

His Eulogy, Her Goodbye

by Keppiehed

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Prompt Author: Lokifan

Prompt: Minerva gives the eulogy at Snape's funeral; among other things, she talks about their relationship. Afterwards she remembers how it really happened.

Kinks: Minerva privately thinking sourly of mini!Snape; a moment where she really tells Dumbledore off for his behaviour If you go for a relationship, I'd like Snape to surprise her with a bit of take-chargeness (though I Am So Dom-ness)

Author Notes: This was written for Minervafest from the prompt list above. I was away from my computer when I wrote it, and when I returned I realized that I didn't stick as closely to the prompts as I normally would. I ended up liking the story and decided to keep it, so I really hope that this doesn't disappoint you! Thanks so much for an *awesome* idea, I thoroughly enjoyed writing this. Also, I would be remiss if I did not sing the praises of my enormously talented beta, Literaryspell, without whom which I would be nothing. You know I love you more than I can say.

Today was the day. Minerva swallowed her grief until it was a bitter stone in her gut and made herself ready. She was determined to play the part, today of all days. He deserved more than a public display of sorrow; he deserved dignity, and that was what he would have. Minerva was resolved to ignore the shaking in her hands as she fastened the collar on her robe. She was foregoing her usual plaid in favour of black, as was custom. Black today and on all days. She didn't usually tend towards dramatic displays, but she could take comfort in some of the antiquated customs. She would be in mourning a lot longer than anyone might anticipate, but who would notice the colour of an old woman's collar? Minerva buttoned it right up to her chin.

Her coat of arms came next: a thistle from the heartland of Scotland. It was a silver brooch that she pinned at her shoulder. It would be the only relief against the sombre dress today. She hadn't been without her family's crest since she had left her home so long ago. And she wouldn't leave it behind today. She was still herself, after all. She cast a glance at the Gryffindor Lion, a ring that had been commissioned for her when she had become Head of her House. She left it in the dish where it rested. Her knuckles were too swollen now, and she hadn't the heart to wear it anyway. Some things demanded respect. She took comfort in the austerity of her dress. It somehow made her feel closer to him.

It didn't take as many pins these days to put her hair up into its bun; the silver strands were still long, but growing sparser every year. Minerva twisted them up expertly and made the style as plain as she could. The grey hairs complied without their usual resistance...even her tresses seemed to have lost their spirit today. Minerva's shoulders slumped for a moment, one long hank curled around her fist. The most unexpected things brought about a memory, didn't they? She was reminded of the time, early in his days as a teacher, when he had caught her with her hair down. She didn't know who had been more surprised: her at seeing him with such an unguarded expression, or him at seeing her as a 'regular' person.

"You ... you have red hair!" he'd spluttered.

Her eyes had spat blue fire at him, although she had been amused. "Did you think I was hairless under my hat, Severus? I assure you, I am every bit as much a woman as any other."

Minerva smiled now, remembering how fast he'd whirled around and left her standing there. She imagined he'd blushed, but he hadn't let her see it, of course. He had always been quick to hide anything he deemed a weakness. That exchange had prompted her to tweak his nose every chance she got. Not many people realized that Minerva McGonagall hid a bit of a teasing spirit, and she saw in Severus a kindred soul. She trusted him not to take things too far, and he was a great conspirator and friend. *Had been.*

Minerva's smile faded. She sank to the little stool in front of the vanity and gazed at herself in the mirror. Why had she not admitted to herself how much she had feared this day? More than her own death knell, this day had terrified her. The loss of her friend, her dearest friend. She couldn't bear the pain of it. Too great was the grievance. Never had she been able to claim the title of coward until this day, but she knew now that this was a task she did not want to face. Life without him to brighten it was unthinkable.

Somehow she must find the strength. Minerva squared her shoulders and looked at herself, but underneath the bravado that had always gotten her through she could see sadness staring back. It was so obvious, how would no one notice? She was broken, there for the world to see. She had lived to see the darkest times in wizarding history with nary a tremble, but this...this was beyond her. Her heart was shattered and showing in her eyes. Minerva closed them. Her will had never left her before. It couldn't today. She would have to find her steel.

The index cards were on the table. Minerva reached out and took them in hand. The white edges stood out in stark relief against her palms, which clutched desperately at them as if they held all the answers she might ever need. She knew the words on them, she had written every one, but she knew there were no answers there to be found. The letters swam before her eyes, and she saw her own hands around the cards, withered and aged. A crone's hands. When had that happened? She was so old now, so tired. He had never seen her that way.

A knock sounded on the door. "Professor?" The voice was muffled. "It's time."

"Yes, I'm ready," she called absentmindedly. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The door to her room opened, and none other than Harry Potter entered. Harry had become a celebrity since the war and was very selective about whom he visited. He was still a sweet young man, and a bit shy. He was uncomfortable with the glare of the limelight, which didn't seem to be fading as the years passed. He still made time to come by and see Minerva, and she was glad that he trusted her enough to spend time with her occasionally. Of course he would be present today. There was no one whom he had revered more than Severus, once the intricacies of Albus' plotting had revealed themselves in time.

Minerva took a breath and turned from the vanity. She feared her legs wouldn't support her.

Harry seemed to guess and was there by her side in an instant for support. "Are you managing, Professor?" he asked quietly.

No one called her that except Harry. And *him*. She had been Headmistress for years before her retirement. Minerva bit the inside of her lip to forestall the flood of tears that threatened to give her away. *She had promised not to cry*. She had to get a hold of herself. She couldn't fall apart now! Minerva turned her head and pressed her lips together. After a moment, she was able to force the rising tide of grief back down where it belonged, somewhere deep inside. It might never go away, but she could push it into the recesses for the time being.

"Of course, Mr. Potter. I am mourning a great loss today. As are we all," she said in a cool, clear voice. She was proud that the only waver was in the beginning, and perhaps that might be attributed to her age and not her emotional state.

Harry was good enough to nod in acceptance. "Yes, we are. Some more than others." He held out an arm. "I am sorry to have to accompany you to this occasion, but I am glad that I could be here for you in your time of need. Please know that you can call upon me for anything, ever, Professor. You know we all loved him, but I know your loss to be especially great, and I want you to know that Ginny and I are here should you need us."

Minerva gasped and craned her neck back to fix Harry with a sharp frown. "Mr. Potter! Don't think that you may speak to me in such a condescending manner in my old age! I appreciate your condolences, as I offer the same to you. As for the rest of your sentiment, you may keep it to yourself, as I don't know what you may be referring to or implying."

"Don't you?" Harry narrowed his eyes in consideration. He waited a long moment, then seemed to deflate. "Of course I meant no disrespect, Professor. I must be out of sorts today."

Minerva gave a brisk nod. "Let us be on our way."

Harry, thankfully, said no more as they made their way to the courtyard, which had been set up especially for the memorial service. There had been too many people who had wanted to attend to even think of holding it indoors. The charms that had been set up in case of inclement weather were not needed. Minerva blinked up at the non-compliant sun; it seemed a travesty that it could still shine so brilliantly as it had in the past. As if to be contrary, there was not even a cloud in the sky, the unbroken blue a thing of beauty to behold. Intense anger swelled up from the dark place in Minerva's breast, and she wanted to shriek and tear the very hat off her head. How was it fair that there could be such a perfect day just over here, ticking by, without him in it to witness? The injustice of it choked her, and she wanted nothing more than to run away from the crowd, to never see the faces again. She was seized with a violent whimsy to stamp around and scream to the heavens to rain down upon them all. Minerva imagined them all getting drenched and thundered on with some sort of savage satisfaction. This mild weather seemed an insult to death. Or life. Or her.

Instead of running away as she was wanted to do, she clenched her fists and pasted an appropriate smile on. She climbed the dais with the help of Harry and stood before the assemblage. Her own wand made the Sonorous charm to amplify her voice. If it was as though someone had cast an *Aresto Momentum*, then it was only her imagination, Minerva told herself. This was real. This was happening. She must do this thing, and do it well. She withdrew the cards from her pocket and began.

The words tumbled forth, smooth as honey. The welcoming, like it was a party they all wanted to be at. Minerva kept her face impassive. Years of hiding her thoughts and emotions were her only saving grace now. The bitterness threatened to overwhelm her, but there was not even a tremble in her tone as she regaled the assemblage of the deeds and life of the Great Severus Snape. That it wasn't really him she was talking about was both a service and an injustice to him. Only she would know the real him. It was the tragedy of it all. And his gift.

"Those of you who knew Severus knew what a talent he had for Potions." There was a gentle tittering at the obvious understatement.

But not at first. When she had been his teacher, Potions had been his worst subject. He had worked hard to be good at that. It was only because he had been so terrible at it and nearly failed his first year that he had resolved to become a success. And he had found a hidden talent. It seemed that he had been a genius all along, but only Minerva remembered way back in those early years that it had been a struggle, that it hadn't come as easy as it seemed now. So no. He wasn't so gifted. He had been a hard worker who hid what wasn't effortless.

"And of course you know how studious he was. His favourite pastime was reading, and he was well-known for his extensive personal library ..."

It was only because she was getting older by then and couldn't sleep herself that she had taken to walking the grounds at odd hours. The students were confined to their quarters, so she was free in the dead of night to walk. It was soothing, and she found herself taking all the routes at least once. The noiseless shadow on the Quidditch pitch had scared her.

"Minerva," he'd said.

"Severus!" Minerva couldn't have been more shocked. There was the resident Potions professor, perched upon a broom in the dead of night, a beater in his hand as casually as if he'd been playing all his life. "What in Merlin's name are you doing here?"

"I might ask the same of you," he said.

Aware of his gaze, she clutched her wrap around her. "But you didn't. I asked first." She grimaced inwardly at her distinct lack of wits. Why was she so addled?

"I quite enjoy Quidditch practice. I always have, but I prefer solitary flight. I never was much of a team player, so I bat the Quaffle at night. I enjoy the freedom of it. Is there a problem with that?" He leaned forward on the broom and guided it closer to her.

"Not at all. I am just surprised by your ... habits, that's all," she managed.

"I don't care to advertise my ... habits to everyone. That doesn't mean I have none." He brought the broom to rest on the ground, an undecipherable look in his eyes.

Minerva didn't know why she was so skittish, but she suddenly felt out of her element. "Yes, well, enjoy your game," she said and turned to go.

"Minerva?"

His voice froze her in her tracks.

"Yes?" She couldn't meet his eye.

"I didn't scare you, did I?" Severus cocked his head.

Minerva felt her mouth run dry.

"On the broom just now, I mean. When you thought you were walking alone." He smiled that little half smile, where the corners of his lips quirked up but didn't show his teeth.

Minerva felt like she had been let off the hook. For some reason, she had the impression they had been talking about something else entirely, but now they were on firmer ground. She could banter with the best of them, but flirting...if that was what this was, as if he would ever be interested...she was at a complete loss. Not that she would ever let on about that fact to him. She tossed her head. "It takes more than the likes of you to scare me, Severus Snape. And don't you forget it!" She whirled away, but she could just make out his soft reply in the wind.

"I won't forget anything, Minerva."

Her heart pounded in her chest as she tried not to run back to the safety of her room. She always took a different path from then on...one that didn't go directly by the Quidditch pitch, but that kept it in sight.

"If you knew Severus well or only by reputation, you know that he was a fair man, and that he valued justice above all else in his life."

"Ten points from Gryffindor!" "Twenty points goes to Slytherin."

Minerva paused and took a sip of water after that statement to hide her smile. He had always been an unmitigated cheat when it came to House points. It was well known that he was absolutely the worst nepotist in that regard. The students were always complaining, and it was the teachers' jobs to stand up for each other, but he had a reputation that was unparalleled even amongst the staff for favouritism. His Slytherins got preferential treatment, and that was that. There were times that Minerva's blood had boiled, and one early year there had been a war between them that had resulted in some spectacular point gouging and inflating on both sides. In the end, Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff had tied for the win, and that was only because Albus had stepped in at the last moment and suspended them from the ridiculous battle. It had been a lesson in humiliation that she would never forget, and she had never abused the point system again, but Severus had always been free with his awards...and his punishments. Let others say what they would, but she would always know that side of him. He liked to win, damn it!

"The students among us, both past and present, can remember Professor Snape as one of the finest teachers that the institution of Hogwarts has had the honour of claiming as its own."

"Minerva, they detest me. That is not a hyperbole. And to be honest, I rather think that they are beastly, as well. I don't think I am cut out for this job."

"Pish-tosh, Severus. They're only children. They don't know what they hate. And you are very good at what you do. I can't think of anything you could be more suited to. Check." Minerva took a sip of her chamomile tea.

Severus glared at the board. He hadn't been giving it his full attention, and now his king was in peril. Minerva hid a smile behind the rim of her teacup. He was going to be in Checkmate in about five moves, unless he moved the rook, but he was obviously distracted. Normally they were well matched, the winner unpredictable until it played out. Severus' hand hovered over the rook, then he frowned. "You know it isn't true. I don't want to be placated. They are more than children; they are the spawn of some kind of demon I haven't yet met. Nor do I want to. And they don't wish to learn about Potions. How am I to interest them in something they want to learn nothing about?" He sighed and moved the bishop.

"Now, Severus, it isn't that bad. Don't you remember being young once? I suppose you wanted to learn about everything your teachers taught you?" She gave him a pointed glance, knowing the opposite to be true, and neatly took his knight instead. She had been wrong. He was going to lose in less than five. "Check."

"Merlin's..." Severus clenched his fist when he saw the board. "You are going to win this time," he said after a pause.

She nodded. "I saw it coming," she admitted.

He laughed. "And humble, too." He knocked over his king. "Really, though. I am pretty much universally derided. I don't suppose you ever feel that way?"

She met his gaze. "Every day. Just keep doing it. You never know what life will bring you, Severus. You don't know which student will be the one to walk through your door and change your life. But you will have one." She had the strangest urge to reach out and cover his hand with hers. She extended her arm and they both watched her hand hover, but at the last moment she lost her nerve and plucked at a pawn instead. "Play again?"

He lifted an eyebrow. "I suppose that's all I can do."

"I don't need to say this, but I will, because on a day like today the words cannot go unsaid. The fact must be acknowledged that although Severus was uncomfortable with accolades, he was a hero to us, a hero in the truest sense of the word ..."

"People say 'hero' to make themselves feel better. Such a tidy justification, such an easy, blunt word. All tied up, pretty as a picture. But it isn't that simple. They don't want to think about the price of heroism, do they? The lives lost? The guilt. That I rotted on the inside for years!" Severus, shouting. "All the years of their disdain. I am gangrenous inside...do you know how that feels? And they think a shining crown of laurels, the key to the city with a pretty bow around it can hide all the fester that they put there! Well, I won't do it! I won't be their hero for them, just to assuage their wounds! I killed for the public, I made them safe, but I will never be the same! I'll never be the same ..." The choking whimpers of a dam breaking, of a man who had finally been broken.

And she held him while he cried, the only one to ever see that sight. The only person he ever let see.

"And some of you were lucky enough to know Severus as a friend. Not as all of the things I mentioned...the public figure, the teacher, the hero, though all of those things are so great in their own regard. The lucky few that knew him as those things and more, as the man...the friend...will be the ones to suffer the greatest loss today."

"Isn't there someone that you want me to call?"

"No. There is no one...save you."

"But you have had so many friends in your life. You will want to see them one last time. There is still time, Severus. Think of everyone..."

"There is no one."

"Nonsense. At least consider Harry. He is as a son to you!" Minerva couldn't help the tears. "Don't do this."

"Minerva, look at me. There is no one, has never been anyone, but you. I have no friends, no family. It's only ever been you. I want you here in my last hours. Yours is the hand I want to hold. Yours is the face I want to see when I depart. I want no other. Do you understand? Do you see, at long last?" He could barely speak. His beautiful dark voice had faded, but he was intent.

Minerva couldn't see through the blur. "Why didn't you ever say? All these wasted years..."

"Did I have to say the words? And not wasted. Never wasted." He closed his eyes. "Never wasted. Please don't cry for me. Promise that."

She sniffed. That was something she could do. "I promise."

"Good." He drifted off to sleep.

"For now," she whispered.

Harry was there to help her from the podium. She did need a hand. It had been a long speech, and she had been standing for some time. He leaned down to whisper in her ear. "You did him proud, Professor. It was a lovely and heartfelt eulogy. No one knew him better than you did."

"Not at all, Mr. Potter. We all have our fond memories of him. I'm sure that you could tell quite a few stories that would surprise us." Minerva didn't have the heart to put conviction behind it.

"Yes, well, I'd like if you came back to the house with Ginny and me. We are hosting a dinner in his memory, and I'd love to tell stories about him and have it be a night all about him. I know that this is a sad day, but we'd like to make tonight a celebration of all of the good times with him. There were so many. It wouldn't be complete without you. Please come." Harry smiled in earnest.

"Oh, Mr. Potter. I thank you so much for your invitation, but I am afraid I must decline. This has been a long day for me. These bones are older than they used to be, and all I am going to be doing is going to bed. You are a dear to think of me, though." Minerva squeezed his arm.

"If you're sure," Harry said.

"Very," Minerva replied.

Harry saw her back to her room, and it was only after she was sure that the latch had shut that she let the first of many tears fall. She had kept her promise to him, but now it was her time. And she had a lot of crying to do.

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Minerva awoke from where she had fallen asleep on the bed with a stiff neck. She hadn't felt this restless in years. In the past when she couldn't stand being in her own skin and the walls of her room seemed to close in around her, she went for a walk. She decided to do the same now. She wasn't fool enough to think that the emptiness wouldn't follow, but she couldn't stay here a minute longer with her gloomy thoughts.

The shortest route around the castle was the one that took her past the Quidditch stadium. Minerva stopped in her tracks when she saw it, the towers standing tall in the distance. Of course she had been on the Quidditch pitch hundreds of times, but never at night like this. It was always associated with ... him. She couldn't help the dark rise of helpless anguish that swelled from her ruined heart. What had once been love was now a poison. It was consuming her like a sickness, this grief. She didn't want to eat or breathe or move anymore. She wished she would just ... vanish.

Minerva tried it. She squeezed her eyes as tightly shut as she could and halted her breath until the world seemed to pause with her. It worked. It almost worked. She couldn't feel. He wasn't here. She was gone from this place.

But she had to open her eyes, and when she did, all the foolish magic in the world couldn't help her as she stood there, smaller than a grain of sand on a beach. Of course she was still there, and he was still dead, and the wound in her heart was bleeding as fresh as if it had been cut by Voldemort himself. And she had never been this silly. Not even as a young girl. She couldn't start now.

The spectators' towers loomed above, and she knew that she couldn't avoid everything that reminded her of him, or she'd never leave her room. And even there ... she had her mind, and he was in there. In every thought and every breath. In the motes of dust that danced in the sunlight, in the darkness and in the dreaming. He was there. He always would be. So though he was gone, he really was with her. She had to face this. It wouldn't get easier until she accepted his loss. And Minerva had never been a coward in her life. She couldn't very well start today, of all days.

Minerva took the first step that led her onto the darkened stadium field. Her nerves were taut as she stood on the edge of the lines, right where she had first been shocked into seeing Severus on a broom, in a new light, all those years ago. She waited. She looked for memories.

The breeze blew in the night, but there was nothing there to haunt her.

Minerva stood a moment longer, and then a certain tightness dissolved in her chest. She remembered that he said he'd felt free out here. It was too soon for her to think about him without pain, but maybe one day ... She was glad she'd come here. She could lay him to rest now.

Minerva turned to go, and she swore she heard his voice on the wind. *"I won't forget anything, Minerva."*

"I won't either, Severus."

She was at peace.