

Fair

by JackieJLH

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Author's Notes: Many, many thanks to Annie Talbot for donating large portions of dialogue to this story when I was freaking out about deadlines. You have my undying gratitude, my dear. This story was originally written as a giftfic on LJ's hp_holidaygen community.

"Well, Potter, Malfoy, I think you ought to be outside on a glorious day like this," Professor McGonagall continued briskly.

Harry did not need telling twice. He thrust his wand back inside his robes and headed straight for the front doors without another glance at Snape and Malfoy.

(Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix, JK Rowling, 2003)

"I fear for that boy," Minerva mused, looking after Harry as he exited into the bright sunlight.

"I fear for them all," was Snape's quiet response, his gaze fixed on the doorway through which Malfoy had passed, heading in the direction of the dungeons despite Minerva's suggestion. When Severus turned back to his colleague, she was watching him with a tender expression.

"How badly were the others injured?" she asked, though he got the distinct impression that she'd intended to ask something else entirely. "I could tell that Albus was downplaying things to keep from worrying me. I swear, the man forgets I'm no longer his student to protect, sometimes."

"Nowhere near as badly as they could have been or deserved, really. The Weasley girl, Lovegood, and Longbottom didn't even spend a night in the Hospital Wing. I had to spend an hour inside the Weasley boy's mind, separating the invasive thoughts from his own; I never want to do that again." He shuddered, and Minerva winced in sympathy. "I don't know what was more disturbing; the chaos that is his natural state or the extremely well organized intentions of the invaders. At least they were easy to identify. And there was no risk of erroneously removing any of the boy's higher reasoning abilities, as he doesn't seem to have ever possessed any."

Minerva smiled, glancing around the empty hall briefly before laying her hand on his arm. "Thank you, Severus. I understand you helped Poppy with Miss Granger, as well."

"The silly girl got in the way of Dolohov's Implosion Curse. Fortunately, it was silently cast, else she'd have bled to death internally long before I got to her." He paused, swallowing. "Lovegood did a decent job of keeping her stable until help arrived." Rather too good of a job; that sort of thing wasn't taught in any of her classes. He made a mental note to mention the girl's talent to Filius, though he imagined it would be a pointless effort—Lovegood would certainly make an excellent Healer one day, but having

taught her for five years, Severus was reasonably sure the girl would instead decide on some insane career researching non-exist creatures, or something equally ridiculous.

"So I hear," Minerva replied, drawing his attention back to the conversation. "I'd say I was surprised to hear she'd managed such a thing, but nothing Luna Lovegood does truly surprises me anymore."

They stood in silence for a long moment, she leaning on the cane she loathed, him shifting his weight from foot to foot. A burst of laughter escaped from somewhere down the hall, then was abruptly cut off by the sound of a closing door.

Severus glanced around again, then frowned and bit out, "What were you *thinking*?" The words seemed to burst out of him, despite her shush and quick glance around. He dropped his voice and continued, his tone infused with exasperation. "How could you have gone out there that night? Directly defied her like that? You could have been killed. You almost *were*."

A blush tinted Minerva's cheeks for just a moment, her lips pursing out of habit more than irritation. "It was six to one odds, Severus. How could *not* have intervened?"

"With that example, who can be surprised that Potter's next move was to hop on a Thestral and go gallivanting off to London to save his mongrel godfather. You should be teaching them caution."

She was silent, her eyes looking anywhere but at him. He had a point—of course he did—and yet, she couldn't say she thought he was necessarily *right*, either.

"You could have died," he pressed on, the barest hint of concern in his voice, and her expression softened.

"Yes, as could have Hagrid," she replied reasonably. "And what about you, following Dolores and Potter and Granger into the Forbidden Forest? Apart from the risks of the place, so ably demonstrated by the centaurs, what did you intend to do if you'd found them together?"

Snape shifted but said nothing, obviously not pleased with the turn the conversation had taken.

"You were going to intervene, weren't you?" she asked, her tone suggesting that she already knew the answer. "Even more than the warning you'd already delivered to the Order, you were going to defy Dumbledore and save Potter and Granger from Dolores Umbridge."

Severus opened his mouth to respond, then fell silent as a handful of students wandered by. They hurried through to the Great Hall at the sight of Snape's irritated glare.

"I don't know what I was going to do," he admitted once they were again alone. He looked even more sour than usual. Minerva smiled.

"I do. And I thank you, Severus."

He huffed. "It's nothing. I did nothing." His gaze sharpened. "Should you be out of bed? Your colour is terrible."

She nearly rolled her eyes at the tactless and obvious attempt to change the topic of conversation, but decided to humour him. "I'll rest soon enough. What I'd really like now is a nice cup of tea with a tot of Laphroig. Would you like to join me?"

Severus let out a short bark of laughter, shaking his head. "Hardly. I have brewing to do. I'll see you settled in your rooms, though." He offered his arm, pretending not to notice the way the muscles in her arms tensed with each step forward.

Minerva in any sort of weakened state was disconcerting because despite her age, he'd always rather thought of her as the one person most likely to survive the war, if only by the sheer force of her own will. And yet, she *had* returned, and in less time than the Healers had recommended, if Albus was to be believed. Though Severus would never admit it, that thought was oddly comforting.

As they crossed slowly to the staircase, she murmured something under her breath.

"Excuse me?" He bent his head, trying to catch her words.

"Nothing, Severus," she said with a warm smile and a slight shake of her head. "Thank you for your assistance."

Behind them, emeralds shifted silently into the bottom half of the hourglass, adding fifty points to Slytherin House's total.

Fair was fair, after all.