

If There is Peace to be Found

by JackieJLH

Eleven moments when Severus was on Minerva's mind (in no particular order).

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Chapter 1 of 1

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6.

The portrait appeared just nine hours after the battle ended.

Minerva almost didn't notice it at first. She'd dashed in and out of the headmaster's office a half-dozen times throughout the course of the day. The office wasn't hers yet, she kept reminding herself, and yet it was hard to keep that in mind when everyone, including the newly-appointed Minister, was looking to her when it came to decisions about what needed to be done at Hogwarts over the coming days.

On yet another one of her trips up to the office, this time seeking some information that only Albus could provide, the new portrait caught her eye. The other portraits had shifted around, somehow, either on their own or simply because the wall had moved underneath them. In the space that had been cleared, a simple black frame hung, and directly in the center, Severus Snape sat perched on a high-backed green chair, fast asleep.

She'd stopped mid-step, rocking back onto her heel, hate warring with incredulity warring with rage, but the knowledge that there were still hundreds of people in the castle counting on her to get things done quickly won out. Tearing her eyes away from the frame, she turned her gaze instead to Albus, who was calmly watching her from his own portrait.

"He just arrived a little while ago," he said in explanation. She nodded curtly.

"I need you to translate a message into Mermish for me," she said without acknowledging Severus's presence at all. "We're having some *misunderstandings* with the occupants of the lake, and as there are currently several bodies floating in there, we need to get this resolved sooner rather than later."

Albus nodded. "Of course, my dear. What would you like the message to say?"

~

1.

Minerva knew who would leave and who would stay each year. The list rarely changed. Pomona would disappear a week into the summer hols to travel the world in search of new things to plant in her greenhouses, Septima would obsessively follow the Quidditch circuit, Filius would go back to his wife and Charity would return to her husband and children.

In contrast, Sybill remained in her tower, Filch in his cramped quarters, and Hagrid in his hut. Albus could usually be found in his office when he wasn't off handling

something for the Wizengamot, the Order or, in years past and in times of friendlier relationships with Fudge, something for the Ministry. Minerva herself walked the halls, renewed old charms and wards and protection spells, and enlisted the help of the house-elves in seeing to the myriad tasks that had to be completed before the new school year began. These people stayed because there was nowhere else for them to go. Hogwarts was their home, the staff the closest thing any of them had to family. They dined together and spent their evenings talking and laughing in the staff room, and despite the size of the castle, Hogwarts never really felt empty with the students away. Just... quiet. Blissfully, peacefully quiet.

This year, of course, felt quiet in an entirely different way. Cedric Diggory's death had cast a stillness over the grounds in a manner that Minerva hadn't experienced since... well, since Myrtle had died all those years ago. Death had certainly touched young wizards and witches since then, but never here. Never, never at Hogwarts. The school was a place where students felt safe, where even the professors felt safe. If Sirius Black, dementors and a loose, raging werewolf the year prior had caused that feeling to waver, then Diggory's death and a psychotic Death Eater masquerading as a professor had dispelled it entirely. The silence now seemed to stretch on and on, more oppressive than peaceful. But still, it *was* quiet, as always.

And so Minerva, going from classroom to classroom and ensuring that everything was sealed up for the summer months, was startled to hear the clinking of glass upon glass and the soft, rolling sound of something boiling as she wended her way through the dungeon corridors. Frowning, she gripped her wand more tightly (after everything that had happened, she hadn't really put it down in days) and stepped closer to the Potions classroom, cautiously peeking around the slightly-ajar door.

Seeing just who was inside, she let out a breath she hadn't realised she was holding, pushed the heavy door open, and stepped inside. Severus, standing over three cauldrons that were steadily bubbling away, jerked his head up sharply, looking as though he were about to tear apart whoever had dared to intrude, but then stopped short when he saw her.

"Minerva," he said in greeting, as if his presence was the most normal thing in the world.

Normally, Severus was one of those who left. As soon as the thestrals pulled the last of the carriages through the school gates, he'd retrieve the one suitcase he owned...shabby, old, and by the last day of school, already packed...from his rooms before hastily marching to the edge of the Apparition wards and disappearing. Minerva knew that he always returned to that little house of his on Spinner's End, and she had rarely seen him until the very end of August during the many summers they'd both been employed at the school.

"Severus," she answered with a nod, drawing closer and peering into the cauldrons. "What are you brewing?"

"Medicinal potions. For Poppy," he added at her raised eyebrow. "Albus thought it best that we stock the storeroom to capacity, all things considered."

With a tight smile that indicated she understood perfectly, she stepped back a bit and watched him work. Even as he focused on the potions before him, a wave of his wand brought another cauldron to the table, and he quickly began measuring out ingredients and setting them inside. "Did you need something?" he asked bluntly, not looking up, and she quelled the urge to roll her eyes at his tone.

"Will you be staying for the entire summer?" she asked.

Severus let out a bark of laughter so lacking in humour that it nearly made Minerva wince. "Eager to be rid of me, Professor?" he replied.

This time Minerva did roll her eyes. "Not yet," she answered blandly. In truth, she rather didn't like the idea of him leaving this year. She knew, even if most of the staff didn't, just what those robes of his concealed. Even now, while brewing, he wore the long sleeves that extended all the way to his wrists...impractical for a Potions master, and especially one standing over four cauldrons at once, yet necessary due to the circumstances. If he'd left, she'd have spent the whole summer wondering if he'd returned to Voldemort or stayed loyal to Albus and the Order...and as Albus had been reassuring her for days that Severus was to be trusted, she would also have been worrying about the younger man's well-being until she actually saw him again with her own two eyes.

Without anything else to say and never having been one for idle chit-chat even when she didn't have hours and hours of work awaiting her, Minerva turned and headed for the door, pausing only to ask, "Will you be joining us for supper?"

"No," he answered simply, and though she waited for a moment, he didn't elaborate on his reasons.

Minerva knew that it was possible his potions would keep him busy well past the normal meal time, but couldn't help but wonder if he would have declined anyway. Pursing her lips in mild irritation, she nodded curtly and left.

By the third week of succinctly refused invitations, it became apparent that Severus was not to be expected at meals.

~

8.

"I was sort of hoping I could talk to Professor Snape," Potter said, his eyes drifting up to the still-sleeping portrait.

"You along with everyone else," Minerva pointed out wryly.

"Maybe he's just pretending to be asleep," he wondered aloud, and Minerva gave a slight shake of her head.

"He'd have to answer me if he were able. All of the headmaster portraits have to respond to the current headmaster or headmistress." Her lips twisted into an annoyed frown. "Mind you, they're not always particularly helpful. But at the very least, he'd have to acknowledge me."

"But... is it normal for it to take this long?" Harry pressed. "It's been six months."

"It varies," she said vaguely, though frankly, the same thought had been nagging at her for weeks.

~

5.

She would have done it.

None of her spells were benign. Each of them, had they not been blocked, would have been fatal. Especially the knives, to which the poor battered suit of armour could attest.

As she chased Severus Snape out of the school...her school...Minerva did not hesitate. A part of her, the part that had ached ever since Albus died, had been wanting to do this for a year now.

Albus had trusted him. *She'd* trusted him. And after a year of watching students fall victim to torture, lying through her teeth to protect child after child, spending her sleepless nights patrolling the halls to try to prevent any unpleasantness that she could, she wanted nothing more than to make sure that Severus paid dearly for what he'd done. What he'd allowed. What he'd *caused*.

She'd trusted him.

Rage fueled her spells, her heart racing and her hands nearly trembling with the release of the hurt and anger she'd kept pent up for so long, the surge of adrenaline at finally, *finally* being able to do *something*.

She would have done it. She would have killed him.

Later, when she found out the truth about Severus, she wanted to feel remorse over what she'd nearly done.

She wanted to, but she just *couldn't*. Not quite. Not just then.

~

3.

Losing Albus had hurt more than Minerva had ever imagined it would.

Maybe it was because he had, at various times over the years, been her professor, her refuge, her mentor, her sounding board, her leader, her greatest source of frustration, her hope, her protector, her employer, and her best friend. Maybe it was because he reminded her of her father. Maybe it was because he'd died so suddenly, and some part of her had expected Albus to outlive her despite his age. Maybe it was because she'd loved him in a way that could only be achieved by knowing someone since you were a child.

Losing Albus had hurt, and the only thing that'd hurt worse was learning who had murdered him.

She'd managed to get herself under control when facing an audience of students and parents and fellow professors, all of them looking to her for answers and guidance, but the next night she found herself alone, and the knowledge that Albus was gone forever weighed so heavily on her that she felt like she'd drown.

Rolanda had appeared at some point, Minerva knew, but she couldn't remember when, exactly. She'd only paid attention to the door opening long enough to identify who was creeping into her quarters in the middle of the night, then had laid her head back down. The bed had dipped in toward the center as Rolanda had laid down beside her, and Minerva had allowed herself to be tugged against Rolanda's chest. Her robes were damp from flying through the cool, foggy night air, and the cold water seemed to seep through Minerva's fur almost instantly.

"Why didn't you send an owl or something? I would've been here hours ago," Rolanda said admonishingly. Minerva just nuzzled her head into the underside of Rolanda's chin.

"Are you all right?"

Minerva didn't answer. She couldn't speak in her Animagus form, and the thought of transforming back made her feel even more exhausted than she already was.

After a moment, Rolanda tightened her grip around the cat in her arms. "Sorry. Of course you're not all right." Rubbing her cheek over the top of Minerva's head, she sighed. "Well, I'm here, if you want to talk. Or if you don't. Either way."

The room was silent for a few minutes before Rolanda muttered, "I always knew Snape was a bastard," one hand reaching up to stroke Minerva's stomach with hands still cold from her flight.

Minerva let out a little growl of irritation...the last person she wanted to think about right now was Severus. Giving up on conversation entirely, Rolanda just pressed a soft kiss between Minerva's ears and then closed her eyes, drifting off into a restless sleep.

Minerva didn't sleep. Despite her usual penchant for napping when lying in one place for too long in Animagus form (she ~~was~~ was a cat, after all), she couldn't seem to stop her mind from racing. She didn't think about the events of the night before...she'd started to at one point, but had found herself unconsciously digging her claws into the mattress in her anger. Instead her thoughts skipped from one conversation with Severus to the next, dwelling on things he'd said years ago, picking apart everything from his choice of reading material in the staff room to the tone of his voice the last time they'd spoken. How could she have missed the fact that he was plotting against them all along? How could she have been so wrong? How could *Albus* have been so wrong?

By the time the sun was starting to seep into the room around the edges of the heavy drapes, Minerva had forsaken the hope of sleeping at all. She had a school full of children to see to still, and Albus's funeral arrangements were only partially completed, and she had a meeting scheduled with Scrimgeour at eight a.m. She wanted nothing more than to stay right where she was, but reluctantly eased herself out of Rolanda's arms, hopped down onto the floor, and transformed back into her human self, sighing as the wave of emotions that she'd been able to more easily ignore as a cat seemed to flood back into her.

Rolanda sat up as Minerva made her way across the room toward the door, blinking drowsily and running a hand through her sleep-mussed hair. "You all right?"

Minerva hesitated for a moment before answering truthfully, "No."

"It's still early.... Where are you going?"

"Scrimgeour requested a meeting. I have to meet him in just over an hour."

Rolanda frowned. "So... is the school closing, then?"

"I don't know," Minerva said quietly. "That's what we'll be discussing, I expect." Despite having had two days to consider the prospect of Hogwarts closing, Minerva still wasn't sure how she felt on the issue.

"If Hogwarts does close... what will you do?" Rolanda asked. "It'd be nice to have you around for more than a couple days at a time, but I can't even get you to stay there over summers. I doubt you'll want to spend your days doing nothing but sitting around the cottage...."

Considering her words carefully, Minerva finally answered, "If the school doesn't reopen, I'm going after him."

Rolanda's eyes widened in surprise. "You-Know-Who?"

"No. Well, yes, eventually. But more immediately, Severus Snape."

~

4.

It only took two days for Minerva to find herself standing between the Carrows and three terrified Hufflepuff first-years, her one wand opposing their two. She was afraid. Not for herself...she was quite certain that she could take them both out before they could so much as *think* a spell. But if the scene she'd come upon a few moments prior was any indication of how the next year was going to go for the students... well, that terrified her. She couldn't be everywhere, couldn't protect everyone.

"This ain't any of your concern, McGonagall," Amycus growled out. He spat when he talked, and Minerva didn't bother to conceal her revulsion at standing so close to him.

"Oh, I beg to disagree, Professor Carrow," she said, her words dripping with scorn. "Lower your wand, or I'll..."

"You'll what? Hex us? Not if you want to see the end of this week," Alecto snapped back.

Amycus added, "Gotta kill us, you see. 'Cept then who'll the Dark Lord send to replace us, huh?" Minerva's glare could have melted steel, but he didn't back down.

The worst part was that she knew he was right. There were others that would be worse. The thought of someone like Greyback or Bellatrix Lestrange being turned loose inside her school made Minerva's blood run cold.

"Professors, is there a problem?" Severus asked, stepping out of the shadows. Minerva wondered how long he'd been standing there. She sincerely doubted his presence was going to be of any benefit to her, anyway, no matter how much he had or hadn't heard.

"McGonagall don't seem to appreciate the way we're doing our jobs," Amycus answered.

"Your job, *Professor Carrow*," she said as evenly as she could manage, "does not require, *nor permit*, you to torture students!"

"Why are you out of bed?" Severus bit out in the direction of the children, who were still huddled close together and doing their best to hide behind Minerva. One of them hesitantly opened his mouth to answer, but Severus silenced him with an impatient wave of his hand in the direction of the nearest staircase. "Ten points each from Hufflepuff for wandering the halls after curfew. Go."

Not daring to protest the loss of points, the three first-years scurried away like frightened mice, disappearing around the corner. Alecto's eyes narrowed in irritation, but neither of the Carrows moved a muscle.

"Minerva, my office," Severus ordered. When she didn't give any indication that she was going to move either, he added an angry, "Now." Turning to the Carrows, he said pointedly, "Good night, Alecto. Amycus."

Slowly all three of them lowered their wands, the Carrows turning around almost simultaneously and walking down the hall, apparently confident that Severus's presence meant they wouldn't be hexed in the back. While she was generally not the sort to attack someone from behind...and in fact thought that people who did such things were unbelievably cowardly...in this instance, Minerva privately admitted to herself she'd have made an exception for the Carrows, if given the opportunity.

Refusing to so much as look at Severus, Minerva spun on her heel and led the way to the gargoyle that guarded the headmaster's office. Severus glided along behind her, the rustling of his robes billowing around his legs the only thing betraying the fact that he followed. The gargoyle moved aside at the sound of a muttered password, and Severus quickly climbed the stairs, settling himself behind his desk.

"Sit," he told Minerva as soon as she closed the door. The fact that he didn't bother to look up from the papers which he'd already begun sifting through didn't stop her from glaring at him as she sat down on the chair in front of the desk. Over Severus's head, Albus's portrait seemed to be sleeping. She wished he'd open his eyes.

Severus ignored her for a long moment. She was on the verge of asking him if there was a reason why he'd bothered to order her into his office in the first place, when finally he asked, "Do you *want* them to kill you?"

"They could certainly *try*," Minerva answered.

He picked up a quill, jotting something down on one of the parchments before him before it to the side and reading the next parchment, seeming to consider her words.

"They would succeed. You must sleep sometime," he replied. "And if *they* didn't, someone else would."

She pursed her lips, anger reddening her cheeks. "You?" she snapped.

"If you leave me no other option." He set his quill down on the desk, finally looking up at her for the first time since they were standing together in the corridor. "If you are so foolishly Gryffindor as to disregard the danger to yourself, perhaps you should consider what would become of your students if the Dark Lord were to feel that a larger Death Eater presence at Hogwarts had become necessary."

"Stay out of it, Minerva," he continued, his disinterest in the conversation made evident as he turned back to the parchments before him. He acted as if they were discussing a budget request or a change in class schedules instead of the safety of an entire school full of students, and it made Minerva's skin itch with the desire to hex him. "The Carrows' teaching methods are beyond your control, and you are not the only one at risk when you interfere."

"Fine. Are we finished?" she asked, bitter frustration seeping into her tone. He didn't answer, just waved his hand toward the door. She quickly got to her feet, moving to leave, but paused in the doorway. "It's your job to protect them. They're just children, Severus."

"And they, too, must learn to behave or face the consequences," he replied without missing a beat.

"You disgust me," she ground out.

Severus's head snapped up, his expression suddenly furious. Without hesitation, Minerva's hand instinctively closed around her wand, but instead of making a move to get up or attack her, Severus just growled, "Get out."

She was quite happy to oblige.

~

9.

She could hear the din of conversation even from outside, but as soon as Minerva stepped into her office, silence pervaded the air. Every eye turned to watch her as she slowly closed the door behind her and then walked across the room, setting the painting she carried down onto the desk.

"I visited Teager's shop in Diagon Alley today," she began slowly, her eyes never leaving Albus's.

"Oh?" he said with a tone of polite interest. His uncomprehending expression made her want to throw something at him.

"Yes, I thought that he could tell me if there was something wrong with Severus's portrait. If it had been painted or charmed incorrectly, perhaps."

He just gave her a bland smile.

"Albus," she continued, as calmly and rationally as she could manage, "would you care to explain this?"

"Explain what, my dear?"

"You know very well *what*," she snapped, her temper flaring at his non-answer.

Albus's smile faltered, then dissolved entirely as he answered without apology, "He deserved a chance at finding peace."

"And you felt this wasn't information you should *share*?" Minerva asked through gritted teeth.

"Not right away," he said in that infuriating gently-patient way he always spoke when he felt someone should have already caught on to the point he was trying to make.

"You were too angry. You may have decided to alert the Aurors, and I think you'd agree that no matter what Severus may have done, he doesn't deserve to spend the rest of his life in Azkaban."

She pursed her lips in irritation. It was a long moment before she answered, "The culpability of his actions are not for you or I to decide."

Albus just shrugged helplessly. "You're probably right, as always, my dear. Unfortunately, it's rather too late to be doing anything about it now."

Minerva glanced at the portrait lying on her desk. The sleeping not-Severus shifted in his chair, then settled again with a sigh.

"Are you hiding any other fugitives that I should know about?" she asked wearily, turning back to Albus.

At least this time he had the good grace to offer an apologetic smile. "No." He paused, then qualified, "Not at the moment, anyway."

With a roll of her eyes and a muttered, "I always expected that the *students* would drive me mad one day, but now I'm quite certain you'll beat them to it," she snatched the fake portrait off the desk and stalked out of the office.

~

7.

It seemed like she'd just done this yesterday... except this time it was Severus's belongings she was sifting through, packing up, discarding. At least Albus had been awake when she'd dealt with *his* belongings. He'd given her instructions...this thing wasn't worth keeping, that item was to be given to so-and-so, and one trinket or another was to stay right where it was, if she didn't mind, because it provided some measure of protection or privacy or amusement from which she would benefit. It had been a comfort, in a way. Albus had been her closest friend and confidante, even if she was quite sure she hadn't been his. His pleasant chatter and wise commentary and occasional harsh admonishments eased the pain of losing him, if only a little. She'd never really gotten around to using the office, of course...the Ministry had fallen, Snape had been named headmaster, and she'd returned to her classes, cut off from Albus entirely for the first time in over forty years.

This time was different. This time she was officially the headmistress...at least, Kingsley had decided she was, and the school Governors weren't expected to object...and the most recent headmaster was irritatingly silent. Severus hadn't yet woken up. He sat in his chair, slumped over and snoring quietly. Albus had woken up within a few weeks, but Minerva understood from the other portraits that it'd taken some of them a month or more. Still... she'd thought he'd be awake by *now*. Hogwarts was beginning a new school year in a few weeks, and she'd put off making the office *hers* for as long as she could.

"I'll just pack everything into boxes," she decided, a hint of frustration in her tone. "I'll have to do the same with his quarters. We're going to find someone to fill the Defence post sooner or later, and I imagine they'll want to have somewhere to sleep."

Albus nodded agreeably. "He'll come around soon enough and make the decisions on what to do with all of it," he replied, ever his annoyingly reasonable self.

With a final glance around the office, Minerva Transfigured the dark drapes into boxes and watched as Severus's belongings begin to neatly pack themselves away.

~

10.

"I've not forgiven you, you know. Not entirely," Minerva said blandly, glaring at the portrait as though it would wake up and scowl at her like Severus used to do. But of course, it remained silent and unresponsive, as always.

The real Severus was out there... somewhere. A part of her wanted to believe he was planning something nefarious or just waiting for another Dark wizard to try to take over the world, but she couldn't make herself entertain the idea for even a moment. If she knew Severus Snape at all...which, admittedly, was not something she felt as comfortable claiming as she had a few years ago...then he was probably holed up somewhere far away, avoiding notice as though his life depended on it.

All things considered, perhaps it did.

Someone should be told...a part of her wanted to believe that too. Shackbolt, the Aurors, the MLE.... So many had answered for their choices after the war, answered for their mistakes, and why should Severus be any different?

And yet... she couldn't quite make herself believe *that*, either.

With an irritated huff and a flick of her wand, the portrait blinked out of existence, and half a castle away, reappeared in its usual place among the other portraits.

If there is peace to be found for him, she thought, hoping, in a way, that there was, *let him find it*. At the very least, she wouldn't stand in his way.

~

2.

Standing watch was an altogether uninteresting assignment.

Minerva knew to think such a thing was foolish...one had to be attentive and alert when on watch, and didn't particularly have the right to *bored*. She'd have felt more justified with tired, perhaps, because she'd been on her feet teaching nearly the entire day and would begin the process again in the morning on no sleep whatsoever, but Pepper-up had kept the exhaustion at bay. For the time being, anyway. She suspected she'd be flagging by midday, potion or no potion, but a catnap or two between classes would sustain her until after her evening rounds, at any rate.

Just thinking about sleep seemed to lessen the Pepper-up's effects, and she rose from her Transfigured chair and paced the hallway, casting the usual charms and spells out of habit. Satisfied that she was still alone, she sighed and leaned against the wall, her hands folded in front of her, wand at the ready, as always. A few moments later, a glance at her pocket watch revealed that she still had five hours left before the Ministry would open and her presence would no longer be required.

A blue streak of light burst at the far end of the corner, the signal for an approaching ally. She raised her wand anyway, frowning in confusion when Severus rounded the corner.

"Godric," he said with a sneer, making his feelings about the day's password quite clear. She suppressed a smile.

"Is everything all right, Severus?" she asked. His manner suggested that it wasn't an emergency that had brought him to the Department of Mysteries at two in the morning, but it was rather unusual for Severus to leave the castle so late unless he was required to do so.

"Albus asked me to relieve you for the night," he answered. In a vaguely accusing tone, he went on, "Despite your reassurances that you are quite capable of standing watch for the third time in a week, he feels you'd benefit from a little sleep."

"Perhaps if he would put together a schedule that didn't involve Mundungus Fletcher, I wouldn't be picking up shifts every other night," Minerva pointed out. "I understand the benefits of keeping him in the Order, but really... Albus should know by now that the man is entirely unreliable."

Severus let out a grunt of agreement, moving to lean against the wall on the opposite side of the hall, his arms folded across his chest.

"Perhaps it's for the best, though," she continued as she made her way to the far end of the hall, retrieving her cloak from where it lay draped over the back of the chair, then turning the chair back into a tall, pointed hat, which she placed atop her head. "Mundungus would probably do little more than *hide* if You-Know-Who were to appear."

"Which would put him at an advantage over the rest of us, who would simply end ~~up~~*dead*," Severus replied.

Minerva would have admonished him for being so damned pessimistic, but she had to admit that he had a point. "Yes, well, there is that." She paused in her stride as she passed him, having to remind herself that they were alone and there wasn't any reason to lower her voice to a whisper as she said, "If you're summoned..."

"I'll send word," he finished. "But it's unlikely. There's a full moon. Otherwise, Albus wouldn't risk sending ~~me~~ here at all."

His words sent a shiver down Minerva's spine. Of course You-Know-Who would refrain from holding a meeting tonight; a large portion of his ever-growing army would be otherwise occupied. The thought was not a comforting one, to say the very least.

Nodding her understanding, she simply said, "I'll be off then. Stay safe."

"When have you ever known me to do such a thing?" he asked dryly, drawing a small smile from Minerva.

"Stay *awake*, then," she amended. A smirk ghosted across Severus's lips, and he inclined his head in acknowledgment. "Good night, Severus."

~

11.

"I can't believe he's still sleeping," Harry muttered, no small hint of exasperation in his voice, casting the occasional hopeful glance toward the unassuming portrait as though Severus could be made to open his eyes simply by the sheer intensity of the boy's desire for him to do so. Well, not so much a boy anymore. The lines of his face had sharpened, his Auror robes...robes that had stopped bearing the insignia of a trainee some time ago...no longer hung awkwardly on still-growing shoulders. And yet, despite the intervening years and what was surely an ever-growing pile of responsibilities, he appeared, as he had every year, on the anniversary of the Battle, practically inviting himself into her school and her office in the hopes that Severus had finally decided to grace Hogwarts with his attention.

"It's odd that he's not awake by now, isn't it?" he went on, his eyes narrowing a bit as he looked at her, as though he suspected that she was simply covering for a portrait that moved and talked whenever he wasn't in the room.

If only he knew the half of it.

"Unprecedented, it seems," he continued pointedly.

Minerva shrugged in pretend innocence, sipping at her tea for a moment before answering. "The man had an exceedingly difficult life, Potter...a fact of which you are well aware," she said simply, setting down her teacup and offering him another biscuit. "Allow him to rest."

Above them, the portrait of Severus Snape snored on.