

When You Care Enough To Send The Very Best

by juniperus

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Minerva sighed sadly. Her moment of elation when Albus' portrait disclosed that the plan had worked, that, with careful administration of venom since three-years-previous and multiple doses of blood-replenishing potion once the Portkey to Albus' Unplottable cottage in the Orkneys was activated (by a drop in Severus' blood pressure and heartbeat, very clever!), Severus had survived, was tempered by memories of her treatment of him that past year and of the circumstances of her last sight of the man.

"That poor boy. I was so unfair tae him, Albus, so *cruel*."

"Now, now, Minerva. You know it would have been unsafe for both of you were we to have brought you in on the plan. And so did he," the portrait over the Headmistress' desk replied, quietly. "He now needs, whether he will admit it or not, someone to check his progress and help, if necessary. I know he has healing potions of various stripe, and I had left a well-stocked larder in stasis when I warded the cottage to his signature and signed the papers bequeathing it to him 'No Matter the Circumstance,' but..."

"Aye. That I will do, Albus. Repair and reconstruction are proceeding apace, and Filius and I have re-set the wards – it's time. Will the wards allow house-elves? I want tae send Winky and Bessy to Spinner's End and into his private labs and quarters for tae box and transport his things afore the Ministry gathers their limited wits and tries tae confiscate anything."

"A fine idea, Minerva, he will appreciate that," the portrait replied, nodding.

Minerva reached behind the portrait to grasp an old iron key affixed to the frame and looked into the painted eyes of her old friend as she whispered *Portus*."

She closed her eyes as she felt the familiar tug behind her navel. As she landed soundly on worn cobblestones leading to a tiny stone cottage with a slate roof, she could hear the sea break against rock, although all she could see from her vantage was rolling green and the crumbling stone walls of ancient paddocks stretching beyond the house. *Ah, remote*, she thought as she slowly walked to the weathered door, *a perfect choice for Our Tetchy Boy*. She stifled a sob as she recalled the nickname she and Albus had bestowed upon Severus his first year teaching.

She tidied her bun and smoothed her robes before knocking thrice on the door. In time a shuffling could be heard within, and the door opened to reveal a markedly pale and gaunt man with blue bruising under his sunken eyes. Around his neck wound a bandage that clearly showed red blood and green putrescence seeping through.

Her hand flew to her mouth and she gasped, tears filling her eyes as she struggled to speak. "Oh Severus, my brawn lad, my boy..." She paused as her hand reached out as if to touch the still-weeping wound on his neck, then dropped to her side as she recalled herself and regained her normally businesslike demeanor.

He sighed as he slumped against the doorframe, obviously struggling to hold himself upright. "I don't need an..."

"Apology, Severus? If you don't need tae hear it, I still need tae give it. That's not all I came tae deliver, however."

One eyebrow quirked skyward as he croaked, "Oh? What have you brought me, then?"

"Me. Now step aside, I have work tae do. How Albus thought you could take care o'yourself is beyond me..." her brusque brogue trailed off as she ducked the lintel and disappeared into the cottage, the door shutting soundly behind her.