

# Out of Chaos, Order: Out of Order, Perfection

by juniperus

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Chapter 1 of 1

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The summer following the Battle of Hogwarts, acting-Headmistress Minerva McGonagall was entirely focused on repairing the castle, the wards, and the grounds. She had teaching staff to replace, parents of students (*all of them*) to reassure, and a memorial to oversee. She barely looked at the *Daily Prophet*...there was too much to do, and she could only tolerate so many stories of celebration before the sharp pang of loss grew too much to bear.

The summer following the Battle of Hogwarts, acting Minister of Magic Kingsley Shacklebolt was entirely focused on overseeing a full internal investigation of every level of the Ministry, on increasing the ranks of Aurors and implementing new and advanced training for them, and on re-populating every Ministry department with tested, fully investigated, and non-Imperio'd employees. He barely looked at the *Daily Prophet*...there were too many areas, too many people, to oversee and too few he fully trusted to oversee them.

Neither, then, had read the stories that slowly insinuated themselves into public awareness. Page 12, page 7, page 4, then 3, until finally the information was front page news. Since early in the days of the First Wizarding War a small team of researchers at St Mungo's had been, without anyone's knowledge, recording family histories. Births, failed pregnancies and difficulties with conception, the incidence of Squibs, and the blood-status of parents were recorded. As was information from a heretofore unknown quill...charmed by Albus Dumbledore himself...that, in cryptic shorthand, noted the numbers of incoming Hogwarts students by blood-status. These researchers, led by a portrait of Dilys Derwent, had quietly compiled information, had run it through Arithmantic calculations and had even applied the principles of Muggle genetics research (the team included a Muggle-born Senior Healer and Potions master and his Muggle fraternal twin, a leading University researcher on human genetics).

Their findings were incontrovertible: The pureblood lines of Britain were dying off at an alarming rate, measures of magical ability showed dramatic power loss from generation to generation, and the incidence of Squib births had grown by 150%. The bigotry-fueled intermarriages between pureblood lines had near-condemned them to extinction, and the slaughter of "blood-traitor" pureblood lines, half-bloods, and Muggle-borns had done serious damage to the healthiest breeding populations.

The wizarding population was shrinking.

And the *Daily Prophet*, each week, printed a short story about the study, about the researchers, about their findings. They interviewed the portraits of Derwent and Dumbledore. They even offered a very simplified introduction to human genetics. The writing was clear, the information presented concise, and the tone kept neutral. Until the day the frightening ramifications of the previous articles were printed on the front page under the headline: Wizarding Britain is dying!

The celebratory shouts of victory became cries for action. Scores of witches and wizards who couldn't be arsed to fight against a sociopathic self-styled Dark Lord were demonstrating in Diagon Alley and the Ministry atrium. By the end of the summer, Kingsley Shacklebolt had bedlam on his hands, and it had crept up on him like a thief in

the night.

He *hated* that.

And so he issued a non-committal press release while quickly convening a group of advisors: the portraits of Dumbledore and Derwent, the twins from the research team, Arthur Weasley (as one of the few Ministry employees he implicitly trusted and newly appointed member of the Wizengamot), Peony MacMillan (a pureblood who, although of some social and political standing, never supported Voldemort or his ideals), and Minerva McGonagall (as Head of Hogwarts, understood leader of the Order of the Phoenix after Dumbledore's death, and Kingsley's favorite voice of reason). They studied the findings. The first week they met daily to discuss them, and the second week they met daily to debate them.

And what they decided, what had been debated and written (and re-written, and re-written again), and signed into law shocked *everyone*.

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*By order of Kingsley Trajan Shackbolt, acting as Minister of Magic in accordance with unanimous decision of the Wizengamot of the Ministry of Magic of Great Britain and approval of the International Confederation of Wizards, written on this 25th day of September, 1998:*

*As a result of recent findings as to the current state of potential for growth and reproductive health of the British wizarding population\* it is decreed that,*

*1. NO marriages between pureblooded\*\* wizards and witches will be authorized by the Ministry of Magic without the betrothed submitting to a series of tests, conducted by the Wizarding Genetics Research Team, to confirm potential viability of offspring.*

*2. NO marriages between Muggle-born wizards and witches will be authorized by the Ministry of Magic, given their recent and artificially reduced numbers and vital importance to the continuation of the wizarding world.\*\*\**

*3. ALL wizards and witches of reproductive health\*\*\*\* are required to produce no fewer than two offspring, each. Individuals who have already produced two offspring, or couples who have produced four, are encouraged but not required to add to those numbers.*

*4. To this end ALL unmarried wizards and witches of reproductive health\*\*\*\* who have not previously produced no fewer than two offspring are to adhere to the following time line:*

*A Ministry authorized marriage utilizing the Conjunx charm must be performed before 25 April 1999.*

*Conjugal relations must occur weekly until conception. Allowances for health may be accepted on a case-by-case basis.*

*Conception must occur within first year of marriage. No exceptions.*

*Completion of reproductive requirements must occur within seven years of marriage. In cases of re-marriage, where one spouse has already completed their personal requirement, the time limit for completion is four years. Extensions may be granted on a case-by-case basis in situations of long-term illness or other mitigating factors.*

*5. Failure to adhere to this decree WILL result in fines and incarceration in Azkaban as decided via formal hearing by a Wizengamot subgroup specifically created for this purpose. Continued refusal to adhere to this decree WILL result in wand-breaking and banishment from wizarding society.*

*\*(see appendices A-K of attached documentation)*

*\*\*defined in this context as a minimum of four traceable generations of intermarriage only with pureblood family lines or six traceable generations with the addition of pureblood family lines from outside Britain*

*\*\*\* This subsection will expire 25 September 2001.*

*\*\*\*\*defined in this context as meeting standard optimal wizarding reproductive age of 27-77 years, fertile, and meeting basic requirements for general health (waivers will be provided by St Mungo's, after examination by a designated team of Healers, from 26 September to 1 October only). Standard optimal wizarding reproductive age is widely considered to be 17-77 years; however, given the importance of education and apprenticeship training to the strength and viability of wizarding society, wizards and witches aged 17-26 are encouraged, but not required, to follow this decree in whole or part. Wizards and witches who are not of at least three-quarters human blood, or werewolves, are not bound by this decree.*

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The new law was read at 4:45 P.M in Diagon Alley and the atrium of the Ministry of Magic, simultaneously. At the same time, thousands of owls left the offices of the *Daily Prophet* with a special edition outlining the law, reiterating the findings, and promising an additional evening special edition the following Friday that would list all half-blood and Muggle-born eligible singles.

The immediate reaction was stunned silence. Shackbolt, the researchers, and the rest of the group of advisors left the Ministry promptly at 5:00, most to unplottable locations, looking forward to the weekend.

A return to bedlam followed.

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The week following the announcement was without incident, if one ignored the thousands of Howlers arriving around-the-clock for Minister Shackbolt. And the fact that the research team needed to be moved to unplottable safe houses at the end of each long day at St Mungo's (where they were protected on-site by several seasoned Aurors with large families). Amazingly enough, the identities of the Minister's group of advisors didn't leak out...although Percy Weasley personally hexed no fewer than seven reporters and trapped a beetle Rita Skeeter under his upended tea cup...before a crack team of equally well-bred Aurors was assigned to the offices to keep the wheels of government turning.

Life went on as usual at Hogwarts. The students were too young to worry about *forced* marriage, and those purebloods already arranged were secretly relieved to have been given a reprieve. And much of the staff were too old, already had children, or were otherwise ineligible (poor Aurora Sinistra had Dragon Pox as a child; much to everyone's astonishment, Bathsheba Babbling had somehow already landed a suitor; and the condition of Sybil Trelawney's liver kept her well out of the running).

Headmistress McGonagall received no Howlers, although she was the recipient of a frantic Floo-call from the Minister of Magic begging for a room in the Hogwarts guest quarters during his last-minute, ah, *public relations visit* to smile, wave, and arrange for photo-ops with the seventh- (and few returning 'eighth'-) year students who had had even the smallest role in what *The Quibbler* had called 'Potter's War'.

Keeping the future of wizarding society on the front page was a smart move, as was staying well away from his London flat, where, he was led to understand, there were another 500 Howlers and at least three dozen protesters waiting for him. He hoped Percy could disperse the crowd and safely dispose of the little red menaces by

Wednesday lunch.

The relative peace allowed Minerva to nearly forget about the new law. She was, therefore, surprised when during Friday dinner a volley of owls entered the Great Hall and circled once before delivering the *Daily Prophet: Special Edition* in a flurry. Like a good number of students (and nearly all of the faculty), she immediately opened it and scanned the columns of names. She was far more than surprised when she reached the last page, and she gasped loudly before grabbing the paper and heading for her office in a dead run, skirts hoisted high.

"Albus!" She yelled as she burst through the door. "Albus! Wake up! Wake up! He's alive!"

She collapsed onto the comfortable chair in front of her desk that faced the former Headmaster's portrait and fanned herself with the paper. The portrait, now awake and peering over his half-moon spectacles at her, spoke. "What was that, Minerva?"

She waved the paper in front of her. "Alive! Shackbolt had Filius charm a quill to automatically generate a list of names of those Muggle-borns and half-bloods who fall under the new law as eligible, and the *Prophet* published them today." She took a deep breath, still slightly winded from her mad sprint through the castle, and wiped an errant tear from her cheek. "Severus is on the list! He's alive!"

The portrait of Albus Dumbledore sat back in amazement, then smiled. "Ah. I knew he could do it. Brilliant boy, that one."

"Albus?" Minerva asked as she sat forward, eyes narrowed. "What did you know? What didn't you tell me?"

The portrait put up his hands. "Nothing, Minerva, it was just a hope. And the fact that his portrait didn't appear here...I didn't believe the castle would fault him for doing what he was required to do in the circumstances, but I didn't dare say anything to you about it in case I was wrong. I knew how fond of him you had been before..." He cleared his throat. "And I didn't know how long it would take for you to forgive him his dedication to duty."

"Albus!" she said, clearly hurt.

"Now, now," he soothed. "It took nearly the whole summer for Harry to make his statements and testify on Severus' behalf, and I know how hard last year was on you, having lost both of us in one way or another."

Minerva nodded sadly. She looked down at the paper and traced her fingers across Snape's name. "Do you know where he could be?"

Albus shook his head. "No, although I can share some suspicions and ideas. You'll have to go looking for him, and if you aren't careful you'll spook him and lose him all over again."

She nodded again. "Aye, pricklier than a hedgehog, that one, and thrice as protective of his underbelly." She stood and moved towards her desk. "I need to find him before anyone else notices his name and goes looking." She looked thoughtful a moment. "I can ask Kingsley to perform some damage control from his office, but Severus is still bound to the decree's timeline same as everyone else on the list. I need to find him if I'm to keep him out of Azkaban."

Quill poised, she looked at the portrait. Three hours and over two-dozen theories later she laid it down on her desk and sighed. It was growing late, and she still had a Floo-call to Kingsley to make. Stretching as she stood, she took one last look at the pile of parchment on her desk before moving to the hearth. It was going to be a long night...she didn't expect she'd be able to sleep a wink.

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Three weeks into October and Minerva was looking over the list again. Kingsley had been shocked, relieved, and pleased to hear of the possibility of Severus Snape surviving the Battle of Hogwarts. He had done a masterful job of explaining the "unfortunate error" to the press and apologized profusely for any upset it might have caused. He offered the help of Ministry personnel to help discover Severus' whereabouts, but Minerva demurred, wanting to keep the secret among as few individuals as possible (but agreeing to call on his help if the deadline grew too close for comfort).

She could hardly ask around openly, so she was forced to restrict her search for clues to one afternoon each weekend. On this day she had been able to definitively cross the first possibility off the list, and what she had already found about the second led her to believe that afternoon's search would result in the same. She sighed.

"Patience, Minerva," Albus' portrait said quietly. She nodded.

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By mid-January fourteen more theories had been crossed off the list, and Minerva had begun to despair. She decided to take Kingsley up on his offer and briefed him on her progress, giving him eight ideas to investigate as surreptitiously as possible. That left her three possibilities to consider with barely over three months to find him before the decree's deadline.

She had searched the most likely...according to Albus...locations first, but as time wore on she began to consider the man in question and decided to keep the three most outlying locations for herself. She felt certain that if there were inhospitable conditions, discomforts galore, and a dearth of people, *that* would be where she'd find that surly, secretive man.

And, the second week of March, with one theory to burn, she discovered she was right.

"The Orkney Islands, Albus. Sanday, to be exact," she said, smiling, still chuffed at her success. "I've arranged with Filius to take all of the coming weekend. I tracked him to Kirkwall, but he made it to a departing ferry before I could catch up with him. I'll need to take the ferry, myself, as I don't relish trying to get there by broom, the season being such as it is." She busied herself with straightening her desk before looking up at the portrait. "Well, Albus? Aren't you pleased?"

"Yes, Minerva, of course. But I must remind you that locating him and convincing him to let you in the door, much less agreeing to wed, are very different things."

"Nonsense," she snapped. "I haven't come this far to fail." Her face softened. "I miss him, Albus. I missed him when I thought he was against us, and more than that when I thought him gone. But it's now, now that I know he's out there, that I miss him most of all."

The portrait nodded. "Tomorrow, then?"

"Tomorrow."

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It was a long, cold, ride on the ferry. She didn't dare stop to warm up lest she give herself away, so she drew her heavy Muggle overcoat around her and walked until she found a spot away from prying eyes. Once shielded from observation, she cast a Severus-specific locating charm using hair she had gleaned from robes he had left in his wardrobe. Her wand trembled and shifted in her hand before it...*yes!*...moved slowly and deliberately to point northeast. She pulled a broom from her pocket and enlarged it, then Disillusioned herself. She perched on the handle and checked her wand again for reference before she slowly ascended and took off in his direction.

After only forty-five minutes in the air (and two landings to check position) she spotted a tiny ramshackle cottage that she would have doubted was habitable were it not for the smoke rising steadily from the chimney. She dismounted far from the walk leading to the door and proceeded slowly and carefully, checking for the skillful (and likely dangerous) wards he was known for.

She was surprisingly close to the building before she felt them ahead of her. "Ah, *only the house is warded, and tightly, so any errant fly-overs wouldn't be able to detect them. Smart lad.*"

Once satisfied triggering the wards wouldn't result in bodily harm...at least, not from the wards...she let the Disillusionment Charm fall and strode purposefully to the heavy plank door. As she raised her hand to knock, the door was tugged open by a markedly pale, wild-eyed, but very *alive* Severus Snape. Minerva gasped and choked down a sob, then reached her hand out, "Severus, is it really you?"

Clearly taken aback but having that split-second to recover, he stood at his full height (with obvious effort) and replied, "Obviously. Have you come to finish the job, then? Or would you prefer that the Ministry handle that unpleasantness?"

Minerva's hand stopped mid-air as she gaped at him. Then her face twisted in both pain and anger as she spat, "How dare you even *suggest* such a thing, Severus Snape! All this time I've looked, I've hoped..." She trailed off, pulling her hand back.

"Hoped what, Minerva? That despite my missing body I was well and truly dead?" he sneered.

"If you think that, then you are a fool and a bastard. We know now, Severus, we know everything. Harry Potter cleared your name and testified on your behalf, told the truth...the truth I had, all through that terrible last year..." He winced. "...hoped would be revealed, at the end." She took a shuddering breath. "You were my friend, *are* you friend unless you wish it would not be so. Severus?"

His shoulders slumped. He opened the door and stepped back, gesturing for her to enter. She looked at him as she crossed the threshold, then stopped, not daring to assume too much. He held out his hand, and she shrugged off the sodden overcoat, handing it to him with a move to extract her wand to perform a Drying Charm be seen as an act of aggression. He pulled out his wand and dried the coat before hanging it on a peg behind the door, next to his own.

He turned around, standing stock still...*still as the dead*...while he searched her face for what felt to her like hours. She forced herself to stand calmly, through whatever formal judging was transpiring behind those black eyes. A spare, subtle nod.

"Tea?" he asked, as he conjured a second cup.

"Aye, tea would be most welcome...I'm chilled to the bone. The weather is far from pleasant," she quipped.

"Indeed," he agreed, with a smirk, as he poured. "I'm afraid I have no biscuits," he commented, almost too casually.

"I've come for your company, not your biscuits," she rejoined crisply. He carried the cups to the corner table that served as a dining nook and Transfigured a chair out of a piece of kindling. He inclined his head toward the chair.

Minerva made her way to the chair and sat, nervously smoothing the oversized Muggle jumper she wore. She again debated pulling her wand out to Transfigure her robes back to their original form but hesitated, Albus' comment about spooking him foremost on her mind. It seemed better if she *felt* as uncomfortable as Severus *looked* at that moment.

Minerva looked down at her hands, folded primly in her lap, and waited for him to speak. When it seemed clear he expected her to make the first move...

- *As I should,* -

...she looked at him, taking in his gauntness, the signs of the terrible damage to his neck behind a high collar, and the wariness behind his carefully constructed neutral state before she began.

"Severus, I'm sorry. I'm sorry for the way I treated you last year, for..." She faltered and swallowed thickly. "For mistrusting you when I should have known, when *did* know, to think better than that of you."

"You believed what I intended you to believe, Minerva," he replied hollowly. "You saw what I intended you see. You behaved as I expected you to behave, as it was necessary for you to behave."

She shook her head. "No, Severus, I should have guessed; I should have understood. I didn't know of Albus' plan, but I did know Albus. I saw what you wanted me to see only because I was too blind to see otherwise." With a pained grimace she added, "And there was nothing about my behavior, my behavior in the privacy of your office and my office, that was necessary."

She blinked back tears as she watched his face tighten. She recalled the cruel names she had called him, from the depths of her pain, the awful insinuations she had made. As, she realized, miserably, did he.

He turned away and closed his eyes. "Minerva," he rasped, then shook his head as if he were trying to shake the unbidden images from his mind. "We both know there were parts to play, and mine was to play the villain." He paused before raising his eyes to hers once again. "It always was."

She brought one hand up to wipe her cheek and stretched the other across the table, to rest next to his. There they sat, in silence, as they sipped from their cups.

Three hours later the tea had been drunk, replenished, and the pot was once again empty. She had allowed him to sit quietly, to ask the questions he needed answered, to remember other teas at other times taken in the amiable comfort of her former quarters. She had asked after his health and comfort but did not press him for information. He acquiesced to her wish to visit again, and a date was set.

When she stood to depart he allowed her to embrace him. She could have wept for joy.

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"What's today's date, then?" the portrait asked Minerva.

She sighed. "It's the eighteenth of April. I'm running out of time, I know that. I just... wish I didn't have to rush him. We've had three long, lovely, conversations over tea, and I'd hate to lose his company if everything goes pear-shaped."

"You'll lose his company if he's imprisoned, will you not?" Albus asked.

She nodded. "I'm leaving straightaway." *Oh, Severus.*

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"I brought some things for you to look at; there's something I want to discuss," Minerva said, as she stepped in the door.

"Oh?" Severus looked wary.

Minerva moved purposefully to the dining nook, setting her satchel on the table and taking a seat. She looked at Severus expectantly.

Eyes narrowed, he watched her sit and looked at her for a moment before shutting the door and taking a seat at the table. She appeared nervous, which made him decidedly uncomfortable. She unpacked a stack of *Daily Prophets*, all turned to particular pages.

"Start with the one on top, they're in order," she ordered, sitting stiffly. But he could see that she was wringing her hands under the table.

And so Severus read. He read the short stories about the research. He read the bios of the researchers and the interviews with the portraits. He frowned as he read the sensational front-page pronouncement and glanced at Minerva. She sat still as a statue, watching him read.

He set that paper aside and began to read the decree. As he read on he mumbled nearly unintelligible epithets, those epithets growing in degree and volume until, at the last line, he threw the paper down and shouted, "Bloody *Imbeciles!*" He turned to Minerva, who turned sheet-white.

"I-I see it's time for the discussion." She swallowed. "I want to propose... *anarrangement*. It's..." She stood up, suddenly, and began pacing the floor in front of Severus' chair.

"Oh hell, I'm here to propose." Her breath caught at the sight of his look of utter shock, but she forced herself to continue. "I think we should marry, fulfill the requirement. We've been friends for many years. You could return to Hogwarts with me and have your pick of either Potions or DADA, or teach only the advanced classes of both, if that's what you fancy..." At his decidedly askance look she amended, "Or I could retire! I have needed little and saved a great deal over the years. I own a home near Ullapool, and we could create a fine laboratory for you, but if you would prefer to bide here, with or without me..." Her hand reached up as if to brush a hair from her face, though none had escaped the bun.

She paused to look at him before finishing the argument she had played in her head for days. "Severus, you're the most knowledgeable and skilled Potions master in Britain...I'm sure you know of a way to guarantee conception, even granting twins, so you wouldn't be troubled with me more than necessary..." She trailed off, and stopped in front of his chair.

Severus looked thoughtful a moment, then his brow wrinkled. "But, your sons... Minerva, you aren't bound by the decree."

Minerva squared her shoulders. "No, no I am not. *You* are."

He took in her words and leapt to his feet.

"How *Gryffindor!* You've come to my *rescue!*" he roared. "Poor Severus needs saving from Azkaban...again!" He began pacing the dining nook, gesticulating wildly to punctuate each indignity. "A mean, pathetic, despised, *ugly* git like me has no hope of meeting the requirements of the decree without a former colleague taking *pity* on me and offering herself up like some sacrificial lamb!" He sneered. "How noble! How..."

"Severrrus Snape!" she snapped and met his eyes, lips pursed.

Severus' eyes grew wide, then narrowed at her interruption of what was shaping up to be a better-than-average strop. Hands on her hips and steel in her eyes, with her well-wielded thick brogue and a pointed look over her spectacles, she was still able to make him feel like a naughty teenager caught at some mischief. And this never failed to elicit in him the same reaction to her brusque authority that he'd had when he was sixteen.

That is to say, he was half on his way to a raging hard-on and had already broken a sweat. He quickly averted his eyes and ducked his head as felt a blush beginning to heat his face.

A blush Minerva noticed. She smirked.

And rarely did Minerva McGonagall smirk idly.

She stepped closer to Severus and watched him fight the good fight against the blush. She watched him scowl, eyes still averted. She watched him bite down on the inside of his bottom lip.

She watched him lose the fight. Again, she smirked.

Minerva had grown up in the Highlands, to be sure, but had worked hard through her Hogwarts years, and subsequent apprenticeship, to gain some control over her brogue. That control slipped when she was angry, tired, or very emotional.

Or when she *let* it slip.

"Severrrus. Ye need tae calm down, lad. I meant ye no insult, and I mean ye no harm," she said, in a soothing tone. His almost imperceptible fidget gave her the answer she was looking for.

The boy he had been, devoid of emotional connection, had hoarded every positive feeling he'd ever had the good fortune to experience...even into adulthood. Loyalty to his only childhood friend... and the crush he harbored for his toughest professor, the one he could never quite please. The one who knew *every* time a student had developed a crush on her (oh, the olfactory benefits of being an Animagus!) and the one who was surprised that, his entire tenure at Hogwarts, he'd had her fooled into thinking he'd long since moved on. She should have known...Severus Snape was *not* a man who moves on.

She was running out of time and patience. Not to mention she was far less willing to lose him a second time than she had been the House Cup (and her competitiveness in *that* area was legendary). The Gryffindor approach clearly didn't work...she would need to catch the Slytherin with Slytherin tactics. She hadn't attempted to seduce a man since her late husband, a half-century previous, although had she known, she might have tried to seduce *this* one ten years ago. *Well, Minnie*, she thought, *there's nothing for it: men are stubborn fools. Especially this one.*

She took another step closer to Severus. He took a step back. She took another. He... found himself against the sideboard.

Even had she not known him for twenty-seven years, she could easily have read his panic. His eyes moved from side to side looking for a path of escape. There was none.

Minerva stood toe-to-toe with him and looked him right in the eye. "Listen tae me, Severrrus Snape, and ye listen good. I dunna pity ye. I dunna think ye pathetic, nor do I despise ye. The fact tha' ye can be a right mean bastard is a point of pride for ye, and don' try tae deny it," she said, quietly but firmly. "And if the sight of ye was sore on the eyes hinka ye I'd be offerin' to look at ye every day from here on?"

His eyes widened at her pronouncement. *Good.*

She took one step back and smoothed the front of her robes before she continued, eyes shyly averted. "Now, I ken if ye have taken this as an insult. Usually it's the Muggle-borns who concern themselves so with age gaps, but I can see how I might've upset ye...although I have plenty of breedin' years still left in me, I'm hardly at my prime and I wouldna fault ye for wantin' a woman much younger and more pleasant in face." She inwardly smiled as she heard his sharp intake of breath. Wizards do so like to think it was all their idea.

She took another step back, and brought her eyes to his face once again, noting that the blush had faded and his customary scowl had taken its place. "*those* you, Severrrus, but I am nae so small a person tha' I wouldna help ye find a bride more to yer likin'. Miss Granger would be suited to ye intellectually, but she's already spoken

for. I can check on Damietta Flint and Gwenneth Davies...ye have a few days tae spare, p'rhaps ye'd like me to bring the Hogwarts yearbooks and we can look through them togeth..."

With a growl Severus grabbed Minerva's shoulders in a vise grip and crushed his lips to hers. As she responded to his kiss and deepened it, his grip on her eased, and she snaked an arm up to tangle her fingers in his hair as his hands moved to her back to pull her closer, then began roaming freely. Although lacking in direct experience, he was always a quick study and soon put his keen observations of which caresses she leaned into and which made her shiver to good use.

It wasn't long before they were both breathing heavily and swaying in place, legs perilously close to turning to jelly.

"So braw," she whispered as she placed soft kisses along his jaw line, ending at a spot just below his ear that made him shudder at the touch of her lips. "An' splendid of mind." She raked her fingers across his chest and around to embrace him soundly. "A finer, more fair lad I couldna hardly find."

"Wh-when," he gasped, as she turned her attentions to his Adam's apple, "do you propose we, ah, finalize the arrangement?" His chest rumbled with a deep moan as she pulled back to look at him and her hands moved southward.

"I can have Kingsley come tae-morrow tae perform the ceremony himself, or even...*tonight*...would tha' be tae soon?"

He met her even gaze with a smoldering look, and smirked. "No, that would be perfect."

She smiled and blushed, in spite of herself.

Yes, she thought. *It certainly seems it will be.*