

Taking Care

by grugster

Severus is overstressed and does not take care of himself, so Poppy Pomfrey and Minerva McGonagall have to.

Chapter 1 – Taking Care

Chapter 1 of 13

Severus is overstressed and does not take care of himself, so Poppy Pomfrey and Minerva McGonagall have to.

Disclaimer: All recognizable characters belong to J.K. Rowling, and I am not earning anything by writing this story.

This is my second fan fiction, so please be patient with me. I'm not a native speaker of English!

Thanks a lot to my beta-readers, saianwizardgurl and rdholmantx, for correcting my mistakes!

Chapter 1

Severus Snape shoved the fourth-years' Potion essays out of his sight, groaning as he did. His head was throbbing and each movement increased the pain. *And again I didn't take a painkilling potion in time.*

Taking his strongest pain potion at this point would merely dull the pain because the pain was already at such a high level. Sitting in his favorite armchair in his calm and dark sitting room would be helpful, but unfortunately not possible. He still had to mark the rest of his essays and then attend lunch in the Great Hall.

If I don't show up, I'll soon have two annoying witches in my dungeons who will scold me for my lack of care for myself he thought. After stating this, they would decide that he should not be left alone in his condition, and they would fuss over him. He groaned inwardly. He supported his head on both hands and massaged his temples with his fingers. Having no other choice, he dragged himself out of his chair.

The world promptly began to spin in front of his eyes, and the pain increased. He braced himself on the desk and was absolutely still until the pain eased a little and he was able to move again. He tried to walk without moving his head too much.

He managed to arrive at his medical potion shelf without stopping and reached for his strongest painkiller. Opening the vial, the disgusting smell made him grimace. Just thinking about drinking the liquid made him nauseous. Damn *Pavlov's reflex*, he cursed inwardly before gulping down the liquid in one swallow.

Instinctively, he closed his eyes and stood absolutely rigid. Any movement would risk the chance that his stomach would protest and empty its contents all over the floor. Not that there was anything in it besides the potion. But having the burning potion come back up the way it went in was not something that Severus was looking forward to. He stood there for a few minutes, feeling his blood flowing through his head and waiting for the pain to ease. When he felt safe enough to move, he made his way over to his desk again. Now in a sitting position, he again waited a few minutes for his pulse to slow down and the pain to ease. Then he reached for his quill and started marking essays again.

After half an hour, his headache was almost gone, but he did not feel any better. *First this splitting headache, and now the words on this parchment start to move so that I can't correct them. What have I done to deserve this?*

Looking at the big clock above the classroom door, he realized that it was almost time to go to the Great Hall for lunch. He rose from his chair and slowly walked to his private rooms. *I best make sure that I appear to be all right, lest certain women will start to make a fuss over me* thought while heading for the washroom.

One glance in the mirror made all his hopes for a quiet lunch without the concerned fussing of his colleagues vanish. He looked like the walking dead. He was paler than normal – which, given his normal complexion, was quite a feat. Dark circles around his eyes showed his lack of sleep, and his gaunt cheeks were evidence of weight loss because he hardly ate anything. He was not trying to starve himself; he just started to forget to eat when he was busy doing his work for the school and the Ministry.

Lately, the Ministry was ordering more and more potions, and he was quite overburdened. Neglecting his duties at school to brew would not be an option. Albus Dumbledore had done so much for him that he refused to relinquish any duties he had to do for him. So the only thing left to neglect was himself. The fact that he could not sleep after hard days like this was not helping his condition, either.

Dreamless Sleep Potions had not been an option because he did not want to become addicted; he had too many problems already. He was still ruminating about his continued miserable lot in life, when an unwanted but familiar feeling crept up.

Oh no, please, not this again! he thought while the feeling that someone was putting stones on his chest increased. He started to sink into this feeling. Darkness was eating him up from the inside, and he started to panic. *I have to distract myself. Merlin, think about something else, something good, Severus!* he demanded. Only happy memories or something good to look forward to could stop this feeling, so he definitely had to stop think about his misery. But it was so damn hard to distract one's self from those thoughts when you panicked because one knew what would happen if they sank further into the darkness. The weight on his chest was getting heavier and heavier and he felt depression taking over. Just then, there was a voice echoing through the dungeons.

"Severus, we are awaiting your presence in the Great Hall. Don't make one of us come down to get you. You have ten minutes." The demanding voice of Albus Dumbledore was not only echoing in his room, but also in his head.

One glance at the clock over the mirror showed him that he already was 20 minutes late for lunch. *Damn, I've already made them suspicious.* At least Albus' voice had made his depression vanish. Now, he had other things to worry about. He looked at his appearance in the mirror again. *I cannot go like this.* He turned on the tap and splashed some water in his face. That had, of course, no real effect, but the tiredness left for a few seconds. *A Glamour Charm is the only thing that will save me from being stuck in the infirmary for the entire Christmas holiday,* he thought while placing said charm on himself. With one last glance at his now more healthy-looking self, he headed for the Great Hall.

***Pavlov's reflex:** Classical conditioning, which means, in Severus' case, that the body reacted out of experience: he became nauseous by just looking at the potion because he knew that it would make him feel queasy.

Please review!

Chapter 2 – The Great Hall

Chapter 2 of 13

Severus takes part at the dinner in the Great Hall. Will someone already notice his health problems?

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Chapter 2 – The Great Hall

It was a relief that it was Christmas holiday. Almost no students were in the castle, and that meant it was calm and peaceful. All students and teachers, who remained at the castle on holiday, were sitting in the Great Hall. Only Severus was missing.

When he stepped into the Great Hall, all eyes were on him. Taking a deep breath and composing himself, he walked over to the large table where all the students and teachers were seated. Normally he hated to share the table with the students, but today he hoped it would be to his benefit. Maybe the students would distract the other teachers enough that they wouldn't have a closer look on him. Glancing at the table, he realized that they had waited for him. The dishes were already served but untouched. There were warming spells on them so the food wouldn't get cold, but Severus started to feel guilty nevertheless.

The only empty seat was the one between Minerva and Flitwick. Approaching the table, he greeted the students and teachers with a curt nod. His gaze fell on Dumbledore as he sat down. *He's waiting for an explanation,* Severus realized.

"I didn't realize that it was already time for lunch," he said simply. "I was working on the new healing potion for the Ministry, Headmaster. I apologize for making you all wait."

With this he lowered his eyes on his plate and hoped the Headmaster wouldn't start to argue with him in front of the students. He knew that the demand to come to the Great Hall was spoken through Albus' mind. So the student weren't aware about the scene in his private room. *Merlin, how embarrassing would it be when the students would know about the molly-coddling of my colleagues,* Severus thought.

"Now that our little round is finally complete, let us start eating," the Headmaster said cheerfully.

Severus put some light vegetable on his plate and started to eat.

"Oh Severus, haven't you seen the wonderful roast beef?" Minerva asked to his right. "It always was one of your favourites." With that she passed the plate with the still

steaming roast beef to him.

And now the stuffing of the goose will start, Severus thought and groaned inwardly. He couldn't refuse the offered beef without making them suspicious. But just thinking about eating the heavy meat made him sick. Minerva and Poppy were always eyeing him like hawks while eating. Being only forced to attend lunch he could manage to eat at least enough to not let them fuss over him. But if they knew that lunch was almost all he had been eating for the last several months, they would give him a hard time. He had no other choice than to take at least a small piece of the roast beef. Choosing the smallest one made Minerva observe him closely.

"I already ate a late breakfast this morning and still am a little full." By her look he knew this excuse didn't work well.

"Really? I will have to ask the house-elves what an amazing breakfast they made that would let you refuse your favourite dish." His face fell, and the moment it did he knew that he had given himself away. Minerva's lips were forming a thin line and that meant trouble for him. The lioness had cornered her prey and now would pounce.

From the other side of the table came another female voice: "I also would like to know what wonders these house-elves have worked this morning for you." It was Poppy and now he was definitely lost. Frantically he tried to find a way out of this situation. From the corner of his eye he could see the blue eyes of the Headmaster eyeing him over his half-moon glasses.

"Well ladies, if you must know, I had a special breakfast with fresh rolls, several flavoured marmalades and cheese. If your curiosity is fulfilled, I would like to eat now." With this he started cutting the beef on his plate. He mentally noted to go as fast as possible after the meal to the house-elves' kitchen and ordering them to lie if Minerva or Poppy really would ask them about his breakfast. Of course he hadn't eaten at all.

He felt Minerva's gaze still on him when he saw her hand lower the roast beef plate. *They haven't bought it at all*, he thought. A meeting with the house-elves was required.

After eating one small piece of the meat he moved over to the vegetable on his plate again. His stomach was already rebelling. Waves of nausea overwhelmed him, and he felt himself starting to sweat. *Thank Merlin I put the Glamour Charm on me*. When his stomach refused any more, Fortuna finally showed some understanding. Neville Longbottom was not only a clumsy fool in his class but also while eating. He had tipped over the big decanter with the pumpkin juice. The content of said decanter was now on Poppy's plate and clothes. Minerva was up with a flush and calmed the panicking Neville while Poppy was trying to dry her clothes. Severus wasn't a former Death Eater and spy for nothing. He knew exactly when to take advantage of a situation. He quickly cast a removing spell on the remaining food on his plate. Just a small bit of vegetable he let stay. He glanced around and found that nobody had noticed his spell. *So my chance to reach the next toilet before the meal is reacting violently with the potion in my system is very good now*, he thought, satisfied. Now he just had to finish his meal with as few motions as possible. From experience he knew that any motion would start the nausea he already felt to increase and end with the emptying of his stomach.

When all were seated again and Poppy and the table were dry again, he started to eat the rest of his food. He already was one of the last to finish his meal, and so after a few sips of tea he addressed the headmaster again: "Albus, may I please be excused? I'm still working on the healing potion, and I would like to finish it before the evening."

"Of course, my boy. But please make sure to be in time for lunch tomorrow." There was a warning tone in his voice. Avoiding Minerva's and Poppy's eyes Severus left the Great Hall. *Now I have to be fast. Where is the nearest toilet?* he frantically thought. He almost ran to reach the nearest lavatory. It cost him all his self control to not empty his stomach on the floor on his way. He reached it just in time before he threw up.

He felt much better afterward, but unfortunately this action has caused his headache to come back. He was still sitting in front of the toilet and now started to lean his upper body against the wall. *Merlin, I'm so tired. I could fell asleep right here*. He suddenly went from sleepy to wide awake. *I have to meet the house-elves before Minerva or Poppy will speak with them*. With that he stood up and just leaned against the wall again to regain his balance. His head was throbbing again, but he had to speak with the house-elves before heading down to the dungeons for another dose of his pain potion.

Please review!

Found Out

Chapter 3 of 13

Severus met with Filch and forgot to meet the house-elves.

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Chapter 3 - Found Out

He had almost reached the kitchen when he heard screams coming from one of the classrooms near him. *There are only a few students in the castle, and yet they manage to get into trouble nevertheless. And, of course, I have the luck of coming across them*, he thought and rolled his eyes in annoyance. As he opened the door to the classroom from which the noises were coming, he hoped that there would not be Slytherins involved. But luck was never with him, and so he recognized the two students rolling on the floor as Mr. Hanson and Mr. Conner. Mr. Hanson was a fifth-year Gryffindor and Mr. Conner, a fifth-year Slytherin. Still not aware that their feared Potions Master had entered the room, the two students clawed and punched at each other.

"Take it back, you damn Snake!" Mr. Hanson shouted.

"Dream on, this is *our* territory!" was Mr. Conner's reply.

"What the hell is going on here?!" he roared.

Both boys were abruptly still. They were looking at Snape in shock. *Like deer caught in headlights*, Severus thought.

Mr. Conner reacted quickly. He stood up and started to try to talk himself out of the situation. "He started it. I was just going down to the dormitory after lunch when he called me names and dragged me into this room. Then he started to hit me, and I was just defending myself." Severus was not fooled by the explanation or the innocent look his Slytherin was giving him. He tried hard to get himself under control. The adrenalin was flowing through his body and he had the feeling his heart would explode. *I have to get rid of these two before I lose control of my body*, he thought worriedly. His eyes fell on the Gryffindor boy, who was just starting to stand up. He fearfully looked at his teacher. He already knew that he would be blamed for this and was for sure in a lot of trouble.

"I was just coming down to find you, Professor, because Mr. Filch asked for your help. He is in the second floor boys' toilet, sir. But then Conner attacked me," he stumbled fearfully. Severus' eyes wandered between the two boys. Mr. Conner was surprised that his Head of House was even hesitating to believe him and punish the Gryffindor. He glared at Hanson and pushed him on the shoulder so that Hanson stuttered backwards. "That isn't true, you liar!"

"Stop it this instant!" Severus spat as he grabbed Conner's arm and dragged him harshly in the direction of the door. "Back to your dormitory. I will deal with you later." With that, he pushed the boy out the door and slowly turned around to face the anxious Gryffindor. Hanson backed away when Severus approached him.

"I swear it was like I said, sir! He dragged me into the room. He said I was in the wrong territory and that he would show me who was in charge." His backside hit one of the tables, and he could not escape anymore. Severus came so near that their noses almost touched.

"Be glad that I have no time for this right now. Fifty points from Gryffindor for fighting and detention with Mr. Filch next Friday, ten o'clock." He waited for a reaction from the boy. When Hanson just stared at him with eyes wide open, he growled, "You are dismissed!" He hardly moved away from the boy, but it was enough to give him an escape route, which Hanson promptly took advantage of.

Still facing the opposite side of the door, he let out the breath he was not aware he was holding when he heard the door shut. He closed his eyes and steadied himself on the table in front of him. His heart was beating fast and the world had started to spin again. *I just want to lie down in my bed*, he thought. *I haven't felt this sick in years. What's wrong with me?* His legs felt like jelly, and he sat down on the nearest chair. Slowly, he regained control of his body again. Resting his head on his hands, he thought, *I just wanted a calm and peaceful holiday, and now everything is just too much. I can't manage this all. It's too much!*

And again he felt the well-known feeling of heaviness in his chest. He just wanted to hide from the world. His role as a spy was over after the Dark Lord found out he worked for Dumbledore. He had barely survived the torture he got as a reward for his unfaithfulness to Voldemort.

Albus' emergency Portkey had saved his life. Poppy had to take care for him for months. *And now I'm a prisoner at Hogwarts. My dear Death Eater friends still try to capture me, and so I have to hide like a chicken under Albus' roof*, he thought bitterly. *I have to teach, to brew potions for Poppy and the Ministry, and then the Dark Lord entertains himself by torturing me with the Dark Mark. That's too much. I can't take it anymore. I always thought it would be a relief when I did not have to spy any longer, but now everything is falling apart*, he thought as his depression took over. He could feel his thoughts becoming darker and darker. *I have to meet Argus about the toilet*, he thought. *And then I still have to speak to Mr. Conner.* He dragged himself out of the chair and slowly walked to the door. His head was throbbing and he felt sick again.

When he reached the toilet, Argus was still trying to dry the ground. "What's wrong, Argus?"

"Someone overflowed the toilet. It's a mess," Argus muttered under his breath. "Could you give me a hand?"

"Of course." Severus applied a drying spell on the area. "Do you have any suspicions already?" he asked as an especially strong set of pulsing headaches were attacking him. He had to close his eyes as he reached for the painful side of his head. When he opened his eyes again, he was looking in the grey eyes of a concerned caretaker.

"Are you okay, Severus? You look like death warmed over." Argus eyed him closely.

"Have I ever looked different?" It was easier to speak with Argus than with the rest of his colleagues. Argus would never talk with someone about Severus' problems, and he would not pester him when he did not want to speak.

"I can finish up here. Maybe it's better if you rest a while."

"Thank you. When you find any evidence regarding who is responsible for this mess, let me know." With that, he headed in the direction of the door. He already opened it when he turned around to face Argus again. "I gave Mr. Hanson detention with you next Friday. Don't make it too hard or nasty. I fear I may have overreacted a little."

The times where I have to favor my Slytherins and play the nasty git to all the other students is finally over. I'm no longer a spy. But old habits are difficult to lay down, he thought while heading down to the dungeons again.

When he stepped into his classroom, he stopped abruptly at the entrance. He was not alone. *Damn, I forgot to speak with the house-elves*, he thought, looking in shock at the two women standing, arms crossed over their chests, in his classroom. *I'm doomed.*

Please review!

Chapter 4 - Into the Infirmary

Chapter 4 of 13

Severus is overstressed and does not take care of himself, so Poppy Pomfrey and Minerva McGonagall have to.

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Chapter 4 - Into the Infirmary

Both women were glaring daggers at him. He could hardly suppress the impulse to reach for the doorknob and run away, but he realized that would be useless. If Poppy did not send a Stunning Spell after him, then she would at least inform Albus. And Albus would hunt him down; the headmaster knew every place in the castle where he

would hide. *And I cannot leave the castle because that would mean my death* So he had no other choice but to face whatever these women had in store for him.

He composed himself and straightened up. "Minerva, Poppy, to what do I owe the pleasure of your presence?" While trying not to look at them directly, he strode in the direction of his desk. The two women blocked his way, and when he tried to get through them, they moved together so that he could not slip past them.

"You had a wonderful breakfast, did you?" Poppy asked sarcastically.

"Poppy, there is really no need to scold me like a child. I am perfectly capable of taking care of myself," he explained harshly as he tried to push through the two women. But Poppy would have none of it.

"SEVERUS TOBIAS SNAPE, stop trying to lie to me!" She grabbed his arm to stop him from moving away from her. "I will check you thoroughly now, and you will cooperate with me."

"You will not!" Severus was furious. *I will not let her examine me and then detain me in the hospital wing! It is enough that I am imprisoned in the castle.* "I am an adult, and I can decide for myself." He tried to free himself, but without success. Merlin, this woman has a grip like a troll!

"You will come with me to the hospital wing this instant, young man!" she said sternly, already trying to pull him in the direction of the door.

Now he was really struggling. "Poppy, please let me go. I am tired and I want to go to bed." He tried to loosen Poppy's grip on his arm with his free hand, but as he had to lean down a bit to do this, Poppy took the opportunity to reach up with her unoccupied hand to his forehead. What she felt did not make her loosen her grip.

"Severus, you are burning up," she said. "You also have bags under your eyes and you are as pale as a ghost. It seems that you do not even have enough power to hold up the Glamour Charm you obviously put on yourself at dinner." *And the fact that you aren't even able to wriggle yourself out of my grip speaks volumes,* she thought, very concerned.

Severus began to panic. "No, Poppy, please, I have so much work to do." He desperately tried to get away from Poppy and her restraining hands, but Minerva was already rounding on him. To know that someone was behind him and that he did not know what this person was doing made him struggle even more.

"Please, Severus, calm down and let Poppy give you a proper check-up. There is obviously something wrong with you." She tried to lay a calming hand on his shoulder. He jerked around; his heart was beating so fast that he feared it would explode. He suddenly felt the cold sweat on his neck as nausea came over him. His legs had once again become like jelly. And then there was only blackness.

When he opened his eyes, he was blinded by bright light. He blinked a few times to get used to the glow. A cool hand was placed on his forehead. "Good to have you back, Severus," said the calm voice of Minerva. "You gave us quite a scare."

He groaned and tried to push himself up, but that was quickly prevented by a strong hand on his chest. "Don't move, Severus, or I will put a Binding Spell on you." He turned his eyes to Poppy, who sternly looked at him. While she pushed him back into a lying position, she strictly said, "This time, you definitely went too far, Severus."

He closed his eyes in resignation. *Now I am not only useless as a spy, but I cannot even fulfill my regular duties. She's never going to let me out of here. I will be unable to finish my potions for the Ministry and the potions for the hospital wing.* He felt so useless and guilty because he was too weak to fulfill his duties.

"I'm sorry," he said softly.

Poppy did not know what he was thinking, and she believed that he was sorry for neglecting himself. She was surprised that he had listened to reason so quickly. "You really shouldn't have let yourself become so ill. You are underweight and absolutely exhausted. You didn't sleep much in the last few weeks, and with the amount of painkillers you have been taking lately, your body tried to show you that it needs rest. You cannot go on like this," she lectured him.

He let her speak because he knew that it would not help his situation if he tried to argue with her. "You will stay here for at least a week, Severus, if not longer."

And with that, he was fully awake. "A WEEK?" He sat up abruptly. "No, you cannot force me to stay here for a week. That is ridiculous!"

Poppy was taken by surprise at his outburst. She tried to block his way when he swung his legs over the side of the bed. But that was not necessary because Severus froze when a calm, serious voice broke up their argument. "No, *she* cannot force you to stay, but *I* can." It was Albus Dumbledore.

No, please, not him. Was he here the whole time or did I just not notice his arrival? Severus wondered. His shoulders sagged in resignation.

"So that means back to bed, young man," Poppy said as she eased him back again. When the bed covers were tucked around him, Albus leaned over him. Severus tried to look away. He was ashamed to be so weak and useless. Hiding seemed to be the only good option for him right now.

"Look at me, Severus," Albus ordered him gently. When he did not obey, he took Severus' chin and forced him to face him. "Severus, you are ill. *Very* ill. We will not let you starve yourself or become addicted to painkillers. When you obviously cannot take care of yourself, you have to let us take care of you."

Severus eyes began to water. "I'm so sorry, Albus. I couldn't do all the work. I'm useless."

He again tried to look away, but Albus still had a grip on Severus' chin and would not let him. "No, Severus, stop. You are not useless. We should have realized that it was too much work. That was our mistake, not yours. Nobody would have managed to fulfill all of the duties that were placed on you." Albus sat down on the bed, still holding Severus' chin and stroking the loose wisps of hair out of Severus' face with his free hand. "You didn't let Poppy finish, so I will finish for her, and you, Severus, will listen and not interrupt me. Your current state is very alarming. You obviously ignored any signals that your body was giving you before it broke down. Judging from your reaction a few minutes ago, it seems that you are still not capable of taking care of yourself, and that means that we will do it for you. You will stay in this bed as long as Poppy deems necessary. You will take whatever potion or treatment Poppy gives you. You will eat and sleep so that you can regain some weight and start thinking clearly again. I do not know how long this will take, but I can assure you that even when Poppy allows you to stay in your own quarters, you still will have regular check-ups. You will not miss any meals in the future and you will get enough rest or you will find yourself back in the hospital wing faster than you can say, 'I'm fine, Albus!' Understood?" He was looking at Severus intensely.

"Yes, Albus," Severus said in a very small voice. He lowered his eyes. *I am too tired to fight, and what would be the point anyway?* Deep down, he knew that this was necessary because he would not stop working himself until he was dead. It was also good to know that there were people who were concerned about him and would not let him suffer any longer. That was what he had done in the past few weeks: suffer. The prospect of being able to rest without work was, on one side, very nice, but it also brought back that damn feeling of guilt for being useless. He was torn between trying to argue with Albus and closing his eyes and letting them take care of him.

Albus sensed the fight in Severus' mind. "Please, just let us take care of you, Severus," he said in a much gentler and more soothing voice. He moved his hand from Severus' forehead to his cheek, and when he felt Severus lean into it, he smiled, satisfied. He leaned over, placed a kiss on Severus' forehead, and whispered, "Sleep, my child." And with that, he whispered a sleeping spell over the tired body of the Potions Master.

Chapter 5 – Games of Power

Chapter 5 of 13

Poppy shows Severus that she is in charge here.

Chapter 5 – Games of Power

The sound of a quiet conversation woke him. "Shouldn't he have woken up by now?" Minerva asked with concern.

"His body is very weak. He needs as much rest as he can get."

The hospital wing again, he thought as he tried to remember the reason he was here. I slept like a stone, so they must have given me a sleeping draught, he mused. But then the image of Albus Dumbledore leaning over him and all the memories of the last day came back to his mind.

Oh, no, I'm not ready to face them right now, he thought. I'll just keep my eyes closed so they won't recognize that I'm awake.

"Albus was here an hour ago to check on him. He will come back when his meeting with those Ministry officials is over," Poppy explained to Minerva.

"I will stay until then. When will Alastor come back?"

"He was here the whole morning, but he left with Albus for the meeting. He said that he would come back in the evening," Poppy explained.

Oh, fantastic. How many people are fussing over me this time? I really must be in trouble if Mad-Eye Moody is watching after me, Severus thought desperately.

A warm tingle covered his body. *Damn diagnostic spell, he cursed inwardly.*

"Feigning sleep, Severus?" Poppy asked, amused.

Groaning, he opened his eyes. "No, I was just hoping to fall back asleep again, but it was impossible with your babbling."

She took his wrist in her hands to check his pulse and peered into his eyes closely. "How do you feel, Severus?"

"Fantastic. When can I leave?" he asked impatiently.

She sighed, put his wrist down, and felt his forehead. "We already had this discussion yesterday, Severus. Don't you remember?"

"Yes, I do." He shrugged his head away from her hand. "But now I'm feeling much better. There is no need to hold me here any longer."

"Severus, be reasonable! Let Poppy do her work," Minerva said while sitting herself on the bed. One of her hands rested on his left leg in the hope that this would calm him.

But he only glared at her and angrily said, "Why are you here? Don't you have work to do?" He forcefully pulled his leg away from her touch. Behaving like a stubborn child was not something he enjoyed, but he felt so embarrassed that he just wanted to be left alone.

Unfortunately for him, Poppy was not the kind of person that would let something like that happen. "Don't speak to Minerva like that. We can do this the hard way or you can cooperate. If you even try to get out of bed, I will restrain you. Everyone is concerned about you, and you will not bite them away just because you feel uncomfortable."

She rummaged through a drawer in the small night table and found what she was looking for. "As you don't want me to touch your head, you will take this. Open up so that I can put this in your mouth," she ordered, brandishing a thermometer.

"This is ridiculous. I'm feeling perfectly fine!" he stubbornly said as he turned his head away from her.

"Okay, there is more than one way to take your temperature." With that she waved her wand. Pure horror was written all over Severus' face when he felt his nightshirt go up and his pants lowered. Only the bed clothes were covering him from the gaze of the two witches. In a panic, he grabbed his pants through the bed clothes and tried to pull them up again, but they would not move. His eyes were shifting from one woman to the other. Poppy had a stern look on her face and Minerva a lightly bemused expression. She even looked with curious interest at the place where his private parts were only covered by the thin bed sheet. Quickly, he covered his front with his hands over the blanket. Of course, he knew she could not see what was under the bed clothes, but nevertheless he turned red like a tomato.

"Poppy, please stop! You cannot do this." The panic in his voice was obvious. "I'll use the bloody thermometer. Please, I swear! I will do whatever you want me to do, but please stop!" he pleaded with her.

"That was my last warning, Severus. Do we understand each other?" She threateningly moved her wand in front of his face.

"Yes, I'll do whatever you say, Poppy, I promise!" he said, frantically nodding his head.

"Okay, then. Open up, young man." She put the thermometer under his tongue.

When she did not move to reverse the spell, he stared pleadingly at her and wildly gestured with his head to his lower body. His hands were still trying to cover himself.

"Oh, no, you'll remain like this until I have the results of the reading. Maybe you will learn from this!" She crossed her arms in front of her chest and made clear that that was her final decision.

His face was burning and he closed his eyes in embarrassment. When the thermometer finally beeped, he was relieved beyond imagination. He opened his eyes to look at Poppy. Her expression made it clear that she was not happy with the results.

"Feeling well, Severus?" Her eyebrows lowered to form a line as she angrily looked at him. "Your temperature is even higher than yesterday." She placed the thermometer on the nightstand and observed him closely. When he remained silent, she placed her hands on her hips. "I'll ask you again: how do you feel?"

"Poppy, please cancel the spell," he pleaded.

"I will once I have the answer I need. So?"

"Okay, okay. I feel a bit sick and I'm very tired. And my head hurts," he described. "Please, Poppy, reverse it."

"If I had known that this would work so well on you, I would have done it much earlier." With a flick of her wand, his pants were back in place and his nightshirt was lowered as well. Another flick and the headboard moved up until his back was resting against it. "You need to eat something, and then I will give you something for your headache."

"No, Poppy, I just told you I'm feeling sick. I can't eat anything. I just want to sleep for a while."

But Poppy was not paying any attention to his pleading. She was already ordering something from the kitchens. "The meal will be here soon. It's just a light chicken soup and some fresh bread, Severus," she explained while putting a bed tray over his lap on which he could eat. She looked at the Transfigurations teacher. "Would you please help him eat, Minerva? Make sure that he eats at least the soup and half of the bread."

"Of course, Poppy." Minerva said cheerfully, smiling at Severus.

Why the hell is she so happy about helping me eat? She smiles as if she's just received a Christmas present, Severus thought, confused.

"I don't need help. I'm not a child," he said defensively.

"We will see, Severus," Poppy said as she handed Minerva two potion vials. "I have to go and check on Hagrid. He burned his hand yesterday, and I want to make sure it's healing properly. Please give Severus this potion after he eats. It's for his headache." She pointed her to the smaller vial with a light blue liquid in it. "If he starts to get sick while eating, give him a spoonful from this vial. It should settle his stomach enough for him to finish his meal without incident." She pointed at the bigger vial with brown thick liquid in it.

She turned to Severus. "And you *will* behave, Severus. Remember, you do not want to make me get cross with you again."

Even the memory of it made him blush again.

"I will be back soon. If he gives you any trouble, inform Albus via the Floo. He will still be in the meeting, but he said that we can call for him nevertheless. He will at least send Alastor if he isn't available at that moment."

"Yes, I will do, but I'm sure there won't be any trouble," Minerva said with confidence.

"Please stop talking about me as if I'm not in the room!" Severus scowled at both women. *Call Albus or Alastor? And what shall they do? Put me over their knee and spank me?*

"I'm on my way." With one last warning glance towards Severus, Poppy left the hospital wing to check on Hagrid.

Chapter 6 – The Kiss

Chapter 6 of 13

Severus is overstressed and does not take care of himself, so Poppy Pomfrey and Minerva McGonagall have to.
SS/MM

Thanks a lot to my wonderful betas, saiyanzardgurl and Duchess_of_Arcadia, for correcting my story and improving it.

Disclaimer: All recognizable characters belong to J.K. Rowling, and I am not earning anything by writing this story.

Chapter 6 The Kiss

Now they were alone.

"Hmm, that smells delicious, Severus." Minerva leaned over the bed tray and inhaled the scent deeply.

"I'm not hungry," Severus pouted. His stomach already clenched just seeing the food. He was very sure that this would create an incident, just as Poppy stated, when he tried to eat. If his back was not already resting against the headboard, he would have backed away from the meal, and with Minerva still sitting on his bed, there also was no room to push the tray away from him.

"Severus, you have to at least try," Minerva said encouragingly.

Couldn't Poppy have stayed? It would at least be less embarrassing to throw up in front of her instead of Minerva, he thought, annoyed.

"Then at least give me the potion for nausea," Severus demanded and tried to reach for it.

"No, Poppy said you should try it first without it." With that, she moved the vial out of Severus' reach.

"But I am absolutely sure that I cannot eat without it. I am old enough to know what I can do and what I cannot," Severus spat angrily.

"Oh, really? And is that the reason you are here?" Minerva rolled her eyes and started to take the spoon.

But Severus was faster and grabbed it before she could. "You will not feed me, woman." When his angry glare had no effect on Minerva, he sighed and leaned over the tray to observe the food closely. The chicken soup really looked and especially smelled wonderful, but it did not change the awful feeling he had in his stomach. The fresh bread also looked delicious. *Maybe first a little bit of the bread, then I will see if I can hold the soup down as well!* Still holding the spoon (I will not give her the opportunity to grab it!), he took the bread and broke a small piece from it. He placed it in his mouth and chewed it very carefully. Waiting for a violent reaction from his body, he concentrated on any sign of nausea. But even when he swallowed, his stomach did not react badly. One glance at Minerva showed him that the woman was smiling at him.

"See. Everything is all right, Sev." He almost choked on the next piece of bread he had placed in his mouth when he heard her call him Sev.

"Don't call me that, Minerva. Or I will call you Min." He glared at her, but she only grinned.

"Oh, feel free to call me Min. I don't mind."

That did not work like I planned, he thought, confused. Rolling his eyes, he changed his attention to his meal again. *Maybe I should try the soup now.*

After two spoons of the soup, he already felt a little dizzy and his stomach rumbled in protest. After the fourth spoon of soup, he felt cold sweat on his forehead, and the feeling of nausea increased. He rested the hand with the spoon on the tray, closed his eyes and concentrated on forcing the nausea down. Still with closed eyes, he fumbled for the bread, broke a piece off, and started to chew. But it did not work. The salty taste in his mouth increased, and he felt that he would lose the battle.

"Please, Minerva, I...." He opened his eyes and saw that Minerva already had a spoonful of the thick brown liquid in her hand. She moved it in front of his face and he gulped it down. The nausea shortly increased so that he feared he could not hold the potion down, but it soon kicked in. The salty taste vanished, and he did not feel dizzy any longer.

"And why couldn't I have it before? I already said that I could not eat without it!" he grumbled.

"Because Poppy said so. And she will have her reasons," Minerva said in her no-nonsense tone.

"Yeah, the reason is that she wants me to suffer," he muttered under his breath.

"That's not fair, Severus. You know how much Poppy cares for you." Minerva shook her head at his behaviour.

When she realized that he had leaned back and almost closed his eyes, she said, "Severus, the soup is getting cold and you haven't even finished half of it."

"Maybe you didn't notice, but I'm ill. I can't eat more." With that, he crossed his arms in front of his chest to make clear that this was his last word.

"You have to eat, and Poppy said you have to at least finish the soup." She grabbed the spoon, filled it with soup, and then moved it in front of Severus' mouth.

But Severus kept his mouth closed and looked at her challengingly.

"Severus, don't be a child. You want to leave the hospital wing as fast as possible, but Poppy will only let you go when you have eaten and slept properly for a few days. By refusing to eat, you just lengthen the time you have to stay here," Minerva tried to reason with him. But Severus was stubborn and just looked at the ceiling.

"Okay then, you leave me no other choice. I will call for Albus."

"You ca--" He could not say anything else because she shoved the spoon into his mouth. This did not exactly work very well, and soup was running down his chin and onto his lap.

"Minerva, are you insane?" he shouted as he cleaned his mouth with his sleeve. If looks could kill, Minerva would be dead by now.

"Oh, don't be such a baby, Severus." She flicked her wand and the spilled soup vanished. "Now eat, or do we have to repeat it?"

He angrily plucked the offered spoon out of Minerva's hand. "I don't know why you are here. Haven't you something important to do?"

"Something more important than looking out for a friend who tries to kill himself, you mean?"

"I have no intention of killing myself, Minerva. I'm just a little tired, and you all make a mountain out of a molehill."

Now Minerva became angry. Her wand still in her hand, she glared at him. "We are *overreacting*? Severus, stop lying to yourself! You *fainted* in front of us. I saw your body when Poppy got you into the hospital gown. You are as thin as a sheet. You haven't eaten right for months. And look at your face, Severus. You look horrible. Merlin, you scared me like hell when you broke down. You are one of my best friends. I don't want to lose you, Severus. So DON'T tell me we are overreacting."

Severus was shocked by her outburst. He looked stunned at Minerva's angry face. *They really must think I'm nuts. I was always thin, and I can't see such a big difference now. So why is she reacting so violently? And why does she care anyway?* The sentence 'one of my best friends' was ringing in his ears. He always was close to Minerva, especially after his recovery as a spy. She was there for him when he was healing from the torture the Dark Lord put him under, and she listened to him when he was confused about how he should then live. Her private quarters were warm and always smelled a little bit like cinnamon, and Severus really enjoyed spending time there with Minerva over a cup of tea or a scotch. *Best friend. She called me one of her best friends and she is really worried about me.* Guilt started to overcome him.

"I'm sorry, Minerva," he whispered loud enough for her to hear. His eyes were lowered in embarrassment.

"I'm sorry for screaming at you like that," Minerva said gently. She was surprised by her own outburst and slowly regained her composure. "Please try to eat more of the soup. Try for me, Severus," she pleaded softly.

Without looking at her, he took the spoon and ate the now only slightly warm soup. He managed to finish the soup and some bites of bread silently. When he finally could not take any more, he leaned back. "I'm really tired, Minerva, and my head hurts even more." Closing his eyes against the bright light in the hospital wing, he sighed.

The tray was moved from the bed, and he felt the mattress dip slightly between his hips. A hand was placed on the right side of his face. "I'm really sorry for yelling at you. But I'm so worried, Severus. I don't want to lose you." Her voice was very sad, and he did not dare to open his eyes to look at her face.

Still with closed eyes, he said, "I know, Minerva. I'm still very confused because I can't really understand why you are all making such a fuss. I'm an adult. Shouldn't I be allowed to decide for myself? Shouldn't I have the right to decide how much I eat and sleep?"

"But you are killing yourself! Your body can't live on such small amounts of food and sleep. Can't you see that you are so tired because of your lack of care for yourself?" She moved a loose wisp of hair out of his face. A tear was running down her cheek as she sadly looked at his sunken face. She leaned over and kissed his forehead.

When he felt her kiss, he opened his eyes. She was only inches away from his face. He looked into her deep green eyes and saw all her pain and worries for him in them. He did not know what overcame him, but he reached for her head, gently pulled her the last few inches to him, and kissed her.

When she felt his lips on hers, she was stunned. She could not think. Her eyes were wide in shock. Before she could react, he let go of her, and on instinct she pulled away.

"Merlin, I'm so sorry, Minerva. I shouldn't have done that. Please, Minerva, I'm sorry," he stammered frantically. He moved his fingers through his hair, lowered his gaze and shook his head. "I'm so sorry."

When she regained control of her feelings, she realized that he must have thought that she had not wanted him to kiss her. She again reached for his face to calm him, but in that moment he moaned in pain and grabbed his left forearm.

Great, exactly what I need right now. The Dark Lord's physical torture when I'm already torturing myself emotionally.

Minerva put her arm around his shoulders to support him. It was not the first time she was present when the Dark Lord tortured him like this. "Severus, it will be over soon. Everything will be okay in a few minutes. Just hold on." She had a firm grip on his shoulders and forced his head to lie on her shoulder. He did not object. The pain was almost unbearable, and he was glad for the support. She was like an anchor to sanity right now. He clawed his forearm just above the mark with such force that there would be bruises after. Slowly, the pain ebbed. He stared at the Mark, which was a deep, angry red. The area he had clawed was white because no blood was flowing

through it. At the same pace the pain in his arm became less, the pain in his neck and head increased.

"Minerva, the potion for my head, please," he whimpered.

"Of course, Severus." Still supporting his shoulder with one hand, she reached for the vial. She slowly guided his head against the cushion. When she was sure that he was resting properly, she removed her hand and opened the vial. She swirled the vial a few times, took his neck for support again, and moved the vial to his lips.

When he felt the vial placed at his lips, he gulped down the bitter liquid without grimacing. He felt the pain ease and the tiredness overcame him. Slowly he opened his eyes. "I'm sorry, Minerva."

"Don't be." She sadly smiled at him.

With that he drifted into sleep.

Please review!

Chapter 7 – The Toilet Accident

Chapter 7 of 13

Severus is overstressed and does not take care of himself, so Poppy Pomfrey and Minerva McGonagall have to.

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I'm not a native speaker of English!

Thanks a lot to my beta-readers, saiyanzardgurl and AmyLouise, for correcting my mistakes!

Chapter 7 The Toilet Accident

When he woke up two hours later, he needed a few moments to realize where he was. Looking to his right side, he found Minerva, fast asleep in a comfortable armchair. His gaze dwelled for some time on the sleeping form.

God, what have I done? Destroying one of the few friendships I have for a stupid kiss He turned his eyes to the ceiling. Suddenly he noticed pressure on his bladder. The soup obviously had gone through his alimentary system and now wanted to come out again.

A look around the hospital wing showed that Poppy was nowhere to be seen. The best way would be to call for Poppy because that would make the alarm in her office go off. *Surely she will have a 'nice' embarrassing way for relieving me in mind,* he thought sarcastically. But there was a good chance that she would be occupied with work in her office, and so there was a possibility that he could go to the toilet by himself. One last glance at Minerva, who was still sound asleep, and he slowly sat up and let his legs dangle over the side of the bed. *Okay, it seems she hasn't put any alarm on the bed,* he thought, smirking. He could also feel that he was still very tired and weak. *Fantastic, yesterday I was quite okay, and now, after spending the whole day in bed, I feel worse.*

His gaze lingered on the toilet door on the opposite side of the room. *Only a few metres. I can make it,* he told himself. The image of using a bedpan in front of Minerva came to mind, and a slight blush crept onto his cheeks, and that was the last thing he needed to push himself to his feet. He felt the weakness in his feet and waited for them to get steady. For the first part of his 'journey' he could use the bed for support, but then he would have to go without help. His legs became weaker with each step and he felt slightly dizzy. *Maybe it wasn't such a good idea. Even if I make it to the toilet, I will never make it back. Damn. Yesterday it all worked. I always knew that being here wasn't helping at all,* he thought bitterly. He was now in the middle of the room. Sweat formed on his forehead, and his legs hardly moved like he wanted them to. Then the inevitable came; his legs gave in and he fell down. "Damn," he screamed and hammered his fist on the floor.

"SEVERUS TOBIAS SNAPE, what in Merlin's name do you think you are doing?" Poppy's voice was ringing through the room like a siren.

Then three things happened almost in the same moment. First, he could hear Minerva shout, "Oh, my God," and jump out of her chair. Second, the door of the infirmary was opened. He could hear uneven heavy steps which then came to an abrupt stop because the person had obviously reacted to the scene, and the third and most frightening one the fast clicking of Poppy's heels in his direction.

Panic came over him and he tried to stand up.

"Oh no, you don't, you stupid man," Poppy said angrily. *'Mobilicorpus.'*

When Severus felt his body being levitated to the bed, he covered his eyes with his hands. Not only because he still felt dizzy, but out of embarrassment. Quickly he was back on his bed. Poppy and Minerva, who had regained her composure again, arranged his bed clothes around him. Severus still refused to show his face.

"So?" Poppy asked. When no reaction came, she tried again. "Severus, put your hands down and speak with me this instant." She grabbed his wrist forcefully and he obeyed.

"I just wanted to go to the toilet, Poppy. Yesterday I could walk perfectly well, so why not today?" He looked at Poppy and saw that Alastor was approaching he *So it was Alastor who walked into the infirmary a few minutes ago,* Severus thought.

"Yesterday, you collapsed!" Poppy almost screamed. She was furious.

Alastor was now standing behind her and was gently encircling her with one arm from behind. He pulled her back to his chest and spoke softly to her, "Come on, Poppy. It wouldn't be Severus if he didn't at least try to sneak out. Calm down, sweetheart." With that he kissed the crook of her neck. His magical eye was fixed on Severus, but the rest of his attention was on his wife.

Poppy tried to push Alastor away. "Stop it, Al. He could have hurt himself and worsened his condition."

Alastor tightened his grip on Poppy to calm her. "It also wouldn't do him good if you hexed him in this condition. Look, you're scaring him." He grinned at Severus.

Slowly, Poppy regained her composure. She seemed to remember what Severus had said and waved her wand over his groin.

Merlin, how I hate these spells, Severus thought while trying hard to resist the urge to grab his pants to check if they were wet. Of course they wouldn't be wet, but the feeling of a suddenly empty bladder seemed to send that kind of signal to the brain.

"So, what did I tell you about trying to leave the bed without my okay?" Poppy asked sternly. She had wriggled out of Alastor's grip already and now was weaving diagnostic spells on several parts of Severus' body.

"Why can I not walk? I was perfectly well yesterday. One day in this damned hospital wing and I'm a cripple."

"And again Severus, YESTERDAY you FAINTED. You've definitely had problems for days, if not weeks. And YESTERDAY your body finally gave in. Now it is taking all the rest it can get and isn't cooperating when you try to overwork it again. Maybe it realized that you don't understand any of the small signals it's been sending you, and so it started sending some more drastic signals, so that even a stubborn, stupid man like you would realize that you need rest." She had finished her diagnostic spells and now was taking his temperature. When it beeped she took it out of his mouth, looked at it and placed it, without a word, on the night table.

He shivered slightly and was grateful for the warming spell she had just put on his sheets. "When will it be over?"

"When you have had enough rest and gained enough weight. That reminds me, it's time for a little snack." With that she moved away from the bed to order something from the house-elves.

"You really know how to make her furious, Severus," Alastor said mockingly.

"I just want to be left alone," Severus replied sadly.

"But that won't happen. You can count yourself lucky that Albus has had so much work lately that he can't fuss about you as he'd like to. You know he would be much more manipulative than my dear Poppy or Minerva here. Oh, and that reminds me, Albus sends his greetings and asked me to inform you that he will come by later to check on you."

"Fantastic," Severus said sarcastically. Alastor was right. It was good that Albus wasn't around. If Albus thought Severus needed sleep, he would just put a sleeping spell on him. No arguing or discussion, just the spell. Or if he thought he should eat, then he would make him eat. Again, without discussing it. *Poppy at least lets me argue about it, so I have the impression that I have a choice in the matter. Not that it ever made any difference, but at least I can voice my objections. And with Minerva, it...* suddenly the image of him kissing Minerva came into his mind, and he looked at her. He felt his cheeks grow hot.

Minerva observed him closely and smiled. "I have to leave for a few hours to check on my Gryffindors and do some work, Severus." She again cupped one of his cheeks and affectionately stroked it. Again, he lost himself in her beautiful eyes, but this time it wasn't he who placed their mouths together, but Minerva. It was overwhelming, and he closed his eyes to memorize it for eternity. She moved her face away a bit, smiled at him and stroked his cheek one last time. "Don't scare me again like that, Severus. Promise me!"

"Promise," Severus said hoarsely.

"I will be back as soon as possible. And I will check on your Slytherins as well." After saying this, she waved good-bye to Alastor and Poppy and left.

When he recovered from the shock, he looked over to Alastor and Poppy. Alastor cocked the eyebrow of his healthy eye, and Poppy looked stunned. "Care to explain, Casanova?" Alastor asked mockingly.

Severus blushed deeply and then turned around to face the wall opposite them.

Alastor's deep and loud laugh could surely be heard far away from the hospital wing. "Oh my, Severus, seeing you blush is really something." He patted Severus' shoulder. "Well done, my boy."

Then he looked at Poppy, gave her a kiss and said, "I'll come back this evening, darling. Don't hex him. Just remember it is Severus."

When Alastor had left the Hospital Wing, Poppy addressed Severus, "Don't think you can get around the afternoon snack by pouting. Turn onto your back." She softly pulled at his shoulder and was glad when he obeyed.

Just a moment later, he was sitting in front of his bed tray. Poppy placed the plate with some cookies and a glass of fresh milk on it. She gathered the potion against nausea and sat on Severus' bed to observe his eating. "Tuck in, Severus."

Please review!

Chapter 8 – Poppy's thoughts

Chapter 8 of 13

Severus is overstressed and does not take care of himself, so Poppy Pomfrey and Minerva McGonagall have to.

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Chapter 8 – Poppy's thoughts

The afternoon snack was a delicious piece of apple pie. It was one of his favorite desserts, and therefore Severus enjoyed it very much.

Poppy silently sat at on a chair beside his bed and drank a cup of coffee. When he had finished his piece of pie, Severus leaned back and enjoyed the silence. He was glad that Poppy obviously did not want to discuss his kiss with Minerva. *Maybe she has already planned how to corner Minerva and have a chat between women about the subject*, Severus mused.

His assumptions were correct. Poppy was a little surprised by the events of the afternoon. Minerva had never said anything and they were very close friends. But when she thought back to when she had had her first date with Alastor, she had not spoken about it with Minerva. She had been so unsure about her feelings for him that she did not dare to tell anyone. And now she could not think about living without him. Yes, sometimes he really annoyed her, especially when he acted affectionately towards her in front of others. She was not used to being kissed in public. She was more conservative. With time, she had gotten used to the public displays of affection, but sometimes she still felt uneasy. And when he used it to manipulate her like he had this afternoon, she really was annoyed.

They often argued about Severus. 'He is an adult, Poppy, and you ought to remember that,' he often said. *But why should I treat him like an adult when he so often acts like a stubborn child? While I was checking on him when we brought him here, I could hardly breathe. I was so scared that this time he would not make it. When he usually comes back from a Death Eater meeting, I am prepared for what I might find while checking him. But yesterday was a shock. How was it possible for him to have worn himself out that much without us noticing? I have never been so worried about his condition after the spying was over. And now this, she thought sadly and drank her coffee. Every time he does something stupid like refusing to eat, I'm scared like hell. That's so unprofessional. To be honest, it was good that Alastor was there to calm me down. I fear I would have restrained Severus in my rage.*

She was so deep in thought that she did not notice Severus lean back and close his eyes when he had finished his meal.

Silently, she removed the tray and lowered the headboard so that Severus was prostrate. He did not open his eyes even as she placed a feather-light kiss on his forehead. "Why do you always have to scare me like this, Severus? Don't you know how worried I am? To me, you are like a son," she whispered to the sleeping man, not knowing that he had heard every word she said.

She did not notice the tear that ran over his cheek because she was already headed for her office. *I never knew that she was so worried. I thought she was just doing her job. Maybe there is really something I should take care of because so many people seem to be worried about me*, he mused while slowly drifting over to sleep.

"How is he, Poppy?" Severus could hear the voice of the headmaster through his sleepy, foggy mind.

"The Calming Draught I gave him in his afternoon juice should have worn off by now. His appetite has returned, and he did not complain about eating at all. I'm still very worried about his weakness. He still has to catch up on his rest, and I will not let him leave the hospital wing until he gains at least five more kilos of weight. Also, he still needs pain killers for his headache. I changed the potion so that we can avoid addiction. His normal pain killers no longer worked for him because his body was too used to them already. He has been mixing a lot of potions lately. Most of his symptoms are side effects of these potions or his body's signals that it needs more. The side effects should wear off in a few days, and I hope that the addiction to painkillers is not so strong that these new potions will be unable to overlay the withdrawals. He may not need the painkillers after a few days, but I fear that all our effort here will be useless when he returns to his chambers," Poppy reported sadly.

Severus could hear the rustling of fabric. Perhaps the headmaster had moved nearer to Poppy to comfort her.

"Poppy, we can only do our best to try to convince Severus to take better care for himself. We will keep a closer eye on him, but he is an adult. Let him make his own decisions even when we don't like them," Albus said calmly.

"Oh, Albus! It's so hard! I can't just stand there and ignore it. He doesn't even realize how close he was to dying!" Now she was sobbing.

"Poppy, calm down! You don't want Severus to see you like this. He is alive, and we will do all that we can to make sure that he realizes how important he is to us and that he takes better care of himself from now on." Again, the sound of fabric rubbing on fabric was heard as Albus embraced Poppy.

"Alastor is waiting for Charlie in the Potions classroom. Maybe you should join him and take a break from your duties here," Albus suggested.

"But Severus has to eat and get his potions and – "

"And I'm perfectly capable of monitoring all of that," Albus interrupted her.

Poppy sighed. "Okay, I really would like to see Alastor and speak with him. And I also would like to see Charlie again. I haven't seen him for years."

"Just show me which potions he should take and then make haste to the dungeons."

Severus heard them move away from his bed. His mind was reeling. Again, they were talking about him as if they had feared that he might not have made it. He was not feeling well, but until he'd come to the infirmary, he could do almost everything. Only after he had spent a night in the hospital wing had he started to feel very weak and sleepy. He could not even make it to the toilet!

And what was this about Charlie? *Meeting him in the dungeons? What is he doing in the dungeons? MY DUNGEONS!* Severus thought.

He opened his eyes just as the door to the infirmary was closed, and Albus came over to his bed.

Chapter 9 – Albus' visit

Chapter 9 of 13

Severus is overstressed and does not take care of himself, so Poppy Pomfrey and Minerva McGonagall have to.

I'm not a native speaker of English!

Thanks a lot to my beta-readers, saiyanzizardgurl and AmyLouise, for correcting my mistakes!

Chapter 9 Albus' visit

"Awake, my boy?" Albus asked cheerfully. His eyes were twinkling as always.

"What was that about Mr. Weasley? What is he doing in my dungeons, Albus?" Severus asked feverishly.

Albus grinned as he placed potion vials on the side table. "Eavesdropping while feigning sleep, Severus? How very Slytherin." He opened the table's drawer. He took out the thermometer and turned to face Severus, who was now blushing because he realized that he had just admitted to hearing the conversation between Albus and Poppy.

"Open up, child," Albus ordered while moving the thermometer towards Severus' mouth.

"I'm no chi hmpf!" The thermometer was placed in his mouth before he could finish his sentence.

"For me, you always will be, so get used to it, *child* ." Albus' eyes were twinkling madly, and he grinned from one ear to the other.

Severus rolled his eyes and then waited for the thermometer to beep. Albus, meanwhile, was moving the headboard so that Severus could sit upright.

When the thermometer beeped, Albus took it out and read the result. "Still a little high, but you seem to be getting better, Severus." When he had noted the result on a clipboard on the night table, he turned back to Severus.

"What do you think about a little journey to the toilet, with help this time?" Albus asked, grinning.

Severus looked around for Poppy, even though he knew she was not there.

Albus chuckled and said, "Poppy gave her okay. You need to see if your legs will support you."

"Okay." With that, Severus swung his legs over the side of the bed. Before he had the chance to stand, Albus laid a hand on his chest.

"First, slippers and a bathrobe. We don't want you to be cold."

When both articles of clothing were on, Albus helped Severus to stand up. He only had to support Severus lightly under one arm.

Albus opened the bathroom door. When Albus did not make a move to let go of his arm, Severus paused in the doorway and looked irritably at Albus.

"What? Do you think I'll let you go in there alone?" Albus asked, acting surprised.

"But, Albus you cannot I mean you " Severus stuttered, shocked.

"I don't think you have anything I haven't seen before, Severus. And I for one won't risk you hurting yourself if you fall while you are fumbling with your nightshirt alone in there."

"I can manage it alone, Albus!" Severus argued.

"It's simple, Severus. We can go in there together, or we can both go back to your bed and I can relieve you with magic. Which would you prefer?"

"The toilet," Severus mumbled and went into the bathroom.

They went over to the toilet, and when Albus, again, did not make a move to give Severus some privacy, he glared at him. "Couldn't you at least step back a little?"

"And risk your legs giving in and you hitting your head on the toilet bowl? Definitely not, Severus." With that, he reached down for the hem of Severus' nightshirt and lifted it.

"Albus!" Severus shouted, shocked. "I can do this alone."

But the abrupt movement made him feel dizzy, and he swayed a little.

"Oh, yes, I can see that," Albus stated as he strengthened his grip under Severus's arm. He shifted Severus' body so that he leaned against his chest. "I'll hold the nightshirt, and you do the rest. And stop arguing or you won't even manage to relieve yourself before your legs give in."

Red as a tomato, Severus reached for the waistband of his boxer shorts and lowered them. He shifted so that he leaned a little bit in the direction of the toilet and waited for the relief to come. But nothing happened.

"I cannot do this, Albus!" Severus could feel his cheeks burning in embarrassment. *This is ridiculous.*

"Severus, you just have to relax. You are thinking too much. There is nothing to be embarrassed about." Albus tried to make the situation easier for Severus. He would really like to give Severus more privacy, but he was already leaning against him so heavily and needed so much support that he did not dare to leave him alone.

And then, it finally worked. Severus was relieved beyond imagination. The relieving spells were horrible, and he never had the feeling of being completely empty. Doing it on his own felt like heaven. Even the fact that Albus was standing beside him did not decrease the feeling of relief.

When everything was safely tucked back in, Albus flushed the toilet, never loosening his grip on Severus.

As he stood in front of the sink and washed his hands, Severus noticed his mirror image *look horrible. No wonder they are all fussing over me* And then his face seemed to swim in the mirror.

"Severus? Are you okay? Severus!" He could hardly hear Albus. His legs gave way, and he felt strong arms catch him.

"*Mobilicorpus*," Albus whispered and carried Severus to his bed.

Albus was not used to caring for patients, and so he needed much more time to tuck Severus in than Poppy would have.

A vial was placed on Severus' lips, and he swallowed without thinking about it. "That's a good boy. You will feel better soon."

The strengthening potion kicked in fast. The dizziness stopped, and Severus felt refreshed and strong. After a few seconds, he could not even believe that he had just suffered a bout of weakness.

"Better?" Albus asked with a friendly smile on his face.

"Much better. I assume Poppy already knew that this would happen?"

"No, she hoped you would make it without a breakdown, but perhaps she did not account for the time lost in your struggle with me," Albus said, a little amused, as he placed the prop-up table in front of Severus. "She left the potion for any emergency."

Albus placed a plate with fresh bread, some cheese, and salad in front of him.

"And for dessert, we have vanilla pudding with cherries," Albus said joyfully as he placed a small bowl on the table.

When he added a glass of pumpkin juice beside the plate, Severus eyed it closely. He remembered Poppy telling Albus that she had spiked his juice in the afternoon with a Calming Draught. Being drugged without his knowledge was something he really did not like. He sniffed at the juice, and this action did not go unnoticed by Albus.

"There is nothing in there except juice, Severus," Albus assured him. The headmaster then summoned a small table and a chair next to the bed. He sat down to a plate of fresh bread, cold cuts of meat and cheese, as well as a glass of butterbeer and, of course, a bowl of dessert.

"Hmmm, that looks delicious," Albus said dreamily as he sniffed at the scent of the fresh bread.

Severus also could not resist inhaling the wonderful smell. When Albus looked over to him, he had already started to eat. With a satisfied smile, Albus started eating as well.

Severus had eaten half of the meal when he remembered that he had not received an answer to his question about Charlie.

"So what was that about Mr. Weasley, Albus?"

"Charlie?" Albus was a little lost when Severus asked. "Oh right, I wanted to speak with you about the arrangements we have made."

"Arrangements? Why do I have the feeling that I am not going to like it at all?"

"Severus, I will explain everything, but you still have to continue eating," Albus said.

Albus waited until Severus started eating again before he went on. "We asked Charlie to take over your classes and help brew the potions for the hospital."

"Take over my classes?" All color drained from Severus' face and his meal was left untouched. He was shocked. *ve been sacked. They replaced me with a Weasley.* Panic was rising in Severus' chest.

"Just for the time it takes for you to recover, Severus. You always liked Charlie, if I remember correctly. He was very talented in Potions, and when he heard about your problems, he was more than willing to help out."

"What have you told him? You cannot go around telling anyone that I'm a cripple who is not allowed to make his own decisions." Severus was furious that more people knew about his condition.

"Calm down, Severus," Albus said with a stern voice. "First of all, I did not tell *anyone* about your condition, and second, you are no helpless cripple. You still can decide for yourself. If you tell me seriously that you want to leave the hospital wing and go on like you did before, I will let you leave. But that would also mean that you have to leave Hogwarts because we will not let you starve yourself and wait for the next breakdown, Severus. Our doors are always open to you whenever you decide to accept help. You can come back whenever you want. No matter when, we will be here to help you. But we won't close our eyes while you refuse to take care of yourself. Do I make myself clear?"

Albus had risen from his seat while talking to Severus. His voice had become more and more severe. He was now leaning slightly over Severus' bed, supporting his weight on both of his hands on the bed near Severus' hip. Severus was shocked. Normally, Albus was the calmest person he knew, and now he was almost shouting at him.

When no reply came, Albus reiterated in the same stern voice, "I asked you a question, Severus. You are no cripple and you still have a choice in the matter. So what is your decision?"

Severus could not look at Albus any longer. The headmaster's eyes were not twinkling, and that meant he was being serious. Of course he did not want to leave the castle! It was his home, and the people here were his family. He thought about what Poppy had whispered about him being like a son to her, and he thought about Minerva, who said she was so scared about his condition.

"I want to stay," he said, still not daring to look the headmaster in the eye.

He felt a hand on his chin, and his head was moved to face the now twinkling eyes of Albus Dumbledore. "I am very happy about your decision," Albus said, smiling.

"Charlie will take over your Potions classes until Poppy gives her okay for you to teach again. Then it is your decision whether or not you wish to let Charlie teach the lower grades so that you can concentrate on the advanced students and your duties for the Ministry. He could also brew for the hospital wing and help you with the Ministry potions if you so desire, but that is completely your decision, and you should discuss the matter with Charlie. But I want you to think hard about it. You cannot work as much as you have been lately. I have already spoken with the Ministry officials and informed them that you will be unable to fulfill your duties for a few weeks. They understand. You have too many duties with your work as Slytherin Head of House, Potions Master, primary brewer for the hospital wing, and Ministry potions supplier. You really should hand over some of your duties to Charlie. I am sure that you will find a way when you discuss this with him."

"I will, I promise. But when can I leave the hospital, Albus? I do not want to stay here," Severus said, hopeful that Albus would give in and let him recover in his private chambers.

"When Poppy says you can leave, Severus. And that will be when your condition improves and you convince her that you will take care of yourself. So I would suggest you do exactly what she tells you, and we'll start by finishing supper, okay?" Albus cocked an eyebrow in question.

"Okay, but I fear I could never satisfy Poppy," Severus said in resignation.

"Oh, you can, my boy, and you know it!" Albus said as he reclaimed his place at his small table.

And with that they silently finished their meal.

Chapter 10 – Addicted

Severus is overstressed and does not take care of himself, so Poppy Pomfrey and Minerva McGonagall have to.

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Chapter 10 - Addicted

Severus ate everything that was on his plate and leaned back to enjoy the heavy feeling in his stomach *can't remember feeling this good in a long time*, he thought happily.

Albus had not yet finished his supper, and so Severus just pushed the table a little bit further away from himself to sit more comfortably. When Albus saw Severus' struggle with the table, he swallowed, cleaned his hands with his napkin, and reached for his wand. "Wait, before you spoil your bedclothes," he ordered and then removed the dishes with a wave of his wand. He stood up and put away the now-empty table. He went over to the nightstand and moved his glasses further up his nose so that he could read the labels of the vials.

"Okay, Poppy said that you should take these two after you ate." He handed the first one to Severus.

"Why do I have to take them? I feel good, Albus! Better than I have felt for a long time."

"The Strengthening Potion makes you feel that way, Severus. This one will give support to your body so that it can assimilate the food you ate as best as possible. You still need to gain more weight."

Severus grimaced, sniffed at the vial, and drank it reluctantly. When he handed the empty vial to Albus, he motioned with his head to the other still in Albus' hand and asked, "And this one?"

"This one is a painkiller." Albus placed the vial in Severus' hand.

Severus eyed it closely. "This isn't one of mine. And I don't feel any pain." With that, he handed the vial back to Albus.

But Albus refused to take it back. "Severus, Poppy said you should take it. You will be in pain later if you don't, and she wanted you to be without pain for a few days. You have taken too much of your own painkillers, and your body is already showing some signs of addiction. When you feel pain just so that you can take another dose of the painkiller, you are addicted. Your body tricks you into getting what it wants, or better said, needs. This potion will stop your body's feigned pain reactions as long as it still wants the pain potions you are addicted to."

"I'm not addicted to anything," Severus said angrily. "Why didn't Poppy say anything to me before? I won't take it!" He moved to place the vial on the night table, but Albus grabbed his hand before he could.

"Severus, I thought we both agreed that you would let us help you. If Poppy says this is necessary, then it is," he said sternly.

They were both so deep in discussion that they didn't notice Poppy's and Alastor's arrival. "What is going on here?" Poppy asked in her no-nonsense voice as she approached the bed.

Albus sighed in frustration. He had hoped to finish this discussion without Poppy's interfering. It was not good that so many people were telling Severus what to do. Severus always felt cornered and despaired when he was outnumbered, but now that Poppy was present, Albus had no choice but to hand the task over to her. "We just had a little discussion about the pain killer." He took the vial out of Severus' hand and gave it to Poppy. Then he moved beside Alastor at the foot of the bed to observe.

Severus had gone quiet and was scowling at Poppy.

"So what is the problem with the potion, Severus?" Poppy asked as she went over to the nightstand to check the records on Severus' clipboard.

"I do not see a need for me to have to take the potion at all. I am not in pain." He shifted in his bed further away from her and positioned himself so that he had a good look at Poppy. *She will not trick me with anything this time*, he thought, a little worried that Poppy would force him one way or the other to take the potion.

Poppy was calm as she approached him and placed a hand on his forehead to feel his temperature. *I will not lose my temper again*, she told herself.

"Severus, the headaches you've had lately were just your body's reaction to a lack of your pain killers. You are addicted to them."

Severus was already opening his mouth to protest, but Poppy stopped him by laying a calming hand on his arm. "No, Severus, don't start arguing with me about it. I performed several diagnostic spells on you, all with the same result. Your headaches are symptoms of the addiction. I have asked for special pain killers from St. Mungo's which will help to overcome the addiction. And that's exactly what's in this vial." She opened the vial and offered it to Severus.

"I would like to speak with you alone." He angrily looked in Alastor's and Albus' direction. *Why does there always have to be others around when she tells me embarrassing things like this? It's hard enough to be scowled at by Poppy, but having an audience while she tells me this is really embarrassing*, he thought sadly.

"Of course, Severus." Poppy said and started to close the curtains around the bed.

Albus turned to Alastor and said, "Maybe we could go to my office and you can tell me the sleeping arrangements you have made up for Charlie."

Poppy didn't even wait for Alastor's response before she closed the curtain in front of the two men's noses.

Severus could hear their footsteps and then the closing of the door. Poppy sat on the bed and looked at him while he stared at the vial and then at Poppy again. "Are you sure about this?" he asked, still hoping she would take her assumption back.

"Yes, Severus, I'm sure. I even contacted a specialist at St. Mungo's, and he came to the same conclusion. From now on, you should not take your self-brewed pain potions. Your body will start to show the same symptoms again. The potion from St. Mungo's works well; it is specially-brewed for addicted patients, and you cannot get addicted to it."

Severus was staring at the vial the whole time Poppy spoke to him. *Maybe she is right*, he thought and then grabbed the vial and gulped it down.

Poppy smiled at him. "I would never give you something that was not necessary, Severus. I want you to heal as fast as possible." She took the empty vial from him, but still remained sitting on the bed. "How do you feel, Severus?" she asked softly.

"Good. Better than I have felt in years. You don't have to worry any longer. I understand what you want from me, and I will take better care from now on," he said while

staring at the ceiling.

"I really hope so, Severus," she said while softly stroking his cheek.

The moment she wanted to draw her hand back, he caught her wrist. "I – I am very grateful for everything you have done for me," he said. "But it's not easy for me to lie here and just accept whatever you do to me. I hate not having the control and feeling helpless. Still, I want to leave the hospital wing as soon as possible. It has nothing to do with you; don't take it personally. I just hate being so vulnerable. Please understand, Poppy." He realized that he was still holding her wrist and let go.

She stroked her hand again over his forehead and cheek and said, "I understand, Severus. But you also have to understand that I cannot let you leave the hospital wing before you have recovered enough to take care of yourself. Sometimes people need others to show them what is best, especially a stubborn man like you." She smiled at him and stood up. "Minerva will arrive soon. The Strengthening Potion will last for another two hours. She said she will bring some books and magazines for you. But no wandering out of bed or anything else that will wear you out too much." She grinned and winked.

"Very funny, Poppy." He rolled his eyes and started to blush again.

Chapter 11 – Severus Screws It Up

Chapter 11 of 13

Severus is overstressed and does not take care of himself, so Poppy Pomfrey and Minerva McGonagall have to.

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Chapter 11 - Severus Screws It Up

Only a few minutes had gone by when Minerva arrived. Poppy opened the curtains before she left for her office. Minerva was balancing a stack of books and magazines in her arms. "Merlin, what did you do to Irma that made her load me with this bunch when I asked her for something for you to read in the hospital?" She placed the pile unceremoniously on the bed and sighed in relief.

"Maybe she wants me to stay here for a month," Severus answered grouchy while he scowled at the pile of books and magazines on his bed.

His surly stare was interrupted by Minerva placing a quick kiss on his lips. "So how do you feel?" She sat on the bed and looked hopefully at Severus.

He tried to recover from the shock he got from her kiss. He could not believe that she really wanted him. *I would have pretended that nothing happened, to give her the opportunity to back out of it. But she is acting as if she really wants me and that she is happy about what happened,* Severus mused.

"Are you still with me, Severus?" she asked, amused when she did not get an answer.

Severus shook his head to clear it and stopped gaping at Minerva. "I'm fine."

Minerva's hand reached for his forehead to feel his temperature, but he jerked his head away. "Minerva," he said, annoyed. "You are not my nurse. And if you have to know, Albus says my temperature is already going down."

"Oh, so Albus is your nurse and is allowed to feel your forehead?" she said, grinning.

"Very funny, Minerva!" he said and rolled his eyes.

"It's good that you feel better. Christmas is in four days, and I hope Poppy will let you attend the Christmas feast in the Great Hall," Minerva explained.

Damn, I totally forgot about Christmas. I don't have anything for Minerva and Poppy. He only had a present for Albus. It was the ugliest pair of socks he could find in Hogsmeade. It was a running joke between him and Albus during his first Christmas at Hogwarts as a teacher, Albus had given him a pair of green woollen socks with a pattern of red snakes that could slither across the fabric. From that year on, Severus made a point of giving Albus a pair of the ugliest socks he could find each Christmas.

Every year it was the same. Albus would make a big fuss about the gift and say how very much he liked it. And then, he would put them on immediately in front of the whole Hogwarts staff. "I hope you still enjoy your pair of Slytherin socks, Severus. Do they keep your feet warm in your cold dungeons?" Albus would ask mockingly.

Severus would then raise one of his eyebrow and reply, "Do you really want an answer to that, old man?"

"Of course I want an answer," Albus would reply cheekily.

"But you won't get one." Then Severus would stand up and leave the Christmas feast.

Later, when he was ready to go to bed in the cold dungeons, he would fish deep in his sock drawer for the green woollen socks. He would put them on, look at them closely, and say, "Happy Christmas, Albus." They kept his feet warm over the night. The next morning, he would cast a cleaning spell on them and place them as far back in the drawer as possible. "Until next Christmas."

He was deep in thought, reflecting on the previous Christmas, as Minerva arranged the pile of books on his bed. Coming out of his reverie, he watched Minerva silently. *What would she like for Christmas? Will she be disappointed that I don't have something for her? Oh, Merlin, what if she has something for me? How embarrassing would it be if she gave me a present, and I don't have one for her!*

"Everything okay, Severus? You seem to be lost in your thoughts," Minerva said, worried. The books and magazines were now nicely arranged in little stacks at the end of the bed.

"No, no. Everything is fine," Severus said, pushing away his thoughts. "Have you spoken with Mr. Weasley yet?" he asked Minerva.

"Yes, I met him while he was moving into the Astronomy Tower. He didn't want to live in the dungeons."

"Thank Merlin for that. A Gryffindor in the dungeons would be unbearable," Severus said theatrically.

"I can't blame him. It's cold and dark down there. I've never understood why you like it so much."

"Maybe because I'm also cold and dark," Severus said cynically.

"Don't be stupid, Severus. You are not cold and dark. Charlie wanted to visit you, but we told him he should wait until tomorrow. He'll be coming after breakfast."

Satisfied with her arrangement of the books and magazines, she now gave her full attention to Severus. When she took his hand in hers, he was startled.

He sighed, hoping that this would give him more strength to say what he wanted to, now. "Maybe we should talk about this, Minerva." He lifted the hand that she was holding.

Minerva was confused by Severus' sad face. "What do you mean? What is there to talk about?"

"Minerva, you cannot *really* want this. What do I have to offer you? We should end this before it goes too far. If it's just out of pity, then..." He could not even finish his sentence because Minerva jerked her hand out of Severus' grasp.

"End it before it goes too far? *Pity*?" She stood up from the bed and looked at Severus in shock. "How can you say things like that, Severus?" Tears were running down her cheeks.

That was not the reaction he had expected, and he immediately regretted his words. But it was too late; he could see it in her eyes. "Minerva, I "

"No, Severus, I don't want to talk with you right now. I'm tired and much too hurt, and I fear I will say something I would regret later. It's better if I leave now."

"No, Minerva, please, I'm sorry!" he shouted desperately after Minerva, who was already leaving the hospital wing.

"Damn! You are such an *idiot*! Why do you always have to screw things up?" he growled angrily to himself, hitting the back of his head on the headboard and punching his fists into the mattress.

Poppy, alarmed by the noises, entered the hospital wing the moment Minerva stormed out of it. She immediately made her way to Severus' bed and heard him cursing and shouting at himself. When she saw him hitting his head and pulling violently at his hair, she quickened her pace to reach him faster.

"Stop, Severus!" She lowered the headboard and restrained his hands. When he became aware of Poppy's presence, he stopped and looked at her. "Severus, whatever happened right now, you have to calm down. The potions accelerate your heartbeat when you are under stress. Please breathe slowly."

Severus screwed up his eyes desperately. *She will never speak to me again. Nothing ever works in my life like it should. Why can't I just be normal?* He felt the familiar tingle of a diagnostic spell being placed on him.

Poppy sighed over the results of the diagnostic spell. Severus' heartbeat was much too high, and he seemed to have worked himself into a depression. She placed her right hand on his chest and let calming, healing magic flow into him. "Calm down," she said softly. "Look at me, Severus," she ordered in a gentle but firm voice, and he responded immediately. Satisfied by his reaction, she smiled at him, never stopping the warm flow of magic into his chest. "Whatever happened, Severus, you can handle it. You are not alone, and we can help you with whatever problem you have with Minerva. And I'm sure Minerva will come back when she has cooled off, and you can both discuss everything calmly."

Poppy's gentle voice and the ongoing flow of warm and calming magic made Severus feel drowsy.

Satisfied to see his eyes becoming heavy and his heartbeat slowing down, she eased the magic flow. "That's my boy."

"I screwed up. She will never speak to me again," he said in a hoarse voice.

Poppy increased the flow for a moment. "Not now, Severus. We can talk about it tomorrow. You have to rest and sleep first." She placed a hand on his forehead and whispered a sleeping spell.

Severus' already heavy eyelids closed completely, and his whole body fell limp. Another diagnostic spell, and Poppy tucked Severus in. *I have to speak with Minerva about what just happened.* She made her way to the fireplace to call for help.

Only a minute later, Alastor was standing in the infirmary. "What's up, Poppy?" he asked, worried.

"I don't know. I came in when Minerva was storming out of the wing, and Severus was cursing and trying to hurt himself. I calmed him down and placed a sleeping spell on him, but he was very agitated. I really want to speak with Minerva and find out what happened before Severus wakes again."

"Maybe it's something personal between the two, Poppy," Alastor suggested.

"Don't try to stop me from speaking to her. She is my best friend, and Severus is my patient. You should have seen him," Poppy hissed angrily.

"Yes, he is your patient, Poppy, but he's not your son. I won't stop you from speaking with Minerva, but you should speak with her like a friend, not a furious mother. Whatever problem the two have, they have to work it out themselves. If you need to know what the problem is in order to figure out the right medical treatment for him when he wakes up, then you should speak with her. Otherwise, you should let them work it out alone, Poppy," he said sternly. It was very seldom that he spoke to Poppy like this. Normally, she was the voice of reason, and he was on the receiving end of a scolding. But he knew how Poppy might react when it came to Severus' well-being and that she sometimes crossed the border of professionalism when it came to him.

Poppy calmed herself down. "I know you're right. But I have to speak with Minerva. As a friend. I'll remember that." She shyly smiled at him in hope that he would become his cheerful and friendly self again. It worked, and he embraced her and kissed her forehead.

"I'll stay and watch him," Alastor said as Poppy let go of him.

"Call me if he wakes up, but he should sleep until tomorrow." She gave him a short kiss and left to meet Minerva.

Chapter 12 - The Panic Attack

Chapter 12 of 13

Severus is overstressed and does not take care of himself, so Poppy Pomfrey and Minerva McGonagall have to.

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Chapter 12 - The Panic Attack

When he woke up in the morning, the hospital wing was empty. He only needed a short time to remember the events of the last evening. Sadly, he closed his eyes. *Why do I always have to screw things up?* He had never felt like this. His heart hurt. *I always thought people were overreacting when they said that it was physically painful to miss a person.* But now he felt the same way. He wanted to speak with Minerva and explain that he did not mean what he had said. He wanted to make everything okay again. *But I am imprisoned here and cannot see her unless she comes here, which is unlikely.* He banged the back of his head against the headboard. *It's not fair. She won't come here again, and I cannot go to her.* He looked around the hospital wing and towards Poppy's office door. *Maybe she hasn't put an alarm on the bed. At least I could try. I feel well, and I think I can make it to Minerva's office,* he thought, already dangling his legs over the side of the bed. He took another glance towards the office door, and when it remained closed, he jumped from the bed. Nothing happened. He sighed in relief. He looked down at himself and realized that he could not go through the castle barefoot and in a nightshirt. He remembered the bath robe Albus had let him wear and looked at the foot of his bed. *There it is. I hope no one will see me wearing this, but I must speak with Minerva.* Again his gaze fell on his bare feet. *Where are those damn slippers?* He bent down to look for them under the bed.

"Can we help you with something, Severus?"

He did not have to turn around to know who it was. The stern voice could only belong to Poppy. He closed his eyes in despair and hoped he could find a good excuse for being out of bed, but he knew that Poppy would not accept any excuse. *Did she say we?* Severus turned abruptly, suddenly felt dizzy, and had to support himself with his hands and backside on the bed's edge.

Poppy was standing, with her arms crossed, only a few meters away, and she was glaring at him. "So? I'm waiting for an answer, Severus," she said, growling, and raising her eyebrow in question.

Next to her was Albus with a mad twinkling in his eyes. He was trying hard not to grin at the sight of the school's most feared teacher looking terrified by the school Mediwitch.

"I just I just I just" Severus started to stutter and frantically looked around the room to find an excuse. When his glance fell on the bathroom door, he said, "I just wanted to go to the toilet, Poppy." He tried to use his innocent school boy voice to convince Poppy, but it did not seem to work.

"If you wanted to go to the toilet, you just had to call for me, Severus. You have been here long enough to know that. Don't think I will buy that excuse for one minute," she said dangerously as she moved in Severus' direction.

He gulped and jumped on the bed again. When she reached him, he tried to back away further.

"Hold still, Severus," she commanded sternly as she removed his bath robe. "Under the covers," was the next command, he followed without thinking about it. Poppy propped the headboard up, so that Severus could sit.

Meanwhile, Albus had moved to the end of the bed and watched the scene in front of him curiously.

"So where did you want to go, Severus?" Poppy asked while checking her patient with a diagnostic spell. "And don't even think about lying to me again," she added in a no-nonsense voice.

"Minerva," he whispered, looking down at his hands.

"What was that? I didn't catch it." Poppy eyed him closely.

"I said I wanted to go to Minerva," Severus spat angrily at Poppy. "Satisfied?"

"Don't speak to me in that tone, Severus. There is a reason that you aren't allowed to leave bed. If you want to be released as soon as possible, then you will do well to remember my rules."

"I'm feeling well, Poppy. And I really need to speak with Minerva," he tried to argue with her.

"I'm sure you want to speak with Minerva. And she wants to speak with you as well. She will visit you in two hours, and then you can clear things up with her. And as for you feeling so well, Severus, that is, again, because of the Strengthening Potion I gave you and not because you are better," she scolded him.

"She's coming?" Severus asked surprised.

"Of course she is. Minerva isn't a woman to run away from problems," Poppy explained.

"And before she comes," the calm and deep voice of Albus stated, "I would like to speak with Severus, Poppy." Albus had moved beside Poppy and laid a hand on her shoulder to get her attention.

"Of course, Albus." She smiled at him. With one last warning glance to Severus, she left for her office.

Albus sat down on Severus' bed and watched him closely. Severus became nervous. *Why is he looking at me like that? What does he want to speak with me about?* He looked at Albus, unsure.

"I would like to talk about your conflict with Minerva," he said as if he could read Severus' thoughts.

"It's personal," Severus said, looking shamefully at his hands.

"Maybe it is, but Minerva came crying into my office yesterday, and what she told me unsettled me a lot," he said calmly.

Glad that the tone the headmaster was using was friendly, he looked up and met Albus' concerned eyes. "She came to you?" he asked in hope that Albus would give more

information about what Minerva had said to him about their argument.

"She was desperate, Severus, and very hurt about what you said. Did you really mean it?"

"I don't even remember exactly what I said. And I still think it's private between Minerva and myself."

"I understand, Severus. I won't force you to talk about your argument with Minerva, but I do want to know why you think that someone could only love you out of pity." This time, his voice was more serious.

"It's private, Albus, and I don't want to speak with you about it." Severus turned around so that he faced the wall, his back to Albus.

Albus sighed, laid a hand on Severus' shoulder, and tried to turn him around again. Severus felt Albus' hand, but resisted vehemently. *It's embarrassing enough that he and Poppy know about what I said, but I definitely do not want to talk about it with him*, he thought bitterly.

"Severus, I will not leave," Albus said.

"I don't want to talk about it. You said I could make my own decisions, and my decision is that I don't want to," Severus said angrily as he turned around to face Albus again.

"That's right, my boy, but I fear you have to sort things out before you speak with Minerva, and I think I'm a good person to help you with this. And I'm available at the moment," he said calmly to Severus. "Or if you'd prefer someone else, I could call Alastor to speak with you if you want."

"No!" Severus said quickly. *Not Alastor, Poppy would pry every single word I said out of him later. And then I would get another scolding. Maybe it wouldn't do any harm to speak with Albus. He at least won't share my thoughts with someone else*, Severus reasoned with himself. He sighed in resignation and said, "Fine."

"Okay, then. Tell me why you think Minerva loves you out of pity."

"I didn't say that she loves me out of pity, I merely mentioned the possibility. I don't even know if Minerva loves me at all, Albus," Severus said, rolling his eyes.

"Judging by the state you brought her to by just mentioning the possibility, she must really love you, Severus. She was crying when she came to me and was worried that you dumped her because of the wrong assumption. She didn't know how to speak with you because she was so hurt that you pushed her away as if the relationship wouldn't mean anything to you. I told her that she must have been mistaken, and that she needed to talk with you. And I really hope that you will persuade her that she was wrong."

"But Albus, she is better off without me. What can I offer her? I'm ugly, I'm poor, nobody likes me ..."

"Stop, Severus," Albus interrupted him. "I don't want to hear things like that from you. Minerva loves you, and she will have her reasons for it. It is her responsibility to tell you about them and not mine. But I know that many people love you and care for you."

Severus snorted in response.

"For example, I know that Poppy loves you, Severus. It isn't just her duties as the school nurse that causes her to react so protectively towards you. She argued for quite some time with me about talking with you about your problem with Minerva, but I convinced her that a discussion between men is what you need. And if Alastor did not care for you, Severus, then he would not hold Poppy back from cutting off more of your freedom while you are here in the hospital wing. Believe me, if it were not for his persuasive power, you would not be allowed to leave your bed to go to the toilet, and you would have been bound to your bed more than once."

Severus did not want to hear all this. He knew it was true, but it was hard for him to accept. Again, he turned his face away from Albus.

"No, Severus!" Albus reached for Severus' chin and forced him to face him again. "If you say you are unloved, then you have to listen to what I have to say about it."

Severus closed his eyes in resignation, but then opened them to look at Albus. *Merlin, let this be over soon.*

"I could list countless others, but I will only tell you about one more now. Me, Severus. I care a lot for you, and I love you like a son. I was glad when I heard the rumors about you and Minerva. When she came running into my office, my heart broke with hers. Severus, why do you push her away? She doesn't love you out of pity. I don't think that love out of pity is even possible. She has calmed down, and when she comes to speak with you, Severus, do not push her away out of fear. Discuss your fears with her, tell her what bothers you. Just be honest with her."

"But she deserves someone better than me, Albus. Don't you understand?" Severus had sat up in bed and leaned closer to Albus to emphasize his words. "Merlin, why does nobody understand me?" he growled, grabbing his hair in his hands and pulling violently.

Albus stayed calm, but grabbed Severus wrists firmly. "Enough, Severus," he ordered while increasing the pressure on Severus' wrists.

Severus had got himself all worked up. He did not even hear Albus' words anymore, only the small voices in his head that told him he was not good enough for Minerva and that nobody understood him. He tried to pull at his hair as hard as possible. He wanted it to hurt, he wanted to feel himself, and he wanted the voices in his head to shut up. Panic overcame him and he started to breathe rapidly.

"If you don't stop now, I'll have to call Poppy, Severus," Albus tried to calm him.

"I'm already here." Poppy had rushed into the room as fast as she could when the alarm went off in her office. She was worried about Severus' auto-aggression and had placed an alarm spell on him that informed her when he tried to hurt himself.

Severus still was not reacting to anything that went on around him. Only when the headboard was lowered, and he felt Poppy's hand on his chest did the voice in his mind start to fade.

Poppy sent warm healing energy into his chest. She had to stop the panic attack before Severus got lost in it. She realized that he did not react to anything that happened around him. She remembered that he often heard voices when he was hurt after a meeting with the Dark Lord. At that time, he had pulled at his hair in the same manner. She knew she had to try to bring Severus back to reality. He had to realize that the voices in his mind were not real, and that he was safe before she could give him a calming draught or make him sleep. "Severus, calm down," she said in a kind, but demanding voice. She let more relaxing magic flow through her fingers and into Severus.

The voice faded more, and he became aware of the calming magic, which was flowing through his chest. He could hear Poppy speaking to him and slowly loosened the grip on his hair. His fingers had been pressed so long in such a violent manner that now they hardly reacted the way he wanted them to. They hurt and would not unclasp. But the magic in his chest was overwhelming. He was exhausted. His breathing was still fast, and when he inhaled, it almost sounded like a sob. *What happened? One moment I was sitting with Albus and the next I was having a nervous breakdown.*

"Severus, open your eyes for me!" Poppy slowly stroked his face with her free hand to get his attention. She did not try to pry his hands away from his hair because she knew it would be pointless.

When he felt Poppy's hand on his face, he slowly opened his eyes. "That's my boy. Everything is okay, Severus. You are safe here. Did you hear the voices again?"

"I want them to stop," Severus said desperately.

"I know, Severus." She spoke calmly to him and still fed calming magic to him. "And they will. You can control them. Don't you remember what we spoke about when you heard them the last time? And it worked, didn't it?"

"But they are back, Poppy. They will never leave me alone," Severus said, still very agitated.

"Of course they will, Severus. You are safe here. You must stop hating yourself. That is the only way you can control them. They only have a chance to get in your head when you hate yourself for something. Listen to us, Severus, not to them." She lowered the calming energy flow when she felt him breathing more slowly.

"But they are right. I'm not good enough for her. Albus doesn't understand." He looked at Poppy, and as he spoke Albus' name, he remembered that the headmaster must still be in the room as well. "Albus?"

"I'm here, Severus. Everything is all right." Albus moved from his place at the end of the bed to Severus' side, opposite Poppy.

Severus shut his eyes and sadly said, "I'm sorry, Albus."

"There is nothing to be sorry about, my boy."

While Severus was distracted by Albus, Poppy used the time to grab his hands and soothe him with more magic. The hands relaxed, and she slowly moved them to Severus' sides. He seemed to not even notice. A flick with her wand, and she had a vial in her hand. She checked the label, and when she was sure it was the right vial, she opened it.

Now that he had come to his senses again, Severus felt embarrassed. *Why did I let those damn voices take over again? I had them under control for so long.*

"Severus, please open your mouth and drink this for me," Poppy said, supporting the back of his head with her hand.

Instinctively, he tried to move his head away from the vial, but Poppy had a good grip on his head. "No, Severus, please drink it. It will help you to relax and slow your heartbeat. You know you can trust me, don't you?"

Severus still tried to avoid the vial. He knew what was in it, and he did not want to drink it at all. *I will be drugged and vulnerable if I drink it. And I will behave like a crazy person. Who knows who will come in here and see me like that?*

"Severus, please don't fight me. I know you don't want to take it, but it will help you. It helped you before."

"No, please, Poppy. I'm calm again, and I don't hear the voices any longer," he pleaded, even though he knew that his heart was still beating fast, and that the moment he was left alone again it would be hard to fight the voices. He remembered that Minerva wanted to come by later, and he did not want to meet her drugged to the eyeballs. He could still remember the last time he'd had to take the potion. It was Alastor's turn to watch over him, and he was telling him his deepest secrets. Worst of all, he hugged him like a small child and told him that he really liked him and Poppy and that he wished they would never leave him alone again. *Alastor never mocked me about it, but every time I see him, I think about that day,* Severus thought, annoyed. They had all seen him under the drug. Albus, Alastor, and Poppy, but not Minerva, and he wanted to keep it that way.

"Severus, we both know that it's necessary. Your nerves have to calm down so that you are under control again. Right now, you are still on edge. You know it's useless to fight it."

He knew that tone. She was near the point where she would get the potion in him with or without his cooperation. He desperately looked for an escape route. "Albus, please don't let her force me to take it. You know what will happen. I need to speak with Minerva. I'm calm again, I promise."

"If we are already at the 'I promise' point, then you definitely need to take the potion, Severus. Poppy knows what's right for you." He grabbed Severus' hand to calm him.

"No, Albus, you promised. You said I could choose. I do not want to take the potion." Severus frantically tried to move his head away from the vial, but Poppy countered each of his movements. He could only hit the vial out of her hand, but one glance towards Poppy and he immediately dismissed the idea.

Albus sighed and said, "Severus, please "

"I have heard enough," Poppy said with a very stern voice. "You will listen now, Severus. I do not care what Albus has promised you. I am responsible for your health right now, and you need this potion. Deep down, you know it yourself. You know that you will feel much better after it. The effect only lingers for two or three hours. There are two choices for you. You can take this potion and one of us will watch over you, and in a few hours everything will be over. Or you can refuse to take the potion and I will call for a special healer from St. Mungo's, and we both know what he will suggest when he sees your condition. So it is the choice between the hospital wing and us, and St. Mungo's and their healers."

"But Minerva " Severus tried one last time to reason with Poppy.

"Minerva will understand when I speak with her, and she will come later when the potion will have lost its effect," Poppy said, still not loosening her grip on Severus' head.

"And we have already put back your appointment with Charlie," Albus stated, drawing Severus' eyes away from Poppy.

When Severus again tried to face the Mediwitch, she had moved the vial so close to his face that his lips touched it.

"Drink, Severus. I know you don't want a healer from St. Mungo's."

He again closed his eyes to find the strength to make his final decision. When he felt Poppy prop up his head more so that his lips were on the vial now completely, he gave in and drank.

Poppy sighed in relief, and Albus pressed his hand in comfort. Severus could feel the potion kick in immediately. His whole body relaxed, and he felt good, as if nothing could harm him. He felt the urge to smile, but his mind still tried to struggle against the potion, and he refused to let his face muscles relax.

"Don't fight it, Severus. It's okay to relax. It's okay to give in," Poppy said and stroked a calming hand over Severus' cheek.

That was the last push he needed to let the potion take over. His facial muscles relaxed like his whole body, and he felt a small smile creep up on his face.

Poppy sighed again. "I cannot sit with you the whole time; I have to meet Minerva and explain the situation to her. Who do you want to sit with you while I'm away, Severus?"

"Minerva? You are going to speak with Minerva? Isn't she wonderful?" Severus said rather serenely.

Poppy could not suppress a smile. "Yes, she is, Severus. I hope one day you will tell her that. But who do you want to sit with you?"

"Alastor, please. Will he come?" Severus asked pleadingly.

"I'm sure he will," she said calmly to Severus with one last stroke of his cheek. Then she looked at Albus. "Please stay with him so that I can flog Alastor."

"Of course, Poppy," he said while he smiled down at the drowsy man.

Chapter 13 – Happy End

Chapter 13 of 13

Severus is overstressed and does not take care of himself, so Poppy Pomfrey and Minerva McGonagall have to.
SS/MM AM/PP

Disclaimer: All recognizable characters belong to J.K. Rowling, and I am not earning anything by writing this story.

I'm not a native speaker of English!

Thanks a lot to my beta-readers, saiyanzwizardgurl and AmyLouise, for correcting my mistakes!

Chapter 13 Happy End

Severus was still smiling stupidly when Poppy came back with Alastor.

"All goofy already, Severus!" Alastor said while shoving a chair beside Severus' bed. After he transfigured it into a more comfortable armchair, he sat down on it.

Severus slowly faced Alastor and said dreamily, "Alastor? You came?"

"Of course I came, Severus. I can't let you stay alone with Albus and my wife, can I? They would cuddle you to death in your condition," Alastor said grumpily while he put his peg leg on a small pouffe he had summoned a minute before.

"What's wrong Alastor? Are you in pain?" Poppy was fussing over him.

"Merlin, wife, I'm not the one all goofy on drugs, so stop the fussing!" he said grumpily, but realizing the worried expression of his wife, he added, "It's just the weather, you know? I'll put it up, and that's it." He laid a calming hand over hers on his shoulder. "Didn't you want to speak with Minerva?"

"Minerva? My Minerva. Will she come?" A drowsy voice could be heard from the bed.

"Yes, she will come, but first you have to rest a while, Severus," Poppy said to the hopeful looking man in the bed.

She tightened her grip on Alastor's shoulder, leaned over to be near his ear and whispered, "Be careful what you say to him. You know what he's like in this condition, don't you?"

"Yes, Poppy, I can remember perfectly well. And you know that I can manage it," he said to her while patting the hand she still rested on his shoulder. "You don't have to worry. Just go and speak with" He paused and looked in Severus' direction "Yeah, just speak with her and then come back. I know it won't take you long and even if it does, I can handle it, and don't forget that he asked me to be here."

"He's right, Poppy. You don't have to worry," Albus said softly while laying a hand on her shoulder and gently pulling her away from Alastor. "I will accompany you on your way."

Minutes later, Alastor and Severus were alone.

I hope he will just drowse for a while, Alastor thought when he saw that Severus was looking at the ceiling.

But his hope was destroyed when Severus said, "Why doesn't Albus enchant the ceiling here, too? It would be so nice to see the stars here."

"Normally, the word nice isn't even in your vocabulary, Severus," Alastor said, grinning.

Severus turned on his side so that he could look at Alastor. "She is wonderful, isn't she?"

"Who?" Alastor asked, even when he already knew about whom he was speaking *Oh please, Severus, you don't want to speak with me about her. You will regret it when the potion loses its effect.* But he also knew that Poppy said that it was good for Severus to speak about whatever worries him. *He normally won't speak about it and that eats him up from the inside. Sooner or later that leads to situations like the panic attack today.*

"Minerva. She is so beautiful." Severus looked at Alastor with glassy eyes. "She kissed me. Me. Can you believe it? And it was so wonderful."

"I'm sure it was, my boy. You should tell her some time," Alastor said gently, and when he saw that Severus wanted to start again with his babbling, he stopped him by saying, "You should rest, Severus. Why don't you close your eyes and just sleep a while."

"Sleep? I'm not sleepy," Severus said and then looked thoughtfully at Alastor. "Does Poppy kiss you often?"

Alastor sighed and answered, "Sure she does. And I kiss her a lot, too. That's what couples do."

"Do you like it?" Severus asked with childlike curiosity.

"Severus, maybe we should speak about this later." *Or better never. Albus would be a much better conversation partner for Severus in this discussion than me.*

"You don't like it?" Severus looked shocked.

"Of course I do. I wouldn't do it if I didn't like it!" Remembering Poppy's advice that Severus should speak about what was bothering him, he added, "Didn't you like it when Minerva kissed you?"

"I liked it a lot. She is so good... so nice... so beautiful."

Alastor couldn't suppress a grin. *So that isn't the reason why he dumped her. He seems to be very much in love with her. So why is he torturing himself? But I can't speak with him about it directly. Only 'good' subjects are allowed while he is drugged.*

"Poppy is nice, too!" Severus babbled along. "But it's another nice. You know?"

"Yes, yes, I know, Severus."

The door of the hospital wing opened, and Poppy and Minerva came in.

"Oh, this woman and her damn plans," Alastor said angrily and heaved his peg leg from the pouffe. He reached them when they were only a few metres away from Severus' bed. "What do you think you are doing, wife?" he spat angrily at Poppy while he blocked their way to Severus. "You cannot let her speak with him in his condition."

"Alastor, don't be angry with Poppy!" Minerva said. "I convinced her to let me speak with Severus. I need to know why he wants to end our relationship."

"She is his Mediwitch and therefore should know better. Severus wouldn't want you to see him like this," he tried to reason with Minerva.

Poppy thought it would be the best to be as far away as possible from her furious husband and went to Severus. *The potion has been in his system long enough now that even if they did speak about a worrying subject, he could manage it.* To be honest Poppy feared that Severus would never tell Minerva his true feelings. After her conversation with Minerva, she was sure that this was the only way the two could speak about it openly. She would have never thought that Minerva would think for one minute that Severus would really want to end the relationship. *She seems to be so much in love that she can't think rationally at the moment. Who would have thought that the stern Minerva would feel that insecure about something Severus said. She should know that he just tries to run away.*

"How are you feeling, sweetheart?" she asked Severus and tried to distract him from the heated conversation between Minerva and Alastor by tucking him in again.

Severus forced himself to look at Poppy, but still eyed the scene between the other two out of the corner of his eye. "Fine! Not sleepy!"

"You don't have to sleep, Severus," she said and smiled at him. *So Alastor has tried to convince him to sleep, so he wouldn't have to speak with him.*

"Alastor mad at Minerva?" he asked, still not able to speak or think clearly because of the potion.

"No, he isn't. Don't worry." With that she looked a little worriedly at the other two.

Alastor meanwhile tried to convince Minerva to come back later. "Minerva, what if he is so embarrassed about what he said to you while under the drug that he won't speak with you after it? Do you want to risk this?"

"Poppy says the first thirty minutes are the critical ones. They are over already. You know him, he won't tell me the truth when I speak with him later. Now is my only chance to speak with him and hear what he really thinks. Isn't that the purpose of the whole drug? I need to speak with him, Alastor. I have to know if he really wants to end it all or if he's just trying to push me away because he is scared about it all, like Poppy says." She tried desperately to convince Alastor.

"Minerva? Come to speak with me?" The drowsy voice of Severus could be heard from the bed.

Alastor sighed in despair because he knew that he had lost the battle. *At least I tried, Severus.*

"Severus, lie down again," Poppy said sternly, already struggling with him.

The moment Alastor had turned to see what happened in the bed, Minerva used her chance and strode over to Severus.

"Yes, I'm here to see you, Severus," she said calmly to him and helped Poppy to manoeuvre him into a lying position.

"Not mad at me?" he asked worriedly and looked at her with frightened eyes.

She sighed and softly said, "No, Severus, I'm not mad. I love you." She tenderly stroked his cheek and felt the wizard relax under her ministrations.

"Love you, too," he mumbled sleepily and then sighed as if a heavy weight had been lifted from his chest. He smiled satisfied, relaxed under Minerva's ministrations and fell asleep.

"So much for having a conversation," Minerva said, chuckling.

"It seems that the situation was bothering him a lot. You just gave him some peace, Min," Poppy said. "It's good for him to sleep, now. You can speak with him later."

"I'll stay if it is okay with you two." She looked from Poppy to Alastor, who was still looking a little angry with them.

"Of course it is," Poppy replied and then turned to Alastor. "It was for his own good that she spoke with him. Look how peacefully he is sleeping now," she said while she laid a calming hand on his chest.

"You couldn't know that it would be like this, Poppy," he said grumpily, but it was obvious that he had calmed down.

"My experience as a Mediwitch let me know it, Alastor. I wouldn't do anything, which isn't good for him. Something about Minerva was bothering him so much that he lost himself in a panic attack. Obviously he was very concerned that she was angry with him and that he wouldn't be able to speak with her to solve the problem. Now he knows that she is there for him and that she will still speak to him."

He sighed and shook his head. "You always have an excuse for your risky methods."

"Let's go into my office. You can scold me there if it will make you feel better, but you can't deny that it was a good idea in the end. He hasn't slept that peacefully for ages." She looked shyly deep into his eyes because she knew he couldn't resist this look. And it worked again. "I love it when you go into your 'protective' mode with Severus."

He groaned grumpily and rolled his eyes. With one last glance at Minerva and then at the sleeping Severus, he let Poppy lead him to her office.

Minerva sat in the armchair and looked longingly at Severus. *I could watch him sleeping so peacefully for hours, and it wouldn't bore me.*

He woke up an hour and a half later. He blinked to get used to the bright light.

"I thought you would never wake up again, Severus," Minerva said, smiling. She stood up from her armchair and sat down on the bed at Severus' side.

"Minerva?" he said while trying to wake up completely. Slowly, the memories of the last hours came back. He covered his face with his hands and desperately said, "Oh, Minerva, I'm so sorry."

"It's all right, Severus, but never say something like that to me again. I love you because of many things, but not out of pity."

He lowered his hands and looked at her. "You never let me finish speaking Minerva. I just wanted to know why you wanted this relationship, and yes, I considered the possibility that you wanted it out of pity or because you wanted to take better care of me. I can't see any reason why someone like you could want someone like me. I have nothing to offer you."

She sighed and took one of his hands in hers. "Severus, you are intelligent, funny..." He raised a questioning eyebrow at that "yes, you are, in your own way. I enjoy our bickering a lot." She smiled at him while he rolled his eyes. "You enjoy a glass of wine and classical music as much as I do; you love Quidditch; you..."

He raised his free hand to stop her and said, "Yes, yes, I get it, Minerva."

"Oh, but I didn't tell you the most important thing, Severus."

He had blushed throughout her monologue and wished she would stop before it became too embarrassing. He sighed and asked, "And that is?"

"Your heart, Severus," she said honestly.

"How clichéd, Minerva. A simple 'because you are intelligent' would have made it," he said.

"Too bad the potion has lost its effect. I really liked the soft and drowsy Severus," she said mockingly.

He glared at her and replied, "Then just keep *him* in your mind because you will never see him again. I would rather die than let this woman drug me again."

"Speaking of yourself in the third person isn't a good sign. Maybe I should call for Poppy," she said cheekily, but when she saw his shocked face turn in the direction of Poppy's office, she chuckled and said, "No worries, Severus. It was just a joke." With that she leaned over and kissed him. She had intended to just let it be one of the quick kisses they had shared lately, but Severus seemed to have a different opinion.

He had grabbed her neck and held her in place while he intensified the kiss.

Minerva was surprised but in a positive way. When she had survived the first shock of him grabbing her neck, she gave into his demanding kiss and even a soft moan escaped her throat.

After what seemed an eternity, he loosened his grip and ended the kiss. "I love you, Minerva."

"And I love you, Severus!"

THE END

Please let me know if you liked it! There are already two sequels written, but I first have to find a beta for them!