

Dancing in Moonlight

by Stefdarin

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Many hugs and thank yous go to Sempra.

Minerva rose, haltingly, using her walking stick for support, and made her way across the room. Each step was met with pain, and she clenched her jaw in determination while she moved. Her goal was to cross the room, but no less than halfway, she slumped down on the burgundy damask settee near her.

After a moment, clenching her free hand in a tight fist and her stick with the other, she took a deep breath and rose once more. Her legs wobbled a little but supported her. Yet, as she stepped away from the sofa, her foot caught the leg of the table next to it, and before she could catch herself, she tumbled to the floor.

Tears of disappointment and frustration came to her eyes. She hated this... this weakness, as she viewed it. And she was thankful Albus wasn't here at the moment to dote on her. Though she loved him, that was the last thing she wanted right now. But she couldn't hide in their chambers, declining involvement in events and engagements in order to hide this weakness, this inability to walk more than a few feet without excruciating pain or toppling over, forever. That just wasn't her style. But being bedridden or wheelchair bound wasn't either. It was only by sheer strength of will that she was where she was now.

Her bottom lip trembled as the last few weeks rushed through her mind. They brought the worst of her fears, the worst truth, with them the knowledge that she had failed the man she loved. That she had not followed through on the one thing he had requested of her when he had been forced to leave the school: protect the children. No, in her haste, in a moment that could only be viewed as truly Gryffindor, Minerva had confronted Delores Umbridge and had been struck down in her effort to help a friend.

Minerva had never conceived how power-hungry Delores was, how things had gotten so... out of control. And she had never believed four wizards from the Ministry would turn on an unarmed witch, a Professor of Hogwarts, in front of the students. At that thought, her tears spilled over, and she let them fall, wetting her face and the front of her robes.

Her body jolted involuntarily at the memory of the stunners which had struck her in the chest. Four powerful wizards had turned their giant-intended magic on her, and when they'd collided, the hexes had penetrated her body, traveled straight through and converged on her spine.

At St. Mungos, when she finally gained consciousness, she heard them discussing her condition. As she lay there, listening, she was filled with trepidation at their words.

"You do realize, because of the negligence of your... colleagues, this woman will never walk again," Minerva heard a feminine voice whisper harshly. It was followed by a voice she distinctly recognized as Umbridge's.

"Yes, yes, but she will live?" Umbridge questioned somewhat coldly.

There was silence, but Minerva presumed the Healer nodded. After that, they both left the room, and Minerva opened her eyes. She found she couldn't move much, and when she tried to move her arms, pinpricks of pain shot down her back. However, the most alarming realization was that she couldn't feel her legs. Tentatively, she reached out with her wand hand and confirmed they were still there; she just had no sensation in them. But that didn't worry her as much as failing Albus. And when, late that evening, she woke to his presence in her room, she conveyed as much to him.

"Albus... I'm so sorry... I..." she began, her voice thick with unshed tears.

"Shh... My dear! What, in Merlin's name, have you got to be sorry for?" He reached up, caressed her face, and brushed her lips softly with his own. "I'm just so happy you're alive."

Green eyes, filled with pain, gazed into blue ones brimming with concern.

"But... I failed you. How can I protect the students from a hospital bed? And you... you shouldn't be here Umbridge..."

"Is gone, and she won't be back for some time," he informed her, some of the usual twinkle entering his eyes.

Albus stayed with her that night, and every night, until, through her own determination, she made herself walk again. And while she could tell he was worried, he did everything he could to assist her while remaining silent and steady by her side.

Now that she was back at the castle, she could still see his concern; she knew he knew she was still in pain. But, even though she was still in pain, it wasn't as bad as it had been in the beginning. She had hoped it would be even less painful by now. The Healers at St. Mungo's said it was a miracle that she could stand, let alone walk. But she was determined that her condition would not hinder not only her protection of the students but the tradition she and Albus had begun more than twenty years ago.

Yet, as she sat there on the floor, her legs in pain from over-exertion, more tears of disappointment flowed. She had told Albus it didn't look like they would be able to follow through with their yearly ritual this year, and though he hid it well, she could tell he had been disappointed as well. She had hoped to surprise him, but tonight was the night, and she had pushed herself too hard, almost to the point of exhaustion, which only caused her tears to fall faster.

If it didn't mean so much to them both, if the year hadn't been so hard... perhaps she wouldn't feel like she had still failed him somehow. And with that thought, she lay down on the rug and finally, after what seemed an eternity of holding them at bay, let the sobs take over.

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*Albus stood at the top of the farthest west tower, and his gaze traveled past the parapets to the breath-taking scene before him. The Black Lake was flanked on three sides by lush, tree-covered mountains. The subtle summer heat of the June day was weakening as the sun dropped behind the peaks, and the sky erupted in orange and pink hues. As he looked out over the Black Lake, his thoughts drifted over the last few weeks. More particularly, they traveled to that awful night. The night he wasn't able to stop events unfolding in front of his eyes as he stood at the window and watched from the Headmaster's suite.*

*He was feeling a sense of pride at how Minerva was handling Delores. But as he watched, he realized Minerva was entering a situation which could go horribly wrong, especially as she did not have her wand in hand.*

*When approaching Ministry officials, it was not a good idea to pull out your wand. But he, too, underestimated how far Umbridge was willing to go. It was dreadful... The Head of Gryffindor, the Deputy Headmistress, struck down in front of the students; unarmed. From his position at the window, there was little Albus could do but send a covert spell to protect her once the initial Stunners were cast.*

*The moment those four wizards turned on Minerva and cast their Stunners, his heart stopped beating in his chest, and a feeling of fear overtook him. Albus leaned against the window and yelled, "NO!"*

*The single word was torn from his chest as she fell, and the pain inside him was agonizing. The ache he felt was for more than his friend and second-in-command, for she was more... so much more. She was his wife.*

*Minerva lay on the ground, not moving... death-like, and as much as he wanted... needed... to go to her, he could not. Giving up his location and possibly ending up in Azkaban would not help her now, but not going to her was one of the hardest things he had ever had to endure.*

*From the window he watched, his hands clenching and unclenching in frustration as he saw them ignore Minerva while they still pursued Hagrid. Finally, Umbridge gave up on the half-giant and turned back to the crowd that had gathered. He noticed Filius Flitwick, the small Charms professor, move forward and gently Levitate Minerva's still form.*

*Filius' care with Minerva helped to relieve some of the apprehension within Albus, and he knew Filius would take her straight to Poppy. The matron would take care of her and get her the help she needed. So in the meantime, Albus Disillusioned himself and made his way to the hospital wing. When Poppy evaluated Minerva, he would be there.*

*In the chaos following Umbridge's failed ambush, Albus was able to make his way to the infirmary. From a corner on the far side of the room, he observed as Poppy ignored the unconscious Aurors and focused on Minerva, whose breathing was ragged and labored. He could tell Poppy was distressed by Minerva's state, though she did well hiding it from Umbridge's scrutinizing gaze. And when Poppy declared the need to send Minerva to St. Mungo's, his heart lurched in his chest.*

*When Delores began to protest the move, Albus was about to intercede, his capture be damned. However, when Poppy pointed out the consequences of not allowing such a move, Delores was quick to transfer Minerva to the Wizarding hospital, much to Albus' relief. There, though it would be difficult to wait, he could visit her later and reassure himself of her welfare.*

*That night as he sat at her bedside, listening to her even breathing, he gazed at her face sadly. Shackelbolt had told him what the Healers were saying about her spine, about her legs. Yet when she awoke, his brave lioness was not worried about herself. No, she was only worried about the students and him.*

*In the dark room, tears rose in his eyes at her altruism. At times like this, he marveled at how he had captured her heart so many moons ago, and he knew her determination and tenacity would never allow her to accept what the Healers were diagnosing. He held her hand firmly in his own, attempting to pass his strength on to her, and when their eyes met, he knew they would overcome this obstacle together, no matter what it took. How he loved her.*

*Now, Albus closed his eyes to the memories. Over the weeks that had passed since that night, Minerva had improved. He knew why, and he knew better than to tell her to take it easy. Instead, he had been steadily distracting her when she was doing too much. It had been easy until she realized the date and what was coming up. After that, try as he might, he could not divert her.*

*This morning, when he had seen the defeat in her eyes as she acquiesced to her tired body, his heart broke for her. He knew she was doing it all for him, for their tradition. After all, after that first time, in twenty years, they had never missed the event as it marked the night they fell in love. It did not matter that it was never on the same day, only the conditions mattered.*

*Trying to make it easier on Minerva, Albus had told her he was needed at the Ministry. Now that they had accepted the fact that Voldemort was back, they constantly*

wanted his attention. Earlier, he had gone to the Ministry, but he had come back and proceeded here, to where their romance had begun. The pull was too great to ignore, and he knew Minerva. No matter how low she felt, he knew she would make her way up to the west tower. If he thought she would accept his help, he would have offered it, but he knew to wait. Instead, he used his time to recreate everything he had done that first night, and when the time was right, he knew she would accept his help.

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Minerva pushed herself up from the floor carefully, leaning heavily on her walking stick. She had lain on the floor in despair for too long already. She didn't know when Albus would be back, but she didn't want him to find her there.

Hours passed, and Minerva became resigned to the fact that perhaps Albus truly wasn't coming back from the Ministry any time soon. He probably didn't want her to feel bad about the day and was avoiding it altogether. Unheeded, her eyes filled with tears. He had told her to rest, but she had not, and now, it was her fault he wasn't here. Her blurred vision rested on the clock. It was getting late, and a thought struck her: maybe they could still celebrate in an abbreviated way.

Her lips curved up slightly as she realized what she needed to do. She knew he might be angry if she overexerted herself, but the end would justify the means. If she could make her way to the tower, once he returned, surely he would come find her there. He would have to, for she would never make it back on her own, she would be too tired. Then, she would gladly accept his help.

Resolute in her decision, Minerva slowly managed to make her way through the castle and up to the west tower. Every once in a while, she had to stop and rest. Occasionally, she Levitated herself, but she didn't want to expend all her energy at once, and self-levitating could be exhausting, even for witches and wizards who were not recovering.

Finally, she reached her destination and leaned against the wall, panting. Her body was trembling slightly, and her brow was covered with a light misting of perspiration from her exertion. She fell forward a little from fatigue, and then, supporting herself carefully, she opened the heavy door at the top of the tower. As it swung open, a warm breeze floated over her face. With one hand gripping her walking stick, and the other clasping the door handle tightly, she looked up into the star-filled sky. There, in its glorious splendor, was the moon, hanging low over the tower, and from this vantage point, it looked as if she could touch it, all she had to do was simply reach out.

Minerva moved slowly onto the turret, away from the door, and towards the parapet. As she looked across the battlement, her gaze landed on Albus, and she sucked in her breath. After a moment, she exhaled slowly as she studied him. He stood there, next to the parapet, in dark blue robes with an intricate and subtle pattern of stars sewn into them. In the moonlight, his beard and hair looked silver and gleamed. His lips turned up in a gentle arc when their eyes locked on each other, and he moved toward her.

Little by little, Minerva realized where he had been. Her eyes left his, momentarily, and took in the atmosphere. There were fairy lights suspended around the tower, and a Victrola was set near the door. Her eyes wandered back to Albus', and he smiled at her lovingly when he came close to envelop her in his warm embrace.

"My darling, Minerva, I knew you would come." His arms wound around her, and his lips found hers.

Minerva was speechless. When their lips met, she gave herself up to his gentle caress; her walking stick clattering to the flagstones as she linked her arms around his neck. It had felt like ages since he had held her this way, and here, in the moonlight, she surrendered to the moment, to his kiss, while he tenderly plundered her mouth.

Their lips consumed each other, and Minerva felt his magic begin to surround her. Soon, her pain eased as he Levitated her. Next, she felt tingling as her robes transformed into an elegant dress, and as the tingling stopped, Minerva felt the sultry night air kissing her bare shoulders.

Relinquishing the contact of their mouths, Albus moved back, a twinkle coming to his eyes as they drifted over her body. At his intake of breath, Minerva looked down as well. While she floated, encircled by his magic, her gaze took in the dress he had acquired for her. It was dark green and the taffeta shone, accentuating each movement as she hovered. The strapless top consisted of tightly wound ruches which traveled down to her hips while the massive skirt fell in bunches, gathered by design in a graceful pattern. The interlaced fastenings in the back both hid and exposed her flesh to the balmy night. Under Albus' gaze, Minerva felt herself flush and then looked back up into his eyes and smiled.

"Oh, Albus..." He cut her off with another kiss.

This time she opened her mouth to him fully and moaned when his tongue danced around hers. His lips devoured hers, drawing on the heady feeling surrounding them. Then, when they needed air, they surfaced once more.

"You've been here all along?" she asked, her hands gently clasping his arms for support, though the Levitating charm was there.

"Mm, no... but I knew you would end up here. It's funny how the promise of dancing in the moonlight always seems to get me what I want." His eyes danced with mischief as he shifted to take her hands.

"Albus Dumbledore!" she exclaimed, trying to look stern. However, Minerva was too happy at that moment, ecstatic that they had not been forced to abandon their tradition. Her eyes reflected his twinkle, and she leaned into him as she continued, "Mm... you know me so well."

"And, my dear, it is only one of the aspects that endear you more to me with every year. That and the fact that I was right about the moon..." he trailed off and felt her chuckle against him.

For years they had had this argument, but she would never admit he was right. All those years ago, it had been his plan to lure her into the moonlight, saying its beams were enchanted. That if he made a wish while dancing with her under it, it would come true. And though his wish had coincided with her feelings, she knew it wasn't just their feelings for each other that had pushed them in the right direction that night. Something in the atmosphere, something about the beams cast upon them under the first full moon in June had pulsed around them, drawing them together in a bond that grew ever stronger as time moved on.

"We both know it was your fine attention to detail, my love," she told him, leaning back to look up at his face. She was enjoying the ebb and flow of his magic as he supported her, and with every happy moment that passed between them, she felt a tingle as it surged with his joy.

For a moment, his face turned serious and he told her, "Minerva, I know I have told you this before... but I want to remind you that you could never fail me, my love. Tonight, I want to let you know that I know why you have been pushing yourself. That, somehow, you still think you have failed me, but please, for me, do not harbor those feelings any longer. There is no other I would entrust the children to. Ah, ah..." he cut her off before she could protest so he could continue, "And... I know it will be difficult, but for the time being, you do not need to push yourself so hard. The Healers said, as with any muscle injury, it is good to push yourself, but you must also give the muscles time to heal as well. They said, if you do that, the speed of your recovery would increase and the pain would subside quicker. So, for the summer, could you humor your husband and let him pamper you, just a little?"

Minerva was quiet for a moment, and when she looked up at him, there were tears in her eyes, but she was smiling. "I think I can do that. In fact, you have already started." She motioned to her feet which were a good six inches off the ground, bringing her almost eye to eye with him. "I am pretty tired, and as you say, we have the summer for me to recover fully. But we are not going to lie about the whole time; I still need to push it once in a while, right?"

She raised an eyebrow in question at him, and he flushed slightly.

"Absolutely. In fact, I have plenty of ideas on how you can push yourself, and then get some rest in between." A gleam entered his eyes at the prospect laid out before him.

Playfully, she swatted his arm, her tears forgotten. In her heart, she knew he would never feel she fell short on anything, but when her spirit was low, it was often easier to berate herself than to see his belief in her. On many levels, they had needed this tradition that Albus had begun so many years ago, to renew the bond it had created... their souls intertwined, forever. And this year, Minerva couldn't deny the fact that they would need that strength between them.

"I'm sure you do... but before you do any pushing, you have some moves to get on with, twinkle-toes," she teased, mischievously tugging on his beard.

"Ah... are you ready, my dear? Hold on tight," he told her, and she heard the crackle of the Victrola as the record turned under the needle.

Suddenly, as the romantic croon of Frank Sinatra filled the air, they were spinning and weaving to the gentle beat under the beams of the large moon and the star-filled sky; the humid June breeze was heavy with the scent of lavender wafting around them as they moved.

I stand at your gate, and the song that I sing is of moonlight.

I stand, and I wait for the touch of your hand in the June night.

The roses are sighing, a Moonlight Serenade.

They looked up at each other and smiled again, their hearts beating as one and their magic building and receding in reflection of each other. Albus began to hum along with the music while the fairy lights danced in time on the breeze.

The stars are aglow, and tonight how their light sets me dreaming.

My love, do you know that your eyes are like stars brightly beaming?

I bring you and sing you a Moonlight Serenade.

As the music went on in the background, they continued their journey around the top of the turret. Albus danced across the tower, and Minerva moved with him, gently cushioned by his Levitating charm. When they reached the raised stones of the parapet, they paused for a moment, watching the golden spill of the moonbeams as they fell over the rise of the mountains and the dark water of the lake below.

Just like that first night, the energy and enchantment of the full moon was infused with the seductive fragrance on the breeze and the sultry heat of the June night surrounding them. Minerva was beginning to feel revitalized as she allowed Albus to carry her with his magic. She had forgotten how invigorating it felt to be wrapped in his love as she was.

"I love you, Albus Dumbledore," she told him, eyes shining.

So don't let me wait, come to me tenderly in the June night.

I stand at your gate, and I sing you a song in the moonlight,

a love song, my darling, a Moonlight Serenade.

As the song trailed off, Albus flushed with pleasure and swung Minerva up into his arms. She gasped and held onto his neck, the folds of her dress falling in a cascade over his arm as he carried her away from the tower.

Holding her close, he made his way to their chambers and told her tenderly in a sing-song voice, "And I love you, my darling, even more than dancing in moonlight."

End