

Finding Forgiveness

by karelia

Minerva's thoughts and actions during Deathly Hallows in fifteen 100-word segments.

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Disclaimer: Ownership is so 20th Century.

She frowned. "Are you all right, Severus?"

His head whipped around, eyes frantically searching for any presence left in the staff room. He marginally relaxed and didn't even sneer when Minerva said, "Do you think I'm so stupid as to speak to you in this manner in anyone's presence? Grant me some thoughtfulness." The expression on her face matched the tart nuance of her voice.

"I'm... fine, Minerva. As all right as one can possibly be in a situation like this..." His sigh was heavy, but his voice distinctly lacked the hopelessness she'd become used to hearing since Voldemort's return.

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Her heart went out to him. She wasn't sure she could forgive him for his worst deed, but she'd paid sufficient attention to know that he tried everything imaginable to shield the students from the wrath of the Death Eater couple and allowed for the possibility that she hadn't been privy to all of Dumbledore's schemings.

She nodded curtly. "If you need anything, you know where to find me."

Back in her office, Minerva pondered the encounter and decided that she was curious enough to place a tracking spell on him. Something about Severus had changed, and she was curious.

She'd been waiting for three weeks and had occasionally wondered if her hunch had been correct. She was certain he hadn't discovered the tracking spell; the spell would have alerted her of that. But the only trip he'd taken in those weeks was to his remaining master.

Finally, the spell informed her that he was making his way away from the castle, and she quickly grabbed her winter cloak, stepped into her boots, and cast a Disillusionment Charm on herself. Then, she followed him at a safe distance out into the grounds, out of the gate, and towards the village.

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When he Disapparated mere steps from reaching Hogsmeade, she counted to twelve and murmured, *Exsequor*." The spell instantly Apparated her to his new location.

Stonehenge. How curious. Minerva headed for the nearest stone to hide behind. The shadows fell on the wrong side of it, but it was still safer that way, just in case the

Charm failed. One never knew with Death Eaters on the loose all over Britain, though she doubted their tactics had any effect in a place like Stonehenge. They probably stayed away from it, unable to cope with the strong energy surrounding the ancient site.

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From her position of relative safety, Minerva observed Snape embracing someone. *Does he finally have a partner...?*

She cast a Charm to hear better...

... and gasped.

"Hermione." His face buried in her hair. "Nobody followed you?"

Minerva's star pupil looked up into the headmaster's eyes. "You know I take precautions. Are you all right? I've been worried about you!" She leant her head against his chest, and his hands moved to stroke her hair, a gesture Minerva had never seen him make, but judging by his confidence, it wasn't a first. *I never knew he had a tender side...*

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His sigh sounded content. "I am now," he said. "I'd love to hide you within Hogwarts, but I know your path to follow is as important as mine. Maybe, one day, we'll be free."

Hermione raised her head to meet his eyes; then, she planted a chaste kiss on his chin. "Yes. Never doubt that, Severus! We will be free! Free of any master, free of any pretence! Never doubt it..." Her last words were mere whispers, and her head leant against his chest again. And again he stroked her hair.

"Yes. We will be free," he whispered. "Never fear."

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He briefly rummaged in his cloak and handed her a small, wooden box. "Here. This should be plenty enough for a few dinners for the three of you."

Hermione took the box and opened it. Her face lit up. "Spaghetti! And Parmesan cheese! What would I do without you?"

His lip turned upward. "You'd probably learn to find edible things in the wild much quicker."

She smiled at him. "Thank you! Harry and Ron are a lot easier to cope with if they aren't hungry."

"I can well imagine," he said, amusement evident in his voice. "I have another solution."

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His hand pulled out a piece of parchment.

Hermione's eyes widened. "Your mother's home?"

Minerva suppressed a gasp. *Eileen alive...?* The scene in front of her was bizarre.

Severus nodded. "You can't miss it; it's the only lavender-painted front in Tintagel."

"But I can't just turn up there!"

"I've informed her that you may turn up. She's aware you'll be hungry or need a shower, so don't feel the need to be polite. She's lived Secret-Kept since I joined Dumbledore's side; she'll enjoy company." He embraced her again. "Don't worry. She's much easier to get on with than I am."

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"Why, that's a relief," Hermione said, grinning at him. Then her face turned serious. "I should really go before Harry and Ron send out a search party for me."

"Do be careful," he said and watched as she Disappeared, his expression unreadable. Minerva thought she detected some pain, perhaps a little longing, but most of all, hope in it.

When Severus finally Disappeared, Minerva let herself slide down the south-facing stone behind which she'd hidden. Her first deed was to cancel the location spell on Severus; next, she spent a long while contemplating what she'd witnessed before returning to Hogwarts.

"What do you think you're doing here, Miss Granger?" Madam Pomfrey asked in an indignant tone.

"Ensuring nobody comes in here to kill him," Hermione replied tartly.

"Let her stay, Poppy." Minerva nodded at her former student. "It'll be good for him."

Madam Pomfrey cast a questioning glance at the just reinstated headmistress; then she shrugged. "If you say so." She left Snape's bedside and turned her concentration to other battle-scarred patients.

"Thank you." A small smile played around Hermione's lips. "Professor," she stopped and took a deep breath, "Eileen asked me to send her regards at the earliest opportunity."

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Minerva swallowed. "How is she?"

"She is well."

Minerva was about to give up when the young witch spoke again.

"I know you followed us to Stonehenge, Professor. A few days later, I visited Eileen for the first time, and Severus had left a letter for me, informing me that you had spied on him."

Minerva's eyes widened. "I was so worried at the time. I knew something had changed about him, and I was quite certain he was still on our side, considering how he protected the children from the Carrows. But I had to satisfy my curiosity because..."

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"Because you did not trust him completely," Hermione finished, and Minerva was surprised that there was no bite or accusation in her voice. "It's all right. We understand."

"I owe him an apology or five." Her voice was soft.

The younger witch lightly patted her arm. "An apology won't go amiss. As long as you mean it." Looking at her intently, she added, "He's had a rough time, what with all the doubts from the side of the Order, even though he completely understands their reactions."

Minerva shook her head. "I wonder if Albus realises what he did... Maybe not..."

Hours later, Hermione stuck her head through the fireplace of the headmistress's office. "Professor McGonagall, Severus is awake if you wish to speak to him."

"Thank you."

Minerva's pace slowed as she neared the hospital wing. Eventually, her shoulders straightened, and with renewed vigour, she entered in her normal brisk manner.

"Severus!" Relief washed over her as she realised that he would not only survive but heal completely from the snake bite; he was sitting in bed. Gauging his mood, she smiled reluctantly. "How are you?" For the first time in a long while, it was not a rhetorical question.

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His sigh was long-suffering, but there was a new lightness to it. "Can we do away with the formalities now, Minerva? Yes, I'm aware you followed me to Stonehenge and discovered us. Thank you for never mentioning it."

"I apologise, Severus. I never *meant* to pry on your life, but I was unable to help myself at the time. I just knew something had changed and hoped to Merlin you hadn't finally defected to... *his* side." She stopped momentarily. "I wasn't certain I could forgive you then; now, I'm not certain I can forgive Albus for putting you through hell."

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Severus Snape smiled. A genuine smile that took years off his age. "You know... one of the first things I learned from Hermione is that if you can forgive, your world will be a much better place. You may wish to take out a leaf of her wisdom."

Unable to contain a smile herself, Minerva met his eyes. "What a formidable witch you have in her, Severus. I'm happy for you."

"As am I," Severus said softly. Then he straightened. "She's annoying, of course. Insists we invite you to our handfasting."

Minerva smiled. "Wonderful! I'd not miss it for anything."

A/N: Grateful thanks to kittylefish for the fast beta and coming up with the perfect title.

Prompt from Stefdarlin: McGonagall, Stonehenge, shadows