

A Question Worth Answering

by Rose of the West

How it was asked made all the difference.

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Chapter 1 of 1

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They were once two seventh years, straight of spine, dark of hair, and whole in body. "Ah, Min," he would say, "why won't your family accept me?" Once he tried to slide a flower into her hair, but that proved a disaster, given the tightly pulled back tresses. Forever after, he simply handed her the flower after gently sniffing it.

"My father doesn't hold with the Ministry and their attitude of appeasement."

"I'm working against the evil wizards," he would say. "Someone needs to work at the Ministry and make them change from within." He was still young enough that it was often a whine. She invariably gritted her teeth and took the next turn that brought them back into the castle.

Time and time again, they would go out to the rose garden. Time and time again, Minnie McGonagall would look in the mirror and contemplate loosening her hair. She knew that on the night she did, she would soon belong to him, body and soul. Time and time again, he started the conversation by complaining about her family.

Minnie never did take down her hair. Instead she grew into Minerva and exchanged tight braids for an even tighter bun. Alastor worked as he said he would, fighting the dark wizards. He was on hand when the Ministry's attitudes shifted and smiled in triumph whenever he saw Minerva. A generation later, things changed again, and the darkness seemed ready to retake the Ministry. Minerva couldn't help a small smile of triumph whenever she saw Alastor after that.

So it went for decades. Minerva never took her hair down for anyone. Whenever Alastor had a couple of extra Galleons, he would send an arrangement of roses to Minerva. They worked together when circumstances required it and quietly ignored each other the rest of the time.

Not so, the year of the Triwizard Tournament. There were no flowers, no little looks, nothing. She looked into her mirror at night and wondered what had happened. This wasn't Alastor as she'd always known him.

Then, at the end of the tournament, she understood what she should have seen all along. The reason he wasn't himself was that *he wasn't himself*. She sat by his bedside for hours, apologizing in her heart for not noticing... and for the rest of it. When no one else was in the hospital wing, she said it all aloud.

When he awoke, he caressed her head and said, "Dinna fash yerself." He reached up and unfastened her hair. She gasped at his boldness, but then slid her fingers up to loosen the still-dark hair that now fell into his hands.

A week later, a clearing throat alerted her to the fact that he was standing in the doorway of her office. In his arms were several bouquets of roses. He set them on her desk and leaned over it to unfasten her hair again. Then he slid a flower behind her ear and whispered, "Will you take me even if your family says nay?"

She leaned up and let him kiss her, eager to take the man who finally asked the right question.

A/N: Inspired by a Truth or Dare prompt from Kyria of Delphi: Alastor Moody/Minerva's office/roses.

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