They clung to each other in a heap on the floor, grieving for the death of the happiness they had known in their little family and for the dimming of the bright light

Serena had brought to their lives.

A pop from the fire chased Albus from his thoughts, and again his eyes rested tenderly on his wife. Her hair had come loose and now cascaded around her like a black velvet curtain. She was so beautiful, and his heart swelled with love as he marveled at the fact that after so many years, he loved her more now than he had even yesterday.

His face was wet from the tears caused by his memory, so he pulled a handkerchief from his robe pocket and quickly wiped his eyes. Quietly, he made his way to her, making a little noise along the way, hopefully, to alert her to his presence. He didn't want to startle her.

"Minerva," he called speculatively. She shifted and stretched her legs back out, looking at him. Her mouth curved slightly in a small smile that was there then gone quickly.

Albus made his way to the sofa and stood behind her. Gently he leaned down, slid his arms around her and brushed her neck tenderly with his lips. "Knut for your thoughts," he murmured.

Her eyes looked a little sad but still held hope. For once, after fifteen years, when he looked at her, he was glad to see hope when he knew she thought of Serena. She sighed, "I was remembering the last time I saw Serena. Aloha," she said quietly and smiled up at him.

He smiled back with a bit of twinkle in his eyes. "I suppose you know how Serena came up with that bit of information."

"Yes, I saw you wink at each other." She playfully slapped his arms, and he tightened them around her. Minerva tilted her face up, and their lips touched. Both of them gloried in the comfort offered by the other.

Their kiss began to deepen as their passion for each other had never waned. It was always there, subtly beneath the surface, just waiting for a spark: heated words... a look... a touch... a kiss.

Albus nibbled her bottom lip, and Minerva's lips opened to his probing tongue. His scent drifted over her, and his taste touched her tongue. He tasted and smelled of lemons and chocolate. Their tongues circled each other playfully, and her hands reached up of their own accord, tangling in his hair as his head shifted sideways to deepen the kiss, sweet passion beginning to flair between them.

Soon, the contact of their lips broke, and they gasped for air, their chests rising and falling quickly. "Mmmm... have I told you how delicious you are lately?" Albus looked intently at her.

"No." She shook her head, which helped her thoughts clear a little. "Albus?" she questioned.

"Hmmm?"

"I just remembered something."

"And what was that?"

"Should we have told Severus that Serena is an empath?"

"Perhaps, but it's too late now. Although I'm sure he'll find out soon enough," he said thoughtfully.

Again, he leaned forward and kissed her upturned face with ardor. He moved his hands to cup her face, his lips following a heated trail to the bit of neck below her ear. A gasp escaped her lips, "But, but Al..." she began, frowning, trying to concentrate.

"Mmmm, hush, my love, and come to bed." With which statement, he scooped her up in his arms.

Minerva turned and put her arms around his neck. Her lips found his once more, and she forgot her protests as he carried her to their bedroom, the fire still burning brightly behind them.

Opening Act

Chapter 4 of 7

Severus travels to Diagon Alley to attend a concert, and as the club fills, Serena and Severus seem drawn to one another. When the show comes to a close, Severus prepares to intercept the star.

Disclaimer: JKR owns all Harry Potter characters. And the songs referenced belong to Sara Evans and Loreena McKennitt respectively.

Thank you, Sempra, for all your hard work and keeping me in line.

Serena sat in her dressing room, staring sadly into the mirror. Wistful green eyes gazed back at her, and she sighed. For a change she wanted to stay, but a nagging inside her insisted she move on. She ignored it for the time being and looked in the mirror at the person behind her. Charles was there, and she snickered.

"Oi! Right! You think it's hysterical. Bloody funny! What if it isn't enough," he rioted, pacing back and forth.

"Well, one, you are pacing, which simply isn't you, Charles, and two, it will be enough... Trust me." She smiled to waylay his worry. Serena sensed his franticness and turned to face him. She got up and approached him, then gently placed her hands on his, and he immediately felt warmth spread through his body, calming him. He stood there and breathed a sigh of contentment.

"There, that's better, isn't it?"

"How do you bloody do that?" Charles stared at her, shaking his head to clear his muzzy thoughts.

"Well, now that I know you'll listen... It will be enough," she said sternly, placing her hands on his shoulders and looking into his eyes.

"Yes, mother," he saluted.

Rolling her eyes at him and letting go of his shoulders, Serena added, "Now, where is John? You two are so opposite, everything will work. You both make up for each other's weaknesses."

There was a knock at her door, and Serena moved to open it. John stood there, looking calm. Serena observed him and smiled knowingly. "Just a few jitters, huh?" she asked, and he nodded.

"How does she bloody do that?" Charles asked in an exasperated plea and then rolled his eyes.

"It's magic." Serena smiled mischievously, for this wasn't a lie, but the boys didn't know that. "You've done all the research. You have your acts together. The club looks fantastic. You have bouncers, both magic and Muggle. You've crossed every T and dotted every I for the Ministry of Magic and the Muggle government. Now it's time to reap your rewards," Serena voiced enthusiastically, breathless as she ticked off every detail while her eyes danced back and forth between her two friends.

"Now go out there, show off your new club, and get ready to start the show." She smiled, and they both shot beaming smiles back at her. "You know, I'll miss you both," she began on a more serious note. "Please don't think I'm rude if I don't hover after my performance. I'll send for my things as soon as I get where I'm going," she told them.

The smiles left their faces briefly but returned at her scowl. Serena beamed at them again and announced, "Hugs!" And they all gathered in a warm group hug.

"We'll miss you, deary. You know you are always welcome if you are ever in the neighborhood," John told her, his warm hazel eyes meeting hers intently.

"Be safe, and remember, we are here if you ever need us," Charles conveyed.

Serena smiled warmly. She was definitely going to miss the boys. They had been inseparable for several weeks now. Sort of like an old soul finding a home, but her soul couldn't rest yet. It still hadn't found its home... its roots. There was a nagging deep within her she had been ignoring for days. Yes, it was time to move on yet again. She knew she had been doing this for long enough, but tonight, somehow, felt different.

As the boys left to do as she said, she was alone in her dressing room. She did the usual things to prepare for her leave. She never knew where she was going or where she would end up. But it was always the same, and while it was hard to explain, she would know where she was going when she got there.

Serena checked her robes for everything. A majority of her instruments and equipment would remain here for the time being. She was only taking the essentials, and she would wait to don her robes because even though everything was shrunken, they always made her feel weighed down at times. She really despised that feeling.

For her performance, she had green dress robes that shimmered. They were transparent at the sleeves with a flare at the wrist and showed just a bit of leg to the knee with a generous slit up the side from the floor. The green was the perfect shade of emerald that complimented her eyes, and there was even a hidden pocket for her wand.

Yes, she would definitely have to remember Madam Malkin. The woman had known what Serena wanted even before she had known it herself, and that was saying something. The seamstress had shown her a white chemise, which was heaven against her skin, and then the dress robes, which were made of several layers of modal and silk. She was wearing it all. With so many layers, she thought it would feel bulky or heavy, yet it was all light. The robes and chemise had been rather expensive, but John and Charles had insisted on purchasing them for her. She had let them indulge... She did feel guilty, but pushed the feeling aside for once. For some reason she felt she needed these clothes. Serena had never owned anything so comfortable, yet so... provocative.

Serena stood at the full-length mirror and smiled at her reflection fervently. *Mmmm... yes*, she thought, perhaps she looked quite good. The dress robes flowed as she turned, hugging and revealing, but letting the imagination do the work. It almost looked like she was floating. *Perfect*, she thought with a smirk.

"Five minutes to curtain call..." John yelled from beyond her door.

There they were, right on cue, the butterflies in her stomach. Like always, Serena took a deep breath to settle them. Silently, she slipped her wand into its secret pocket and left the room to make sure the band and everything else was set up right.

Backstage was a mass of action. The girls from the act following hers were running back and forth putting on makeup. Serena scrunched up her face as she looked at what they were wearing. Nude colored leotards covered in sequins and some type of white plumage stuck to their bottoms like tail feathers. Hideous! But they had sounded good in their rehearsal. *Might want to change their image soon*, she concluded.

As Serena arrived at the back of the stage, the band was already seated and arranged. They all had their music, and her stool was set at the front with a microphone. Her piano was to her left, and her guitar was in its stand to her right. Perfect. She carefully stepped over all the wires running to the amps and sound booth and made her way to the front of the stage.

Serena grinned and waved at each member as she went past, each smiling in return. John had done a great job selecting each person of the band and, in turn, acquiring some of the best in their field in the area. She was very pleased with this because it would ensure not only the popularity of Achelous but its future success as well. She really was going to miss them all. She made it to her seat finally, but remained standing. She raised the microphone, intending to stand for the first song, and beyond the curtains, she heard murmuring and laughing. Serena took a deep breath and waited the last few minutes quietly.

Severus Snape made his way into the night club with a nod to the man at the door. He looked left and right, taking in the people and atmosphere, ensuring no one would recognize him. He also looked for Mundungus in his hideous hag gear, but didn't see him either. *Well that's one bright note to the evening*, he reflected.

Scanning the club around him, he noted the bar with glowing blue neon off to the right. The walls had a shimmer to them as if they were filled with water, making the club seem like it was under water. The walls also glowed with aqua-blue color. Ahead of him, there was a shimmering, iridescent-green curtain hiding the stage, and in front of that was a dance floor.

Surrounding the dance floor were tables made from large pieces of coral with clear glass tops. Each was flanked by two chairs which looked like an open shell. Severus searched to find an empty table toward the back and spotted one in a small niche around to the right of the bar. There weren't too many people here yet, even though the show was about to start. However, he felt if it did get crowded, he could see well enough from here and even manage to slip out if needed.

Staring ahead, he went over the plan they had come up with silently. While Minerva had not agreed at first, he closed his eyes at that thought, she had finally agreed that he and Albus were only looking out for her best interests and the school's. She'd had to admit they couldn't all attend the show as it would draw attention. So here he was, about to abduct a woman on the pretense that she was someone who should have been dead, was someone who had an ancient power the Dark Lord might want and was the grandniece of the Deputy Headmistress. Odds were, none of this was true, but these days they couldn't take chances.

Severus looked up to the stage when the curtain rose. *And she is beautiful*, his mind yelled. He closed his mouth, as it had dropped open in astonishment. Here, before his eyes, on the stage was a vision. This woman seemed to hover in the center of the stage with her green robes floating about her. Her deep, rich mahogany hair was half piled on top of her head, and the rest flowed down her back in a cascade of waves and curls. Her skin looked creamy at her chest where the neckline of her robes dipped between her breasts. The robes clung to her, accentuating the curve of her hips and the swell of her breasts. One could only imagine what she looked like beneath them. Last, her face was like a pixie, with full lips, high cheek bones and bright green eyes. Yes, thought Severus, *Serena fits the bill for a Siren alright*.

Severus shook his head and recalled what Minerva had told him. Yet, she could never have prepared him for this. Quickly, he slipped the sound mufflers into his ears. He would be able to hear, but any of the ethereal sounds of a Siren would be filtered. The plan was to wait until the show was over to make his move. So, when a waitress walked up to him, he ordered a Butterbeer and leaned back to listen.

Serena held her breath as the curtain rose. Quickly, she scanned the small crowd seated at all the low tables. As she scanned, her eyes seemed drawn to the small table in the alcove to her left. When she noticed the man seated there, she took a sharp intake of breath and her mouth almost fell open. The man at the table was simply delicious. His black hair fell in a curtain about his shoulders, and his hooked nose gave him a look of nobility.

He was wearing what looked like Muggle attire, which was all black: black trousers and shoes, with a black long sleeved shirt with a high collar and a black, enameled button at his throat. His black eyes seemed to rove over her body as the atmosphere sizzled. Serena felt her skin begin to heat as the first strains of her song filled the air, and she began to sing.

"The rockin' horse came, from an old oak tree

Just missed the house, when it was hit by lightning"

Quickly she grabbed the microphone and swung her long tresses.

"My daddy painted that horse, a midnight blue

Shooting stars and silver horse shoes

And it was something magic out of something frightening"

She closed her eyes and let out just a little bit.

"That's how I live my life

I take it as it comes

And I find the hidden love

When it's pouring down on me

In my mind I see

The rockin' horse inside the tree"

Severus listened to the words. This song was definitely American. As he looked around again, feeling the need to stop staring at the woman on the stage, he noticed more people filing in. Many of the people already seated were watching Serena avidly, and many of the men had a dreamy look about them. He sneered at them as a feeling washed over him like icy fingers in his gut. *What is that*, he wondered. Severus swung his head back around to look at Serena again. He needed to do a test so he took one sound muffler out of his ear and listened.

"A broken heart means deeper feelings

A thorn in the flesh, means room for healing

Oh, salt in your tears, can open your eyes

Wounded years make you realize

It's just something magic out of something frightening"

As Serena went to the chorus again, Severus had to shake his head to clear his thoughts. He had been almost in a trance. However, it wasn't so bad he couldn't think. Severus found himself pondering several things. Serena was either controlling the power very well or this was all the power she possessed. Nevertheless, he put the sound muffler back in his ear. He didn't want to take any chances, as a few men around him were drooling. "Dunderheads," he said under his breath and gave a sniff.

"Ohhhh... things aren't always as they seem

Ohhhh... take the nightmare from my dreams"

Well, he could certainly identify with this song. He watched Serena once more as she opened her eyes, scanning the room as she had when the curtain went up, and her eyes rested on him. They simply seemed to linger on him, and for a moment, it felt like only the two of them existed. Her singing and him watching her.

Serena's gaze drifted from him to rove yet again, and briefly he felt lost. But he shook his head and it cleared. There was something else to try. Breathing deeply, Severus cleared his thoughts with the practice of Occulmency and looked up with his mind clear. When Serena looked at him again, his mind filled with her despite his attempt to shield himself. Since Severus prided himself on his talent for Occulmency, it came as a shock to him when Serena could tear down his defenses without even trying. He realized being close to her was going to be very dangerous for him, especially if she ever fell into the hands of the Dark Lord. *What will Albus think*, he pondered. His eyes narrowed. He didn't think there would be a twinkle in the old man's eyes with this revelation, or would there be?

Severus sneered at the thought as the song ended and applause began. Just then, a short, stocky man with thick blond hair and blue eyes mounted the stairs to the stage, clapping. "Ah, very wonderful, Serena, love. Thank you. Hello, all! And welcome to Achelous. We hope you are enjoying yourselves. I'll only bother you for a few moments, and then we'll get back to the entertainment." Charles beamed at the crowd.

"First, I would like to thank Serena for all her hard work in helping Jonathan and myself get started." He paused at the applause. Serena started to scowl at him, but then looked away shrugging. Resigned, she smiled timidly and nodded at the crowd.

Severus wondered at this reaction as Charles spoke again. "We have a wonderful line up tonight. After Serena, we have The Harmonious Harpies, and then, to wrap up, we have The Pixies. Also, in addition to the first drink free, we have two for one until midnight." There was loud applause at this announcement. "So, please... Remember Achelous. The place to celebrate and wash away your cares," Charles finished with a flourish and made a movement for Serena to take it away again.

Serena nodded at the band, sat down and reached for her guitar. The drummer tapped off the beat and the song began. Serena closed her eyes and strummed as the words softly floated out of her mouth.

"I'm a leaf on a river, falling from the tall oak tree

Drifting down this moving stream, wherever this life carries me

I'm a tumble weed, in the desert wind

Just tumblin', while the sun's shinin'

I have no boundaries... call me a gypsy

I'm restless

Just ramblin'

What do you do, where do you go... when no where feels like home

I'm restless"

Another American number, Severus thought, but the words spoke volumes. Could this be how she felt, he wondered. More people had wandered in, attracted by the music no doubt, and he noticed they had the door propped open.

Several couples circled the dance floor, but soon there would be standing room only. Serena opened her eyes and searched again for the man in black. Why she continued to seek him out, she didn't know. This was so unlike her, especially when she couldn't get a vibe in the crowd. Several people stood in front of his table now, but she could still feel his eyes on her as she continued.

"Am I an angel, fallen from heaven's grace

Oh, it feels like that some days and I can't find my place.

I guess God just makes some of us, to live and die by highway dust

Guess I just have to trust, on those days I'm crawlin'

This is my callin'"

The crowd was really thick now, and Severus was going to have to stand to see. However, he hesitated. He doubted anything would happen to the main act with this large of a crowd around, but he moved anyway and remained in the shadows so as not to draw attention. He moved, enabling him to see Serena once more as her song continued.

"Oh, to hold somebody close that cares

Oh, to finally find some roots somewhere

I know someday I'll find that it's out there

But until then, I'll just keep movin'"

Severus stared at Serena, who gazed back at him. The fact that he had moved made no difference. Her eyes found him again, and he couldn't help but stare back. After the song finished, the next one began.

This song had a Gaelic feel. *Well, that is some change up*, he decided. He had to admit this song had a more ethereal feel to it. As he looked at all the faces in the crowd, many looked in a trance or in and out of one, at least. The dance floor was full, and now there was standing room only as Serena continued.

"When in the springtime of the year

When the trees are crowned with leaves

When the ash and oak and the birch and yew

Are dressed in ribbons fair"

Serena gazed at Severus and their eyes played a sort of dance. Severus broke the stare this time to search those close to him. Most looked like Muggles, and none looked familiar. For this he was relieved.

"A garland gay we bring you here and at your door we stand...

It is a sprout well budded out

The work of Our Lord's hand"

As Serena sang the chorus again, Severus popped out a sound muffler again to test the strength of her power. This song was definitely stronger because of the music type, but he could still clear his head with a gentle shake. Swiftly, he popped the device back into his ear.

Severus watched the couples on the floor dance with abandon. Some appeared to be in a trance-like state, and to him, the music seemed seductive. As the song ended, applause erupted from the crowd, and he clapped as well. He heard a few whoops and whistles from the back, then saw Serena try to cover a blush.

"Thank you," she said soberly and smiled. Severus' breath caught. She was simply stunning when she smiled. Severus frowned; he did not understand his behavior at all.

The band behind Serena had begun a murmuring tune like those of a sanctuary. A picture of a tall monastery popped in his head. "And for our last piece, Dante's Prayer," Serena told them as she moved to her piano.

While her fingers caressed the keys, she conveyed a little sorrow, Severus thought. Someone pressed against him, and he looked up into the back of a head. Someone had simply backed into him. He scowled and moved back further.

"When the dark wood fell before me

And all the paths were overgrown

When the priests of pride say there is no other way

I tilled the sorrows of stone"

Severus started to make his way to the exit. Serena had said this was the last song. There was no way she could leave from the front. She would probably slip out the back

where Fletcher had overheard the conversations. Severus smirked sinisterly. He would be waiting for her.

"Cast your eyes on the ocean

Cast your soul to the sea

When the dark night seems endless

Please remember me..."

Her words rang in his head as he moved stealthily toward the door. Silently, he slipped through the crowd with ease.

"Please remember me..."

Please remember me..."

Please remember me..."

As Severus approached the door and gazed back at Serena, he reflected, *How could I not, now that your image is etched into my memory?*

A/N: Songs referenced in this chapter include:

Rockin' Horse and *Restless* by Sara Evans

Mummers Dance and *Dante's Prayer* by Loreena McKennitt

Come With Me

Chapter 5 of 7

The show closes with a bang, and Serena finds herself backed into a corner.

Thank you so much, Sempra. You're a doll.

"Please remember me..."

Please remember me..."

When the song ended, Serena closed her eyes and expelled a breath as applause erupted around her. She heard whistles and whoops, then smiled when she opened her eyes and gestured for the band to stand. They all bowed to the generous clapping.

"Thank you. Thanks so much. Y'all have a great night," she offered. "The band is gonna take a twenty minute break, and then you will be treated to the melodic sounds of the Harmonious Harpies. Good night, everyone," Serena announced and waved to the crowd. The applause continued as the curtain came down, and she sighed.

Suddenly, Serena was grabbed from behind and turned around into a warm hug. John beamed at her. She had gasped, but now smiled back at him. Charles was right behind him, beaming as well. Serena smiled at him and gave him a knowing look.

"Yes, yes, I know, I know! You told me so." Charles grabbed her in a fierce hug when she opened her mouth to give him a piece of her mind.

As they parted, she wagged her finger at him, then stated, "Yes, well, I think things are off to ~~a~~very good start." She giggled at his red face and listened to the murmur of the large crowd beyond the curtain. How she loved this.

Just then, one of the Harpies came up and asked John where her guitar was. Meanwhile, another approached Charles and asked him to adjust her tail feathers. Serena grinned, shook her head, and turned to make her way to her dressing room. The boys were going to do well.

Once in her dressing room, Serena pulled on her outer robes. Sadly, she looked around and sighed. She was going to miss all of this. But it probably wouldn't be long before she would get to sing like this again. She clung to that hope, cast a final look around the room and slid out the back door.

She shivered slightly as the cool night air hit her, then waited a moment for her eyes to adjust to the darkness. Once in the alley, a peculiar feeling hit her. Quickly, she slipped her wand into her hand with no time to spare. Suddenly to her left, a rat grew into a man wearing a black cloak and mask. He aimed his wand at her while her peripheral vision registered two more cloaked figures advancing quickly up the alley on her right.

With swift grace, Serena cast a silent *Protego* to protect her as the rat-like man's wand shot a red flash at her. At the same moment, the two figures to her right sent red and blue streams of light simultaneously. Rapidly, she ducked behind a pile of crates that took the force of the blasts and splintered.

Crouching, she slipped behind another stack to the right, closed her eyes and took a deep breath. She hoped all her assailants were male. Strong and lilting, her ethereal voice penetrated the night.

"Come with me, come and I'll take you away..."

Away to my land of enchantment,

Gentlemen, come let me take you away,

Away to my land of enchantment..."

Serena had let go with her power fully, and as she sung, the three figures stood transposed, practically frozen.

~~~~~  
Severus had made his way to the back of the club and occupied a place well hidden from view. He heard the back door open and saw a hooded, cloaked figure slip out the door. The fluid movements told him it was Serena. He was about to reveal himself when a movement on the ground up ahead caught his eye, and he sank back into his previous position.

*Wormtail! Great, this is just great*, he thought furiously. He could not be seen by the pompous man, his position with the Dark Lord would be compromised. Frantically, his eyes darted back and forth as he evaluated the situation. Suddenly, magical bursts sounded behind him, and he swiveled in time to see Serena block Wormtail's spell and duck to deflect two others. He then heard her start to sing and an odd feeling come over him.

Struggling, he kept his wits about him, but it was very difficult, even with the sound mufflers. *Well, that answers our question about her Siren powers* he thought. He leaned forward and peered around the crates to gauge the situation and watched as Wormtail and one of the other two figures stopped in their tracks. The other figure, however, still moved, though much slower than before.

Serena cast a wordless *Stupefy* on Wormtail and the figure that had stopped. Severus saw the other Death Eater was facing away from him, and after quickly scanning to make sure there were no others, he cast *Stupefy* on the last figure in the alleyway.

Swiftly, he emerged from his hiding place, and Serena flew up in front of him, her wand pointed at his chest. He held up his hands quickly, and she lowered her wand. She sensed he was here to help her and meant her no injury. With her submission, he grabbed her hand. They ran two alleys over and out of sight. Here, he held out an object to her: a toothbrush. Serena cocked her head to the side and looked at it inquisitively. With a look of mischief in her eyes, she shrugged and touched the item. Immediately, she felt her navel pulled, and she was winded when she landed on a hard, cold floor.

It was so dark, Serena couldn't see a thing. *Lumos*, she thought, and the dark man's face was illuminated next to her by her wand. He sat up quickly, and she smiled at him. "So, now what?" she inquired with an impish grin.

~~~~~  
Severus sat with his back against the wall and his legs stretched out in front of him. Thoughts chased each other in his head. Across from him, Serena sat cross-legged and close to the fire between them. Honestly, he had thought he was going to have to kidnap the woman, not have her full cooperation. To top that off, she kept smiling at him. It was maddening. Frustrated, he raised a hand and pinched the top of his nose to stem the headache he felt approaching.

Serena watched the dark man. He kept staring at her, frowning, then looking away. After they had landed from the Portkey, he had cast *Incendio* and lit a fire in the middle of what could only be a cave. She searched her feelings. She definitely felt he meant her no harm, but he was certainly, what was that, annoyed at her? For what, she had no clue. But it seemed to simply be because she existed. Perhaps it was her disposition. *Hmph*, she thought and crossed her arms. Two could play this game.

"So, I gather you know my name, but I'm afraid I don't know yours. It is...?" she began in a snarky tone, breaking the tensed silence.

Severus looked at her, his arms also crossed, and sniffed. "Snape, Severus Snape. And you are Serena Celestia, I gather, correct?" He eyed her keenly, was greeted with a sharp intake of breath and a fierce green-eyed look.

"They never said my last name. How did you..." Serena began in an exasperated tone and broke off suddenly as realization struck her. The goons tonight, his knowledge, they were all a by product of "The sign!" The words came out in a rasp, and she rose hastily. Serena began to pace furiously in a swirl of heavy robes. "Of all the stupid, low down I asked him, I told him! It was my *only* stipulation! What an *idiotic* thing..." She broke off and took several calming breaths.

Through all of this, Snape had simply watched her with a raised eyebrow. He watched as she struggled to compose herself and was astounded when she plastered a smile on her face and turned to him.

"Why, yes, that's correct, and to what do I owe your rescue of me?"

Well, that was blunt, he thought sedately. He hadn't really wanted to get into this subject right away, so he side stepped a little.

"Why did you come with me?" He questioned her easy cooperation. Her face flickered briefly with annoyance, but it was gone almost before he could register it.

"Because I know you are no threat to me," she told him truthfully.

"And how could you know that when you were being attacked? Perhaps I am one of your attackers," he countered, infuriated with her quick acquiescence. He worried how easily she might fall into the Dark Lord's hands before they could see how powerful she was, and he had no doubt of that power. The performance with Wormtail had proven it.

"Yes, well, it would seem that while I don't know you, there is quite a lot you don't know about me," she informed him with sarcasm.

Snape sneered at her. "Really, Ms. Celestia, this banter is going to get us no where."

He really was beginning to irritate her. Yes, he may look divine, but his attitude was simply dreadful, and of course, hers was nothing to contend with at times either. When faced with adversity, she always rose to the occasion. "Then perhaps we should part ways. I appreciate your help, Mr. Snape, but I can quite take care of myself, thank you."

As Serena made to find the exit, Severus replied dryly, "I believe it is in your best interest to stay. I did save your life."

Serena snorted. "Saved? My life?" she asked incredulously. "What rubbish! I was perfectly fine. I am sure I could have handled the other Death Eater without your help, and as for me being here, I was simply curious...." She trailed off when she sensed the anger emanating from him.

"I should not like to know you follow people simply because you are curious, Ms. Celestia." He was on his feet now. "These are dangerous times as I hope you know," he seethed.

"How dare you lecture me? Just who the hell do you think you are!?" she seethed back, reaching out with her hand and poking him in the chest. Her eyes spat green fire at him in her anger. They stared at each other, their chests rising and falling as if they had run a race.

Abruptly, the atmosphere sizzled, and Serena felt the hair raise on her neck as electricity filled the air between them. He grabbed her hand in a viselike grip and pulled her against him roughly. Their mouths met and crushed each other, his mouth plundering hers. She opened her lips, and his tongue dove in, her tongue swirling around his in a mad pirouette. Their arms came around each other, pressing their bodies together in their anger, which soon turned to raging lust.

Serena tangled a hand in his hair and felt a growl in his throat. The scent of something warm and masculine filled her senses as her mouth left his to travel to his neck, and he did the same to her. His hands pushed her cloak off, and it fell to the floor.

She was still wearing the dress robes from the show, and she heard his sharp intake of breath. His eyes roved her breasts, swelling against the soft fabric with each rise of her chest for air, and her nipples tightened to form visible beads under his scrutiny. His hands shifted in her hair and brought her face forcefully to him so he could taste her

lips.

Her hands found his coat button, and nimbly, she slid it through the hole, sliding his coat past his shoulders to remove it as his right hand cupped her breast. She leaned into his touch and a moan rose in her throat. Serena's hands tugged recklessly at his belt and pants. Soon, she placed her hand inside and cupped his sac. She heard his breath catch, and he seemed to almost lose control.

Severus quickly pulled her dress robes up and placed his hand between her thighs. Serena shuddered as his fingers slipped inside her panties and found her nub. She gasped, her head falling back. She felt him retreat a little and whimpered.

"Severus, please..." Her words trailed off in a plea.

"Are you sure?" he questioned, conscious thought attempting to make an appearance.

"Yes, yes, please." She looked into his eyes. Green orbs searching black, pleading.

He saw the need there as she pushed at his pants. They traveled backwards, and she shivered when she felt her body meet the cave wall. His fingers moved into her, feeling the warmth and wetness there. She closed her eyes, her breath hitching. "Mmmm, so wet," he murmured seductively in her ear.

Brusquely, he tore off her panties, picked her up and pulled her legs around his waist. In one torrid motion, he entered her, filling her, and Serena gasped at the contact. He retreated, and she protested, but then he thrust into her again. Slowly, ever so slowly, he would retreat and then plunge again. Serena felt his length, every inch, as he thrust deeper with each penetrating stroke.

Severus pushed down her dress robes to expose her breasts. Slowly, he brought one to his lips and suckled, then nipped it hotly. Lavishing her creamy breast with due attention brought a hoarse moan to her mouth. He then returned to her lips, holding her face and kissing her as if he were drinking sweet nectar. He plunged into her again, holding her face, his tongue dancing with hers.

Serena felt as if she were climbing, climbing toward a pinnacle of light. Severus soon left her lips and gave copious attention to her other breast. Gaining momentum, their bodies moved: in, out, sucking her nipple, in, out, his mouth traveling up to her neck, sucking her earlobe, in, out, and then back down, licking her neck while she was kissing the parts of him she could reach and running her hands through his hair.

She felt his sac slapping her flesh. His manhood thrusting, brushing against her intimately, rubbing her core and touching the inner most spot that craved his touch, his possession. It was torture. Slowly he moved, thrusting his throbbing shaft in her hot center. Her body writhed beneath him, and suddenly, her muscles tightened around him. She reached the summit and fell over into the white light beyond and heard his answering shout as she felt the warmth of his seed spill into her body.

Serena clasped her legs around him, holding him to her. Wrapping her arms around him, she kissed him recklessly, their tongues twinning as their bodies trembled. Severus raised his eyes to hers and shuddered, *Oh gods, what have I done?*

Disclaimer: I am making no money, the characters, except a few, belong to JKR. And the Siren song referenced is adapted from the movie, *Hocus Pocus*.

Revelations

Chapter 6 of 7

Severus has regrets but Serena does not. Severus receives a shock when Serena explains she possesses a rare magical ability. Will he believe her?

A/N: Many thanks go to the lovely ladyinthecloak for betaing this for me. =o)

Revelations

Looking at Severus, Serena saw emotion fill his hooded eyes. She felt him stiffen and seem to withdraw, so she clung to him more tightly. She felt he needed her to hold him. Leaning forward, she did what Severus had never allowed, what no other had done for him in a very long time: she hugged him.

Winding her arms around him, she held him close to her, held him inside her. She loved the feel of his body next to hers, touching her inner most spot. Yet as her mind cleared, she wanted to be even nearer, skin to skin. And as they stayed locked together, she felt him begin to relax, whereas before he had been stiff.

"Miss Celestia," he began, and it was her turn to stiffen.

"Serena," she murmured from where her head rested, buried in his neck.

"Serena," he purred in her ear because it was so close to his mouth. "My apologies..." he trailed off when she stiffened once more.

She thought about what they had done something she had never done. She never lost her head, but she had with him. Searching her feelings, she knew it would always be this way with him, as though their souls owned each other. *Well, I'm not going to be sorry,* she thought.

"I'm not," she told him quietly, pulling back to look fiercely into his eyes. She gasped when she felt his aura change, reflecting guilt and remorse. "Please, Severus, don't."

Looking into her eyes, he saw tenderness and trust, and it shocked him. How could she feel anything like this for him? They'd only just met. "Perhaps we should... get dressed and talk," he told her, beginning to shift.

Holding him to her a moment longer, she nodded resignedly and released him. Carefully, they disentangled themselves, Serena wincing as she felt a sharp, jagged rock in her back, raising her hand to massage it.

Severus adjusted his clothes, waving his wand to cast a refreshing spell. From the corner of his eye, he watched her. She was not remorseful of what they had done. *Does she do this often,* he wondered.

Crossing the floor to her cloak, Serena searched the many pockets. "Ahhh," she breathed, pulling a tiny trunk from a pocket. The room of the cave was quite spacious. Moving to an alcove, she set down the trunk, waving her wand above it. A bright yellow light emerged from the tip, enlarging the trunk to its original size. Opening it, she began rummaging through it.

Serena laid out fresh robes, then returned to her cloak. Standing back, she pulled out a coat rack, enlarged it and placed it next to the trunk along with her cloak. Turning slightly, she took Severus' coat from the floor, placing it on the rack as well.

Watching her, Severus raised one brow when she pulled out an old fashioned stand with a mirror. The stand held a large bowl and cloth. Placing her wand in the bowl, water rushed into it, and after another wave, steam rose from the surface of the water. Returning to her robe, she brought out a tiny wooden and cloth covered square. With a flick, the square grew into a partition.

Turning to him, she said, "Please excuse me for a few moments."

Severus opened and closed his mouth several times. "Of course," he said after a moment.

Once Serena was concealed behind the screen, she breathed a sigh and looked in the mirror on the stand. Her reflection glowed at her. She smiled a little as her heart flipped over in her chest. She felt almost giddy. Suddenly she scowled, remembering she was supposedly angry with him. A slight grimace crossed her face. At the moment she didn't feel angry. She rarely stayed mad for long...it was her nature...and she wanted to know more about him.

Searching her cloak pockets, she found a vial of bathing potion. Pouring it into the basin, the water swirled, wafting the fragrance up to her nose. Closing her eyes, she sighed indulgently as the scent of raspberries surrounded her. Quickly, she removed her clothes and washed her body with the cloth. Then she flicked her wand to dry herself with a stream of warm air and donned the robes she had laid out.

Stepping from behind the divider warily, Serena seemed to float in robes made of white cotton flowing around her like gossamer. Leaning against the wall again, Severus' eyes traveled to her when she emerged. His breath caught in his throat. She was exquisite; if he didn't know better, he would swear she was an angel. Blinking his eyes and shaking his head, he tried to gather his thoughts. He could be of no use to her if he couldn't keep his head straight. Thankfully, his mind cleared as he concentrated.

"Miss Celestia, there are a few things..." he began.

"Serena," she insisted.

"Very well, Serena, we need to discuss a few," he went on.

What is that in the air around him, a sense of duty? Hmm... interesting, Serena thought.

"Things. But first I must ask, are you always so trusting?" He looked at her and saw anger start to rise again, her face flushing. He held up a hand, saying quickly, "Do not grow angry. I am simply asking questions I must know the answers to. It would seem you possess a temper similar to my own, and if we do not set our differences aside, I'm afraid we are going to get nowhere."

Serena thought about earlier and sighed, deciding he was right. Setting her anger aside for the time being, she cleared her throat and answered, "No, I am not as trusting as I have been with you." Looking at him intensely, a smile started at her mouth, slowly reaching her eyes, and she looked away.

"And why, may I ask, have you trusted that I will not harm you when you hardly know me?" Severus looked down his nose at her. It was almost a sneer, but not quite.

She blushed, looking down. She wondered how much she should tell him. She hated when people did not believe her. But she wanted to see what his reaction would be because she liked him very much, though she was hard put as to why. Yet, if he had a sense of duty, perhaps he was working for the same side. The side she wanted to join. She knew the only way a powerful dark wizard like Voldemort would be conquered would be with unity in the wizarding world, not widespread panic.

"For several reasons. First, you did not seem to be in cohorts with the pathetic ambush that was attempted upon me earlier. In fact, you did neutralize one of my would-be captors who was female. And second, your aura did not project any negativity toward my person as the others did."

Serena watched as he digested this information. It was there the disbelief just below the surface. However she saw him; instead of voicing it, he became curious again. She sighed; so far so good.

"You saw me in the alleyway before I neutralized a Death Eater?" he asked.

"No, I felt your presence behind me."

"And how do you know the Death Eater I struck down was a woman?"

"My vocal powers do not have as strong of an effect on women as men. They do slow them down, but they do not completely immobilize them." She had thrown caution to the wind, but he had been at her performance. He had heard her enchantment to immobilize the other Death Eaters, so he already knew about that. Suddenly, a thought struck her, and a puzzled look came to her face.

"Hang on... how did you how were you not affected?" she questioned, looking at him hard. "Are you...?"

"Deaf? No." He smirked knowingly at her.

"Then how...?"

"Let's just say I came prepared," he informed her shrewdly.

"You aren't going to tell me, are you?" It wasn't a question. "At least... not yet." She smiled at him mischievously.

Maybe not ever, Severus thought. He found himself warming to this woman, and of course, the attraction was there. He was going to need to keep his wits about him, but that was going to be hard when she kept looking at him with those liquid green eyes.

"Now, you say you felt my presence behind you. You're certain you did not, perhaps, see me?" he queried, his face twisted in thought.

What did I read? He replayed the attack over in his mind. Serena had been quick as though she had known the others were there before she saw them, as well as himself. Replaying and examining the memory, he also noticed she didn't say a word except when she sang her enchantment. What was she? Twenty-five? Twenty-six? Some wizards went their entire lives and never mastered all spells wordlessly. Yet she had never uttered a word while being attacked earlier or while she had taken things from her cloak and refreshed herself.

Hm, yes, I remember now! But she can't be. Severus frowned. They were so rare, and Albus and Minerva had never mentioned this. But the Headmaster did not always inform him of everything. Having been so long ago and Minerva so distraught, perhaps they had forgotten, but this was important. He had to ask, he had to know. *And if it was true?* Severus shuddered. The Dark Lord could never know. Her Siren song alone would make her desirable to the Dark Lord. However, if this was true, she would become a more pertinent target were he to ever find out.

"Are you..." he began, hesitating as she looked directly in his eyes.

Serena wondered where this line of questioning was going. He looked so serious. The crease in his brow told her he was deep in thought. He seemed to have come to a conclusion; however, he was not emanating anything except thought in the air around him. *Wait... what was that?* She felt a flicker of fear that worried her a little. She couldn't see his fears, she could only feel them.

"Are you an empath?" he asked slowly, looking at her intensely.

He seemed to be resigned; he seemed to believe her. Her heart gave a lift. He had guessed, so she decided to accommodate him.

"Yes, I am," she told him boldly, watching disbelief flit across his face. It was swiftly replaced with concern and then followed by acceptance. She felt him accept it as fact. "Ok, it's my turn," she told him assertively.

"Miss..."

"Serena!" She glared.

"Serena, there is more we need to discuss. I..."

"You? You? Well, I answered your questions so far, but as you so efficiently pointed out, I hardly know you. I think it's only fitting that I get to ask a few questions of my own. Because, Mr. Snape, I would indeed like to get to know you," she informed him, hands on her hips.

Me? he thought. Those were not words he normally heard from a woman. However, none had ever given themselves to him willingly without being paid or wanting something from him. And none with the passion she had shown him. He shuddered. He found he wanted to know more about this woman on a basic level. His eyes shifted to her form, and he saw her shiver, crossing her arms over her chest.

"Severus, please call me Severus."

"Severus," she murmured, smiling up at him gratefully.

He found himself genuinely smiling back, moving to her side swiftly.

"Are you cold?"

"A little," she replied. He put his arms around her, guiding her to sit by the fire.

He looked around. "You know, if we had anything, I would make you some tea, but I didn't think we would be here long."

"Oh," she sighed in delight.

"Let me guess," he began. "You have some in your cloak."

Beaming at him, she rose, strode to her robes and commenced digging. She took out a miniature tea pot, tray and set up, a tiny can, and something else he couldn't see. Skillfully, she balanced all the items, setting them down in front of them and slipped her wand out of her sleeve. With a flick, she enlarged all the tea items to their normal size with a flash of yellow light.

Smirking at her, Severus shook his head. "Here, I'll do this." He moved to set up the teapot over the fire. Taking out his own wand, he pointed it at the teapot and water erupted from the tip into the pot. Replacing the lid, he set the teapot apparatus over the fire, hanging the teapot to heat.

Smiling at him, Serena moved to the far side of the room. She set down the other item she had pulled from her robe, and Severus saw a yellow light from the corner of his eye. Turning his head, he couldn't believe his eyes. There in the large cave was a mahogany, four poster bed draped in white, gold and red hangings. He looked at Serena, who blushed furiously, looking down.

"I just thought I mean, not to do what we before, just," she stuttered, then rushed on, "If I mean, when we get tired oh, God." She put a hand up to her face.

"I understand, Serena, we can never..." he started sadly, but she cut him off.

"No," she beseeched him. "I didn't mean ever, I just want to get to know you a little better," she finished. "Please."

"Oh, very well. Come over here by the fire. You can ask your questions, and we'll warm you up." He smiled tentatively at her again.

Serena moved to the fire and sat down cross-legged. Severus poured tea in the cups and handed her one. Letting out a breath, Serena took a sip of tea. Closing her eyes in bliss, she sighed.

Severus caught a light whiff of jasmine and took a sip. "Mmm... thank you for the tea, Serena."

"Oh, no problem; do you like it?" She looked at him with large hopeful eyes.

Severus shook his head slightly. He had almost lost it again. "Yes, though I can't quite place it." He raised his eyebrow inquisitively.

"Oh, it's one of my favorites. It's a bit hard to find over here. I came across it in a little tea shop in the States. It's called Jasmine Dragon Phoenix Pearls," she told him.

"Okay, your turn. Could you tell me about yourself, please?" She looked longingly into his eyes.

How could he resist such a simple request when she looked back at him like that?

"Very well," he resigned. "You know my name. I am the Potions master for Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry."

"Really?" she asked excitedly. "I went there when I was eleven, I think. I don't remember much, but I do remember a man with a really long white beard and purple robes."

Severus smirked a bit. "That would be Professor Dumbledore."

"Really?" she squeaked again. "Oh my goodness, all this time and I knew him, er, or had met him," she went on exuberantly. "And you know him personally?"

"Yes, well..."

"Do you think you could introduce us? I have so many questions..." she rattled on.

Severus began to grow angry. His eyes hooded, and immediately, Serena stopped talking.

"Oh, oh... I'm so sorry, Severus, how rude of me! Please don't be angry. Never mind, I don't need to meet Professor Dumbledore. I just thought..." She sighed heavily, looking down. "Never mind," she finished quietly.

They continued to drink their tea in silence for a few moments, Severus brooding darkly. Suddenly, a thought struck him. Of course she was going to meet Albus, but he had her to himself... for now. Severus shook his head; she evoked emotions and reactions which were foreign to him.

"Serena, it's alright. You will eventually meet the headmaster, but for now you wanted to know about me," he went on, trying to lighten the mood.

Serena looked up shyly. "Yes, please."

"Well, there isn't much to tell. I do enjoy books immensely, and I do have a bad temper as we have discussed."

"Yes, I can understand a temper; mine doesn't usually stay for long though. And I am only a fair hand at potions. I have my moments with the odd ingredient, but I was good enough in school to aid several others.

"Since I never seem to stay in one place for long enough to set up storage, and there is only so much room in my robes, I only keep essentials with me. I brew what I can with what I find wherever I end up." She shrugged.

"So tell me more about you?" he inquired, wanting to know more before he pressed on.

"Well, I grew up in the States and attended the Good-Osborne School for Witchcraft. I lost my parents when I was eleven, and my aunt Adelaide raised me. She passed away about eight years ago. Since then I've been traveling. I think I have some sort of wanderlust. I never stay in one place long before a nagging starts in my bones, and I'm up and on the go again."

"That explains the robes. So, you have been moving around all this time since your aunt died?" he questioned.

"Yes, I had always wanted to see the world. I've been to so many places. Sometimes they all start to blur. But my bones keep nagging, so I keep going," she informed him, looking off in thought and shrugging.

"Why didn't you stay in your aunt's house after she passed? Have you been back there?" he asked curiously. Seeing sadness flicker into her eyes and hover, he gasped. The pain he saw was soul searching.

"My aunt was not a loving woman; in fact she was rather possessive. Many of the summers I spent with her, I felt she looked at me more as a magical possession than a person. Adelaide was practically a Squib; she had very little magical ability. She hated the fact that she couldn't do magic while the rest of the family could. She spent countless hours trying to do magic, getting me to help her. When she died, I had planned to stay in the old house even though it held no happiness for me. However, after she passed, the authorities came and presented me with all her bills. It seems she had squandered the family's fortune even the money my parents had left me, which she had access to since she was my guardian in her pursuit of magic.

"Well, I couldn't pay those bills, being fresh out of school, so I had to sign the house, and most everything in it, over to the bank. I did manage to keep some of my more sentimental items, but I found myself turned out on the street with just my robes and a few trinkets. Then the nagging began, so I moved on." She let out a sigh.

Looking at him, she went on, "My mother had started teaching me to control my vocal ability shortly before she died. The only thing that made me happy during that time was singing. I soon found I had to use my ability to earn money to survive. But I couldn't sing all the time. Mother had warned me that people do not always understand, and I could put people in jeopardy if I did not control my gift. She had also explained that I could come to harm if the power got out of control or I pursued recognition with my talent," she finished, coming out of her reverie. "You know, you are very easy to talk to," she told him.

Severus smiled gently, thinking she was wrong. Maybe it was the attraction between them which made it easy for her to confide in him.

"So how is it you know my name, and why were you there tonight?" Serena had come to the question he wanted to discuss on her own. She frowned when she noticed his aura was emanating a sense of duty again.

"A friend," he cringed at the word, "was near Diagon Alley yesterday and saw your name on a sign on the side of a building." He stopped at her gasp. Looking at her, he saw the anger start to return and held up his hand. "Serena! What's done is done; you are safe." He watched her and saw her anger recede, her body relaxing once more.

"Now, he seemed to remember your parents, and he thought you had died with them though he was not the only one apparently." He paused, gauging her reaction to this information. Fleeting he saw pain and disbelief, but that was all.

"So... so you mean, people have believed I was dead?" she replied incredulously.

"It would seem so. Anyhow, he told myself, Professor Dumbledore, and Professor McGonagall about the sign." He scrutinized her closely while providing this information. If she had been as close to Minerva as Minerva suggested, surely Serena would have sought her out before now. But like Minerva, Severus felt something was amiss. It had been all he and Albus could do to convince Minerva to stay away from Diagon Alley.

As he observed Serena, her eyes seemed to go blank and lose focus.

"Does that name mean anything to you?" he asked gently, but Serena gave no answer. She simply stared with a vacant expression on her face.

Severus frowned. "Serena?" Still no reply. Moving to her, he waved a hand in front of her face. She made no movement or response. "Serena!" He took her by the arms and shook her, worry edging his voice.

"Wha...whoa... oh, my gosh! I'm so sorry, my mind must have wandered. Would you like some tea?" Picking up the teapot, she smiled impishly at him.

Circular Conversations

Chapter 7 of 7

As talks continue, Severus stumbles over a secret about Serena even she didn't know about.

Circular Conversations

Looking at her inquisitively, Severus raised an eyebrow. "No, I have some. I was asking if the name meant anything to you," he pressed again.

Frowning in thought, she said, "But we already discussed Professor Dumbledore."

He let out a breath of tensed patience. "No, I meant Professor McGonagall," he tried for a second time. But, as he looked at her, her face went blank once more.

His brow furrowed. *Well, this could be a problem*, he thought. If the girl couldn't hear Minerva's last name without losing her senses, what would she do if Minerva presented herself to her? This was a big problem.

Fleeting, he was glad she was prepared and smirked, looking around, shaking his head. The cave looked as though she lived there already, and until they knew how she would react to Minerva, he planned to keep her here once Minerva returned. At the moment, it seemed the only solution. At present, there was no one at the castle. Their plan had been for him to abduct Serena, bring her here to ensure she wasn't an imposter, then bring her to Hogwarts to await Albus' and Minerva's return.

Minerva had gone to the United States to find Adelaide while Albus took care of other business. Severus scowled. Business the Headmaster wouldn't share with anyone – it was maddening. Since he now knew Adelaide was dead, he figured Minerva would be back sooner than the two weeks they had perceived. And although Albus was due back in just a few days, with Serena's current reaction to Minerva's name, that short time span loomed impossibly before him. *What am I going to do with her for three days?*

That gave them more time to get to know one another without prying eyes. He also had more time to study this strange thing that happened to her when he mentioned Minerva's last name. Emerging from his thoughts, he glanced at her. She sat there with a vacant look. Raising his brows in surprise, he moved closer to her. He hadn't meant to leave her there for so long.

"Serena," Severus called gently, taking her hand in his. Rapidly, her eyes cleared, and she looked at him, a sweet smile gracing her mouth. Suddenly, a look of worry came over her face.

"Severus? What's wrong?" She felt his worry, saw it on his face. As she watched, he looked down and seemed reluctant to tell her. "Please," she begged, wanting to ease his unrest.

How could he tell her, he wondered. There was more – there had to be. "I was trying to tell you about your great-aunt," he began.

She snorted. "Adelaide was many things, but I don't think great would be a word I would use," she chuckled.

"No, I meant your great-aunt who works at Hogwarts," he informed, watching her. He saw her eyes widen, her mouth opening to form an O.

"I... I have an aunt – a great-aunt – who's still alive?" she squeaked, awe in her voice.

So far, so good. He pressed on. "Yes, her name is Minerva," he told her and observed. Again... the empty stare. *This is troublesome. She must be under some kind of spell*. How he wished Albus was here for some insight. "Serena?" He shook her slightly.

"Yes? Oh, would you like some tea?" she questioned with an exuberant smile, reaching for the teapot.

Clenching his jaw, Severus put out his hand to stop her from reaching it. This was getting on his nerves. "No, I have some already. We were discussing your great-aunt," he told her again, just barely keeping the annoyance from his voice.

"Well, I wouldn't call Adelaide great by any means." She snorted again slightly.

"No, no... Your great-aunt who works at Hogwarts," he explained once more, exasperated.

"I... I have an aunt – a great-aunt – who's still alive?" she asked with awe in her voice all over again. "What's her name?" she inquired, looking at him with hope.

Pain rose in his chest. "I can't tell you," he told her, not wanting to have to repeat himself yet again. Their conversation was going in circles. It was enough to make one dizzy.

"And why not?" Her anger was rising.

"Because every time I say the name, you get a blank expression and forget what was being said," he told her bluntly.

Shock mounted on her face, followed closely by realization. "A curse..." she rasped painfully, despair crossing her face. Such despair and pain he could hardly bear it. He looked away.

"That is it! I have been cursed. But who would do—"

"How do you come to the conclusion that you are under a curse?" he asked, looking down his nose at her. "Perhaps it is a simple spell, easily remedied." The words sounded untrue, even to his ears.

"The nagging in my bones? Never staying in one place for more than a few weeks at a time?" she queried, looking at him hard. "Now you say I forget everything when you mention my great-aunt's name? It can be none other than a curse. At least it seems so to me." She gazed at him sadly.

She looked like her world was falling around her, and he couldn't stand it. There was an ache in his chest for her. She was so young, and she had her whole life ahead of her. Maybe it was a curse as she said.

Would her whole life be spent never stopping, always going? Never having a constancy that was a normal human want? Always searching for something, having it so close and never being able to cling to it? Never having companionship for more than mere weeks at a time? Some of these wants were ones he understood all too well. *And what of love?* He gasped suddenly at that word, pushed it away. Yet he felt her need and realized if it were him, he might perchance go mad.

He frowned. "How long was it you say you have been traveling?" he asked to stop his rampant thoughts from swirling out of control.

"Eight years," she stated dejectedly. "It feels as if I am searching for something, but I have no idea what it is. However, I am ecstatic about my great-aunt. I thought I was the only one of my family left," she added a little more brightly.

"Well, your great-aunt is from your mother's side. They all thought you were dead. It would seem you have a few relatives left." He gave a slight smile, attempting to turn her spirits around. "What was your mother's name?" he inquired, lifting a brow.

A smile came across her face as she thought of her mother. "Sss..." Raising hysterical eyes to him, a hiss came out of her mouth, and one hand came up to her head. "Oh, my God, I don't know! How can I not know my mother's name?" she entreated agonizingly, her eyes darting back and forth as she searched frantically in her head for the name. Her eyes landed on him, the pain in their depths renewed and tears glistened on her thick lashes, threatening to spill.

He felt it again, that tug in his chest. "Sh, hush now, Serena, it's all right. I can tell you her name, but I'm afraid if I say it, you may forget what we have discussed again. So let's leave it for now," he told her softly, compassion rising in his chest.

She nodded, her lips quivering, and he opened his arms to her. Falling into them, she clung to him, her body shuddering, as great, deep sobs were torn from her chest. He tightened his hold around her and began to rock her gently, like she was a child. He was surprised when the movement did not bother him because it wasn't something he would normally do, but it felt right.

His shirt was wet with her tears, and her hands clutched it as her desolation rose. He wondered who would want to curse her. Pondering this thought, he stroked her back and remembered what she and Minerva had said of Adelaide. The woman had very limited magical ability; she had been practically a Squib, but people could be hired – or

worse – sometimes Squibs could perform a curse, though it was rare. However, if Adelaide had *some* magical ability, she could have done this to Serena. That was something he would have to look into.

His thoughts returned to Serena – her sobs were starting to subside. Sighing gently, he rested his chin on top of her head and spoke softly to her. “Serena, please stop. I will help you. We will all help you.” He took her by the arms and gently raised her away from him.

Looking at him, a tear rolled down her nose, which she hastily wiped away with her sleeve and sniffled, averting her face. Tenderly, he placed a finger beneath her chin, tugging it up so her eyes met his.

“Okay,” she croaked. Hiccupping slightly, she murmured, “Thank you.”

“I know this has been a difficult piece of information, but knowing your great-aunt, I have no doubt of your backbone.” Serena found a timid smile at that statement.

He stood, offering his hand to help her up. Closing her eyes a moment, she took his warm palm, letting him lift her to her feet and lead her to the bed. There, he bid her to lie down, the bed dipping when she sat down, gazing up at him. Briefly, his hand caressed her cheek, and his dark eyes met hers.

“Sleep will help,” he murmured. “We will talk more in the morning; please get some rest.” Straightening, he moved to settle on the floor. Leaning up against the cave wall, he closed his eyes.

Staring after him, Serena called to him softly, her voice a gentle plea, “Severus?”

Opening his eyes, he stared at her. It had been a desperate bid; a denial of what he felt for her. He needed to give her time – them time – but they had already jumped the gun, and this seemed pointless. He was trying to be noble, but he was no Gryffindor.

“Please stay with me,” she pleaded. “I can’t see you sleeping on the floor when there’s plenty of room here.” She patted the vacant space beside her. “I just need you near me, nothing more.” She held up her hand to make a sign. “Girl Scouts Honor.” She smiled at him, a little teasingly.

Severus frowned questioningly at her. “What’s—”

“A Girl Scout?” She smiled a little brighter. “It’s an organization in America that provides upstanding morals and encourages teamwork for young girls. I seem to remember them encouraging this through camping trips and other activities – and no, I never was one.”

He smirked at that. Slowly, Severus rose and crossed to the bed where he lay down next to her.

“Thank you,” she told him simply, snuggling up against him.

“Here...” Moving his arm around her, he held her close, allowing her to lay her head on his chest.

“Mm, very nice.” She sighed contently.

“Yes, well, go to sleep. It will do you good,” he instructed.

“Yes, Professor,” she whispered, smiling gently as she closed her eyes.

Looking down at her briefly, Severus then rested his chin on top of her head and hugged her tighter to him. He was worried about what had been done to her. *How would it affect her? How would it affect Minerva?* He felt powerless, and that was a feeling he abhorred. Especially since this woman seemed to be burrowing her way into his thoughts constantly.

Pushing his worry aside, he reminded himself that tomorrow they would begin the search for answers. Slowly, he closed his eyes, and before long, he drifted off to sleep wrapped in the warmth that was Serena.

A/N: My sincere thanks go to karelia for her awesome beta abilities. I am beginning to wonder how I can ever repay her.