

Lead Me Not Into Temptation

by TartanPhoenix

Time-Turners are delicate instruments. This is why.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 of 2

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The sky was a brilliant blue, just as it should always be. The parade of white fluffy clouds seemed never ending as they made their way toward the horizon. It realized what the people below it were only just beginning to realize. It was a time for celebration.

It had taken him another two years. Two years after Harry Potter had walked through the boar-flanked gates of Hogwarts for the last time as a student, he returned with even more trepidation. He had left that unsure school boy far behind. A young man, far older than his years had walked, his head held high, and faced the destiny others had chosen for him.

The wind had stilled, the birds became silent, and the battle began. Curses flew, angry words were exchanged, emerald eyes flashed, but Voldemort had lost and was no more. Harry stood, transfixed, as he watched the body of the most evil wizard simply fade away into nothing. Even the blades of grass beneath him simply stood tall once more and swayed in the wind. To Harry, it could all have been just a bad dream.

It took only a matter of seconds for the word to spread, and the entire wizarding world rose up in one voice of celebration. Albus Dumbledore, who had stood beside the young man through it all, deflecting spells, declared a week of remembrance. All classes had been cancelled, and at the end of that week, Halloween, the greatest feast ever seen was held for the students.

It was the next morning, ironically the first, that things changed, while still managing to stay the same. Life still made itself difficult.

It was still only seven o'clock, and classes were an hour away. The professors had all arrived for breakfast and were chatting amongst themselves about anything that came to mind. The war had been over for a week, but excitement was still running high, along with spirits. After being away from their classes for an entire week, most of the students were reluctant to start them again, and most of the children had yet to pull themselves from their warm beds. So, when the mail arrived that morning, there were only a handful of students sitting, bleary eyed, at the house tables, trying to remember what a spoon was used for.

Owls swooped back and forth, brown, grey, and white balls of fluff dove toward the tables, seeming to enjoy the students startled reactions as much as the professors did. A wagger had begun to guess at the first to fall from their seat. A poor first-year Hufflepuff who had tipped over his pumpkin juice was currently in the lead.

There was one owl, however, that didn't join in. Instead, it continued to circle high above the hall. It was an odd owl, black from head to toe, and looked more like an overgrown raven than an owl, waiting to be noticed. Finally, when it had received enough attention, it flew toward the head table and came to rest in front of Albus. It stood stock still as he untied the large paper from its leg, not bothering to hide its contempt as it watched the other owls.

"Now now, there's no need to try and out do them. They're only having a little fun," Albus admonished gently. The owl looked at him indignantly before turning its back on him and flying away, knocking over his oatmeal in the process.

A small sound came from his right, and it grew into an outright laugh when he turned and looked down. "Is there something amusing, Minerva?" Albus asked, knowing exactly what was making her eyes water.

Tenderly, she reached forward with her napkin and wiped the offending globs from the tip of his nose and his forehead as he took off his glasses and did the same. "I think you hurt its feelings, Albus," she said, trying to catch her breath.

Albus could feel the warmth spread through him. It had been far too long since he seen her laugh like that. "Well, the oatmeal was a little lumpy for my tastes this morning anyway. And," he said, looking out of the corner of his eye, "if it makes you laugh like that, I'll have to do it more often."

She just shook her head and continued to chuckle, taking the liberty of unrolling his newspaper. The sharp intake of breath and muttered, "oh my," made his eyes follow hers to the headline. His hand came to rest over hers as he leaned in, reading over her shoulder. He had heard rumors of course, but this was unexpected.

Minister Scrimgeour resigns under suspicion

Minister of Magic, Rufus Scrimgeour,

resigned from his post late last night.

Scrimgeour, who cited his failing health as the

reason for his resignation, left office in what

could be the shortest term for a sitting

Minister since Theodore Coldwater some 250

years ago was caught trying to sell the

Americas to a group of goblins. Scrimgeour,

who could not be reached for comment, may

have had another reason for his sudden,

and unexpected, departure.

It has been learned that an internal

investigation into Scrimgeour has been going

on for several months, although the specifics

could not be released to the public. The IAD,

Internal Auror Division, spokeswizard did have

this to say. "Mr. Scrimgeour has been under

investigation due to a... disturbing

personal relationship with another Ministry

employee. This person, who will not be

identified at this time, has also been under

investigation for reported links to the

rogue group, collectively known as

Death Eaters."

If the allegations facing the former

Minister prove true, it will be up to the

Wizengamot to decide his fate, but there is

one question on the minds of almost every

person this morning. Who will be the next

Minister of Magic?

Several names have been thrown

out for consideration, including Arthur Weasley,

Bertie Higgs, and a member of the Unspeakables

named Hadrian Scipio.

But, there is one name that had garnered

more support from Ministry members and the

public, Albus Dumbledore.

The current headmaster, who has

been called for office no less than seven
times in the past, has always politely refused
the position, but can that be ready to change?
Only time, and the next election will tell, but
with such popular support behind the
movement, could anyone possibly stand in
his way?

The silence between the two old friends was deafening until Albus started to chuckle. The slight shaking of his broad shoulders soon began to grow until he was holding his sides, the laughter ripping from his throat.

Minerva's mind was reeling with the possible outcomes as she watched him, utterly incredulous and doubting his sanity. Projecting a calm she didn't feel, she folded up the paper and laid it down in front of them, her slim fingers folding on top of it. "Something funny, Albus?" she asked coolly.

"Definitely," he said between chuckles.

She watched him, her heart pounding, until a thought wormed its way to the forefront. 'He's not going to take it.' To anyone who knew him, it was an obvious statement, but Minerva could feel the oppressive weight that had descended upon her lift as the relief washed over her like the evening tide.

"I take it," she said, her own lips betraying her and turning upward, "that I don't need to worry about losing you to the Ministry? Don't you want the opportunity to make ten pin bowling the national pastime?" she teased.

"Why, Minerva? Looking for a promotion? Granted, the office is certainly bigger, but the staff can be a bear."

She tried to glare at him, but the light dancing in his eyes simply made it impossible. "No more so than dealing with an unruly headmaster," she said slyly. "Really, Albus, after all this time, why won't you take the position? You have all but run the country for the last twenty years anyway. Why not make it official?"

Her tone, and the fact that she obviously expected an answer, surprised him into silence. He watched as she absently filled his tea cup while he piled fresh strawberries onto her plate. "There are two very simple reasons for it, my dear. One, Hogwarts is my home, and has been for most of my life. I cannot imagine anywhere else I would wish to be. And second, it would simply be too tempting."

She stared at him, confused, but he appeared utterly serious in his reasons. "Tempting?" she repeated questioningly.

"Hmm," he replied absentmindedly while he tapped his spoon gently on the side of the cup. His eyes took on a faraway look as he watched the liquid swirl downward, pulling him into its depths.

"For reasons I have never been able to understand, people seem bound and determined to follow me. If only they knew my mother would never allow me to have a pet since I couldn't remember to feed the poor animals. I highly doubt that there is... anything that our people would not let me do."

Minerva stared at him through narrowed eyes, her heart beating just a little quick for her own liking. "But surely, you wouldn't do anything that was not for our world's best interest? You're far too good for that, Albus; I don't believe it."

His eyes stayed focused on the unseen, never noticing the few students who were staring at the pair. His hand slid over hers and gave it a tight squeeze. "Your faith in me never ceases to amaze, Minerva, but can you not? Even the most altruistic of men have become tyrants in the name of peace. The Muggles got it right. Absolute power corrupts absolutely."

He fell silent and gripped her hand tighter, almost painfully. "Albus," she called his name softly. This was not the type of reaction she had been expecting, and his answers were worrying her. In that instant she would give anything to have her lighthearted man she had fallen so hard for back.

He turned toward her, and the concern that filled her emerald orbs seemed to bring him back to the present. "Do you see, my dear Minerva? You've always wondered why I'm my own boggart."

His voice dropped as he leaned in, the smell of sandalwood ensnaring her, enveloping her. She shuttered as his lips came to rest beside her ear, and his warm breath danced across her skin. "Given the right circumstances, I know exactly what I'm capable of, and it scares me to death. But," he said pulling back again, his voice returning to that light tone she knew best, "I have no reason to fear. As long as I have you, there is someone to keep my ego in check."

The bell rang, signaling the beginning of classes, but as the hall emptied around them, neither moved. Emotions crashed through her, each warring for dominance as his words sunk in. Minerva's hand surprised her and remained steady while it traveled up the length of his forearm and came to rest against his beard. She couldn't help marveling at the silky texture beneath her finger tips. "What am I going to do with you, Albus?" she breathed, staring into his eyes, becoming blissfully lost.

He grasped her hand, and brought it up to his lips, kissing her palm and allowing his tongue to dart across the sensitive skin. "I can think of one or two things," he dared. "We could discuss them tonight, perhaps over dinner in my chambers."

Minerva stared into his eyes that always reminded her of the summer sky, and she saw everything she hoped for, as well as a vulnerability that surprised her.

She mimicked his previous actions, only stopping for a light, but promising, kiss first before finally stopping beside his ear. "Perhaps," she whispered.

She was smiling as she got up and walked out of the Great Hall and headed toward her classroom for the first lesson of the day. Albus was still sitting in his chair, staring into space with a goofy grin plastered on his face, long after she had arrived.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 of 2

Time-Turners are delicate instruments. This is why.

Minerva sat back in her wooden chair as the last of the students filed out of her classroom, chatting excitedly amongst themselves. For the first time that any student could remember, Professor McGonagall had dismissed a class early and with no homework. As the last student shot a look at her from over his shoulder and walked out of the room, Minerva flicked her wand, shutting the door behind him.

Leaning back, the smile she had been fighting all day broke free. Years melted away as her eyes crinkled slightly at the edges and a happy flush took hold of her cheeks. She knew she was grinning like an idiot, but in that moment, she couldn't have cared less. She was a woman very much in love. She could still see the twinkle of his eyes and his smile as she had walked out of the hall that morning. She licked her lips slowly. 'I wonder if he always tastes of lemon,' she thought idly, letting the memory wash over her taste buds. The day was made all the better, because she knew he would stay, and she could find out first hand. The quiet chime of the clock brought her back, and she shook her head quickly, scattering her thoughts.

There was still one last thing she needed to do if she was going to get ready for dinner later that evening, and the sooner it was finished, the longer her bath could be. Reaching into her right drawer, Minerva wrapped her slim fingers around a thin chain and lifted it out. The gold glittered in the sunlight, and the hourglass hanging from it was heavy in her hands. She watched it sway softly back and forth, hypnotic in its own way, before she blinked.

It appeared as if she wouldn't have to wait another twenty years as she did last time before another exceptional student would ask for the device. Her thoughts wandered back to Miss Granger's misadventures with the small device, as well as her own as a student, and Minerva was willing to admit she was a little hesitant to risk it again. Even she had a limit before the grey hairs would begin to arrive, and the trio had all but reached it. Granted, Daniel Ives was nowhere near as involved as Miss Granger was, but somehow he could still find his fair share of adventure.

Pushing her chair back with an obnoxious scrape that set her teeth on edge, Minerva stood up and made her way toward the Charms classroom. Classes would be ending in a matter of minutes, and she wanted to catch the young man before he got lost in his afternoon pursuits. Wrapping the tiny hourglass tightly in her hand, Minerva stepped out into the corridor. She got as far as the staircase before she saw another soul, or in this case, a ghost.

Floating just above the ground and wearing one of Filch's mop buckets as a helmet, Peeves was busy attaching moustaches to various suits of armor that lined the long halls. Several of them were already done, and those that weren't were busy trying to block their visors. Unfortunately, they were far too rusty to put up much of a fight.

Minerva brought her hand up to cover her smile. The poltergeist was a pest, but she had to admit most of his pranks were funny, as long as you weren't on the receiving end. She still remembered the morning Albus came to the Great Hall with purple hair after Peeves had put dye in his shampoo bottle.

Schooling her features, Minerva moved silently to stand behind him while Peeves hummed a nonsense song to himself, getting glue everywhere. She leaned toward him, careful not to brush against him. She never could get used to the cold feeling touching a ghost produced. "Peeves, what are you doing?"

The poltergeist whirled around, the bottle of glue in one hand, a moustache in the other, and one plastered to his own face. The length of it would have done Albus proud. "Peeves is just redecorating Deputy, ma'am," Peeves drawled in his oily voice. There were only three people in the castle that he would never dare cross. Luckily, she happened to be one of them.

"What did Argus try to do this time?" she asked patiently. Peeves bobbed up and down and began waving his arms wildly, glue sloshing out over the edge of his can, falling on Minerva's shoes. He never seemed to notice.

"Peeves was only floating along, minding his own business, when Filchey decided to smack him with a broom."

"And where, exactly, were you floating?" Peeves mumbled a reply that sounded remarkably like, "the second floor women's bathroom." Minerva closed her eyes and pinched the bridge of her nose, trying to suppress a shudder. She made a mental note to talk to Argus in the morning, and find out exactly what he was doing in a woman's bathroom. Sometimes, that man could be down right disturbing.

"Peeves, I've told you before to stay out of our bathroom. No one wants to walk in and see you floating there with a camera. Especially," she said, looking down over the rim of her glasses, "when the pictures end up plastered all over the castle. And second, if you insist on punishing the caretaker, don't take it out on the armor. They haven't done anything to you. If you insist on being creative, please confine it to his office." The last bit she said with a smile. "Just don't tell him I sent you. You're not the only one he chases with a broom."

Taken aback, Peeves broke out in a toothy grin and saluted before turning tail and flying away in the direction of Argus' office.

When Peeves had finally turned the corner, Minerva finally chuckled before waving her wand and removing the offending facial hair from the row of armor. In thanks, the mind numbing sound of metal against metal filled the air as the armor came to attention before her, all helmets turning in her direction. "You're welcome, boys." She nodded.

Minerva turned on her heel, and stepped forward without thinking. To her surprise, there was nothing underneath it for her foot to land on. She had forgotten about the staircase until it was too late, and Minerva could feel herself pitch forward into the air.

Her normally superb balance failed her as she began to fall, and the world around her slowed to a crawl. Her heartbeat pounded in her ears, and her frantic breathing filled the air. It was almost as if she could see herself falling, arms flailing wildly, the shocked cries of the portraits following her.

Just as quickly, time seemed to speed up, and with a sickening thump and a single breath, there was darkness. The portraits watched, bewildered, as she landed in a heap of emerald robes before disappearing without a trace. None of them had seen the time tuner shatter beneath her. Minerva McGonagall was gone, and the bath would have to wait.

Minerva could feel consciousness seep into the recesses of her mind, pulling her out of the blissful nothingness that had enveloped her. Her mind was telling her that she was face down, and whatever was beneath her was cold, but that information made no sense. The cause of her odd situation came flooding back to her, and she waited a heartbeat, and then two, but there was nothing. Despite the fact that she had fallen down a flight of stairs and landed flat on her face, there was no pain.

Unable to believe it, Minerva opened her emerald eyes cautiously, almost afraid of what she would see. She was, indeed, lying on the stone floor at the base of the staircase, still very much in the castle. "So this is what being dead feels like," she thought humorlessly. She slowly drew her knees up underneath her, and let out a yelp when her hand landed in the shards of the broken Time-Turner. Turning her hands over, she was surprised to see the little shards of glass the protruded from the very palm Albus had kissed to tenderly just a few hours before. She watched, fascinated, as the pain increased along with the tiny drops of blood. "Well, there goes that theory," she said wryly.

Deciding it would just be faster, Minerva got her feet, careful to avoid the rest of the glass, and walked back up the stairs, toward the hospital wing. There was no point in going to see Mr. Ives now, and the hospital wing was on the way to Minerva's chambers. Minerva trudged along the empty corridors, cursing her own stupidity, when she passed a window overlooking the grounds. She took another two or three steps before she stopped and turned back. Not sure of what she had seen, Minerva walked back to the window and looked down, not believing what her eyes told her.

Instead of the vast sea of green that the window normally overlooked, Minerva saw rows upon rows of dirt strips. At the end of each strip, there was a single wooden post with a dummy tied to it. They were life sized, and if it weren't for the way they swung in the wind, Minerva would have been sure they were students.

More confused than she could ever remember, Minerva's steps increased on her way to see the nurse. Perhaps she had hit her head going down after all, but for the first time, Minerva could sense unease in the pit of her stomach. The normal calming hum of the castle's magic was different. It had changed in a way she couldn't name, heavier, more sinister.

Looking around, Minerva began to notice other differences as well. The usual portraits had disappeared; all of them had been replaced with landscapes or removed all together. 'What the hell is going on,' Minerva wondered. She needed to see Poppy, and then a trip to Albus' office was in order. She couldn't have been unconscious long enough for anything serious to have happened, could she? And where had those dummies come from? Too many questions, and not enough answers flowed through her head.

Minerva reached the ward and entered without knocking. "Madam Pomfrey," she called out, just in case students were about. "You know the rules, if you're conscious, you're well enough for classes." A woman came bustling around the corner, but Minerva couldn't believe her eyes. It was Poppy Pomfrey, of that Minerva was certain, but the woman couldn't have looked more different. Instead of the slightly plump woman she had seen at breakfast, Minerva looked at a wisp of a woman. Circles, black as night, ringed her eyes, and wrinkles invaded every inch of her face.

Poppy came bustling toward her, not bothering to look up from the stack of supplies in her arms. "Didn't you hear me? Back to class with you. Tell your classmates to bring you back if it gets worse." She continued on her way and began stocking the shelves. Minerva stood rooted to the spot, her mouth agape, as she tried to put the words together.

The only thing she managed to sputter out was, "Poppy!"

The other woman stopped, her hand hovering in the air, before she set the flask down gently and turned around. She looked back at Minerva with cold, unfeeling eyes. "Who are you?" Her words were harsh, and Minerva visibly flinched.

"Poppy, this isn't funny. What's..." but she was cut off. For the second time in her life, Minerva was silenced as a red light streaked toward her, and she fell to the ground.

Minerva groaned as again, she flitted back to consciousness, but this time, it was far from painless. Her head was pounding in time with the throb in her hand, and her shoulders were sore from being wrenched behind her. She could hear voices, all recognizable, but inconceivable given her present circumstances.

Opening her eyes just enough to see, she listened. "I've tried every counter charm I know headmaster, and made up a few just for good measure, and I'm telling you. It's not a glamour. It's been too long for it to be Polyjuice, so I don't know how she's done it."

Minerva would recognize Filius' squeaky voice anywhere, but she couldn't understand why Albus would have her tied up and left on the floor. She was shocked when the second voice spoke, and it wasn't Albus. "That does me no good, Filius," Severus drawled. "What I want to know is who she is, and how she got into my castle. If she's a member of the underground, I need to know why she's here. Do whatever you deem necessary, but I want the answers by dinner tonight."

"If I may, headmaster," Poppy interjected. "I have another idea. She was already bleeding, so I ran it against Minerva's old medical file. I hadn't been able to get rid of it after... Well, when I ran the comparison, it was a match. I don't know how or why, but that is Minerva McGonagall. I suggest we turn her over to the Praetorian Guard. They can take her to the Minister. I'm sure, if nothing else, he can get the information you require with... the least amount of discomfort for her."

Severus looked across the room at Minerva's body before nodding. "Alright, Filius, call the guard and inform the Minister. I take it you've already healed her hand, Poppy?"

"Of course." She sounded indignant. "Some things don't change, headmaster."

"And others do, despite our best efforts. Get her ready for transport."

Poppy waited until Severus left before turning and stopping at Minerva's side. "You can open your eyes; I know you're awake." Minerva blinked and looked up at a visibly suspicious nurse.

"Poppy, what is going on?"

Poppy just shook her head, pulling Minerva to her feet. Minerva heard her mutter a few words, and the pain in her head and shoulders disappeared. "The Praetorian will be here soon," Poppy said quickly. "I don't know who or what you are, but listen to me. Do not say a word until you reach the Minister's office. I don't know how you got here, but even the trees have ears." Her eyes shifted across the room before falling back on Minerva. "If you really are Min, then do as I told you. This isn't the same world you left. Remember, not a word."

Soon, a group of men, many of whom she recognized from the Auror office, arrived and carried her away. The trip was as uneventful as it could be. She followed Poppy's advice and remained silent in the face of their questions.

They arrived by Floo powder in the Ministry, and she was quickly brought to the Minister's office. She still couldn't understand what was happening, or why she was standing outside the Minister's office when one had yet to be elected.

Things were happening too fast for her mind to register everything, but nothing could have prepared her for what awaited them beyond the door. With a quick knock, the thick oak door swung open, and Minerva was unceremoniously pushed into the office. A lone person stood, his back to her, staring out the window. He had silver hair, trimmed short and close to his head. He was tall and broad shouldered, and, instead of robes, he wore a something that looked like black armor.

Minerva couldn't help but gasp when he turned around, her heart dropping to the ground and shattering. "Albus!"