

To Some a Gift

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After Voldemort's first defeat, Severus has a great deal to atone for. Minerva finds a way to help him. (Contains corporal punishment of a child)

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Chapter 1 of 1

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NOTES...This story was my entry for the 2011 Snapely Holidays fest on Insane Journal. My recipient asked for "redemption stories, Severus confronting his demons, spanking (as domestic discipline, not BDSM), frottage, all manner of hurt/comfort, and some darker elements...[Severus] portrayed as awkward, inexperienced, and shy."

My plan was to write a much more dominant Minerva, but she wouldn't cooperate. Even though I normally see her as strong, fierce, and confident, I sometimes also see her as a bit tentative and subdued (the way she is in canon in the scenes after Albus's death)...it's the consequence, I think, of her being kept subordinate for so many years to the often-patronizing Dumbledore. As I wrote this story, I kept coming back to the notion of "domestic discipline" and the pros and cons of punishment, both corporal and non. Severus and Minerva are both psychologically damaged here, and the spanking became for me an emblem of that damage.

Personally, I'm opposed to corporal punishment of children, but not to the idea of punishment per se. So I tend to think that Minerva is right here about punishment overall and wrong about the form it should take; she may have convinced herself that her father was right, but I find him abusive. Still, the story isn't about what I think; it's about how guilt and need and desire and physical intensity (whether of punishment or sex or whatever) play out between these two characters.

Warnings: corporal punishment of a child

My super-grateful thanks to my beta, The Real Snape.

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A punishment to some, to some a gift, and to many a favor.

--Lucius Annaeus Seneca

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Prologue

Crack!

"Three!"

The sounds came all too clearly to the young girl who stood motionless outside the study door, trying not to let the slightest rustle call attention to her presence. She didn't

even breathe, though less from deliberate choice than from the power of the feelings crashing through her...a mix of fear, excitement, sadness, curiosity, dread, and any number of things she couldn't name.

Crack!

"Four!"

Though she stood straight and still, Minerva cringed inside every time she heard the cane hit what she knew were her brother's bare buttocks. This time, she wasn't even sure what his infraction had been...something to do with a neighbour's chickens, she believed...but she didn't need to know. All that mattered was that her beloved brother was being punished.

She was the elder by two years...twelve to his ten...and it was up to her to look after Finn. That's what their grandmother had said when Mother died, and Minerva did her best. Now that she was at Hogwarts during term, she had only the summers, but she tried to give Finn a year's worth of mothering in those few weeks. She would have taken his punishment for him if she could have, but since she couldn't, she waited, ready to soothe him when it was done.

Crack!

"Nine!"

Crack!

"Ten!"

There was blessed silence then, broken only by strenuous breathing, though whether it came from her father, her brother, or both, Minerva didn't know. She was so proud of Finn; he hadn't cried once.

Father spoke again. "You may rise. I hope you have learnt something here. I trust I shall hear no further complaints from Mrs Battering."

"No, Father."

"Very well." There was a sound as if heavy footsteps were heading towards the door, and Minerva prepared to bolt. But then her father paused.

"Finn," he said, his voice warming slightly. "You do understand that I take no pleasure in chastising you. But I would be remiss in my duties as your father if I did not teach you the consequences of wrong-doing."

"Yes, sir."

"You have taken your punishment in manly fashion, my son. I am not displeased. Now you may go."

Minerva allowed her shoulders to slump a little in relief. Then she straightened quickly; Father didn't approve of slovenly posture, and she took care never to forget his strictures, whether he could see her or not. She was a good girl.

But then Finn came hobbling into the corridor, and all other thoughts were forgotten as she slipped her arm around him and hurried him off to the nursery, where she would offer salves and pat his back as he lay face down on his bed and of course give him the dignity of not noticing his finally-flowing tears.

She herself had never felt the weight of her father's hand or stick; Father didn't believe in striking girls. Yet how she wished he would! It would hurt, of course, and badly...Finn told her that the bruises could last for weeks.

But it would also mean instant forgiveness. On those rare occasions when Minerva transgressed, Father would indeed take her to his study, but not to cane her. Instead, he would speak to her, in a dreadful cold voice, telling her how she had disappointed him. Then he would dismiss her and turn his back, leaving her to creep miserably out of the room, knowing that his coldness might continue for hours, even days.

Eventually he would ask her read the newspaper aloud to him, signaling her return to grace, but until that moment occurred, Minerva would scarcely be able to eat or sleep from shame.

No, she would have much preferred the bite and directness of the cane.

She imagined bending forward, holding tightly to his desk, listening to the swish of air as the stick was lowered. She would be clothed, of course...that would only be proper...but the pain would still come, blossoming forth with almost welcome heat, for each blow would bring the knowledge that her father thought her strong. She would bear the stokes without a sound and wait for the end, for the moment when Father would tell her that he did it for her own good, that she had borne it well...and that he was "not displeased."

"It's all right, Finn," she whispered, smoothing her brother's hair. "You're not a bad boy any more. Father has forgiven you."

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June, 1982

Professor McGonagall stood silently in the Headmaster's office as Albus fixed a benign gaze on Severus Snape. She still didn't know why Dumbledore had summoned her to appear along with Severus, but she had long since learnt that questions would avail nothing; Albus would tell her what he wanted of her when he was ready, and not before. For now, she could do nothing but wait as he began a soft-spoken interrogation of their newest staff member.

She wondered if Severus knew Albus well enough to realise that the Headmaster was not happy. That particular quizzical tilt of his head, the exceptional mildness of his expression, the softness of his voice...none of it boded well for the boy.

Not that Severus was a "boy" any longer, of course. Joining the Death Eaters might have been a boy's stupid mistake, but Severus had paid a man's price for it. He'd returned to Hogwarts to teach Potions just a few months ago, at the start of the winter term, and she'd been shocked at the change in him from his student days. He'd never been robust, but now he was frankly skeletal, his face haggard and grey and old beyond his years. He moved with a jerky intensity, prowling restlessly at all hours, as if constant motion could help him evade his obvious misery.

Knowing what she did of his Death Eater past, Minerva might have been tempted to think that he was mourning the defeat of his Dark Lord the previous Halloween, had Albus not assured her that Severus's rejection of his previous allegiance was complete, his remorse genuine.

That some sort of tragedy had befallen him was clear, though what specific event had driven Severus away from his Dark life and back to the protection of Hogwarts, Minerva didn't know. Albus was not going to tell her, and she would never presume to ask Severus himself.

She hadn't known him well in his student days. He'd been an unappealing boy, scrawny and pale, with a perpetual sneer and tendency to lash out viciously at anyone who tried to get too close to him. Since he'd not been in her House and had shown little interest in Transfiguration despite some skill at it, she'd been content to let him alone.

That had been a mistake, she thought now. She wasn't so arrogant as to assume she might have saved him then, but she wondered whether she at least could have avoided helping him along his road to Darkness. Her lack of attention could hardly have done him any good. Perhaps if she'd done something to nurture his talents, to let

him know that she recognised his abilities...

Or she could have done more to rein in the behaviour of the boys in her own House, their endless stream of petty torments against Severus, the *otro voce* comments in class, the snide looks, the mild hexes. Oh, of course she had put a stop to anything serious, deducting House points with abandon, but she had thought it best to let the boys...Potter and Black, primarily, and Severus himself...work out their own personality conflicts, as they would have to learn to do in the world.

Yet over the years she'd discovered that the situation between Severus and the Gryffindors had been more complicated than she'd ever realised at the time, and she had come to question her own role. Had she allowed herself to be swayed by Severus's unprepossessing exterior or by his adolescent sullen posturing? Whatever the reason, she very much feared that she had not done right by Severus the boy.

Minerva straightened her shoulders and took herself sternly in hand. Such regrets were useless. Not even a time-turner would let her unmake Severus's difficult past. She had nothing now except the present and whatever good she might be able to do for Severus the man.

And she could probably begin to help him this very evening, with whatever problem the Headmaster was about to raise. She turned her attention to Albus, who was just beginning to speak.

"I've been comparing examination results, Severus," Albus said. "And I note that the very worst are to be found on the Potions exams. Some students appear to have scored a mere two points out of a possible one hundred. Seventy-eight percent of your first-year students have received a mark of 'Troll.'"

A twitch of his shoulder suggested that Severus wanted to shrug, but Minerva was glad to see that he restrained himself. "Potions is a very exact and intricate science," he said. "It takes hard work and care and a modicum of interest to do well, and unfortunately, these are qualities most of the students seem to lack."

Albus shook his head. "Of course some students will always do poorly. But when I see a teacher with an overall failure rate of sixty-six percent, I fear that the problem might begin with the instructor. I suspect you have set your standards too high. We don't want to excuse ignorance, but we must meet the students where they are and work with them to bring them up to the necessary level of competence."

He stood up and came round his desk to place a hand on Severus's shoulder; if Albus felt the flinch that Minerva clearly noticed, he said nothing.

"I am not blaming you, you understand, Professor Snape," Albus said. "You are a new teacher; you will live and learn. Of course I applaud your desire to set challenging tasks for students. But we want them to be able to succeed."

Finally Albus turned to Minerva. "That's why I asked Professor McGonagall to join us," he said. "Minerva, I thought perhaps you and Severus could spend some time this summer working on teaching strategies. I know both of you plan to stay here at the castle, and it seems the perfect opportunity."

Though Minerva might have wished that he'd asked her first privately, it was too late now, and in truth, she was happy to help. She opened her mouth to say, "Of course, Headmaster," when Severus pulled angrily away from Albus's hand and snapped, "I don't need any professional babysitting. If you're not satisfied with my teaching, then sack me."

He was out the door before Albus could reply, and Minerva could hear him clattering down the stairs, a further testament to how upset he was. Usually Severus made a point of walking as noiselessly as possible.

"Shall I fetch him back?" Minerva asked, but Albus shook his head, sighing, and returned to sit behind his desk.

"Let him go."

Minerva studied the headmaster, puzzled. It was unlike him to react personally to an inexperienced professor's understandable errors. One didn't become a good teacher in a single term, and few understood that truth as well as Albus Dumbledore. "You're angry with Severus," she said, turning the statement into almost a question.

"Was it so obvious?" he said, with another sigh.

"To me. Probably not to him, for he doesn't know you as well as I."

"No, and I daresay he doesn't want to." Albus removed his glasses and pinched the bridge of his nose, a testament to how upset *he* was. Rarely did he show obvious signs of weariness.

"We have a complex relationship, Severus and I," Albus said finally. "He is important to me, but he is difficult. Oh, not in terms of teaching; I'm not angry about that. He did a reasonable job for a neophyte, and he can only improve. Especially with your guidance?"

He raised his eyes to Minerva, and she nodded. No point in mentioning now that she'd have preferred to be consulted in advance. Albus wasn't taking her for granted, not really. She should consider it a compliment that he knew he could rely on her.

Replacing his glasses, Albus turned back to the work on his desk. Minerva waited, in case he wished to say anything further, but after a few moments passed with no comment, she said, "Will that be all, then?"

"Yes, thank you," he replied, taking up his quill. But as she reached the door, he spoke again. "Minerva. My trust in Severus remains absolute, of that you may be assured. He could be a great force for good. But he is an intense and often overwrought young man with much to regret and atone for. He will wallow if we allow it. I hope I may count on you to help me see that he does not."

How she could stop him, Minerva had no idea. But if Albus needed her support, then he would have it. And so would Severus.

"Of course, Headmaster," she replied, and saw herself out.

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She let two days elapse before she sought out Severus in his dungeon chambers after dinner. He did not look pleased to see her, but he didn't refuse her entrance.

"I suppose you have come to lecture me about teaching, as per the headmaster's orders?" he said, frowning. But he didn't sneer, and she decided to take that as a mark of respect.

"No," she replied, keeping her tone deliberately mild. She raised the bottle of Ogden's she'd brought with her. "But I did come to see if you might like to join me in a wee dram of spirits and perhaps a game of two-handed wizard whist. There are many long summer evenings ahead of us, Severus, and I wouldn't mind some corporeal company."

She'd been giving the matter some thought and had decided that the best way to improve his teaching was not to instruct him as if he were still an errant schoolboy, but to work with him as a colleague. They would discuss teaching together as equals.

But first they needed actually to *be* equals. Merely serving on the same staff did not automatically make them so. Her plan, then, was to have them spend some time together outside a strictly professional setting; it would help balance their relationship and with luck, they might both even enjoy themselves. She hoped so, for summers in the castle were lonely, and new friends were welcome.

She was prepared for initial resistance, and so she did not let herself react to the veiled rudeness of his raised eyebrows and...ah, yes, here it was...the sneer.

"Surely you'd rather play chess with the old man?"

This time, Minerva kept her temper only with an effort. "The old man," indeed. "If I'd wanted to spend the evening with Albus, I would have asked him. I came to ask you."

Severus's laugh was sardonic. "You must be seriously desperate if drinking with a Slytherin former DE is preferable to your own company," he said. "Fine. Who am I to refuse a Gryffindor *colleague*"...the slight emphasis was exquisite in its derision..."when she is in such dire straits?"

But in the end, he was not inhospitable. He cleared a small table and summoned a deck of cards..."If you trust me enough not to have charmed the kings and queens to tell me what's in your hand"...and even asked a house elf to bring some biscuits and cheese.

They spoke but little as they played their cards and sipped their whisky, but the atmosphere was comfortable, and at the end of two hours, Minerva realised that she'd had quite a nice time.

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Over the next few weeks, she began to visit regularly, and just as she'd expected, the talk eventually turned naturally to teaching. They'd compare notes on various students and classes, and she was always careful during the course of the conversations to mention some of her failures: pupils she had never managed to reach, lessons that had gone spectacularly wrong. Severus would reply with examples of his own; she'd add a few suggestions and strategies, and on the whole, she thought she'd managed to give him some useful direction without triggering his resentment.

And also as she'd anticipated, she liked spending time with him and hoped they could continue their pleasant evenings once term began. When Severus forgot to be defensive and hostile, he was quite good company, amusing and perceptive and possessed of a dry wit similar to her own. If he was still a bit gauche, a bit awkward, well, he was young, and he had not had an easy life.

She could never approve of what he'd been and done, but she thought Albus was right: Severus was redeemable. He was damaged, yes, and still seemed deeply unhappy, but she thought he might be on the mend. She fancied that he was already becoming less brittle, less suspicious.

Yet one night, as they finished their game and she was charming the cards away, he suddenly leant towards her with a scowl.

"What is this really about, Minerva?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"We've talked about teaching, you've done your duty in instructing me. So why do you keep coming here? What do you want?"

She was both taken aback and rather hurt; she'd thought he'd come to enjoy their meetings as much as she did. Deliberately, she let the cards finish stacking themselves neatly before she answered. "What do I want? I want a pleasant evening, a chance to relax with someone I hope might become a friend. Is that so sinister?"

Severus's face darkened to an alarming degree, and he pushed his chair back with a screech. "I don't need your friendship, and I refuse to believe that you could want mine. It's Dumbledore, isn't it? He put you up to this, didn't he? *Didn't he?*"

Minerva was angry now. "Don't you..." she began, but Severus was not about to be silenced.

"Well, fuck him. I don't need him, I don't need you, I don't need nobbut from no one! Fuck you all!" His rage roughened his voice and thickened his accent, and by the time it had driven him across the room to slam his hand against the wall, Minerva's scant remaining patience had snapped.

"You most certainly need something!" she shouted. "Look at you, behaving like a foul-mouthed, emotional teenager. Do you think you have a corner on unhappiness?"

He said nothing, just continued to face the wall, his shoulders heaving, his stance so much like Finn's that Minerva felt her stomach clench. Before she thought about what she was doing, she had crossed to him, touched him.

He stiffened, but did not fling her off.

"Severus," she said, willing herself to be calm. "You might prefer to be alone in your pain, and I don't know, perhaps it *would* be best. Who can say? But it's not possible. For better or worse, you have people in your life now. You can't wish us away, not permanently, although I will stop visiting if that is what you want. But don't turn away from the headmaster. He cares about you..."

The hearty snort these words brought from Severus told her a great deal. "You don't believe that?" she asked softly, leaving her hand on his shoulder, not daring to move lest she frighten him away like a skittish thestral.

He didn't move, either, but kept his back to her and his head bowed, clearly not wanting to look at her. "No, I don't believe it," he said, the anger gone and replaced by a sort of exhausted bitterness.

"But he brought you here, saved you from Azkaban." She normally wouldn't have reminded him of this, not wanting to throw it up to him, yet she needed to be honest.

The bony shoulder shrugged under her hand. "He needs the things I can do for him. He doesn't care about me."

It was said with bravado, but she thought she could hear a world of hurt underneath. She felt a burst of sadness for this pained man and would have taken him into her arms if she'd thought he would stand for it, and if it were the sort of thing she was wont to do. But he wouldn't, and it wasn't, so she said only, "He does care. He said so."

Severus made a sound that might have been a laugh, or might not. "I disgust him."

"Once, perhaps. But not now."

"He told me so."

"He told *me* that he believed you could be a great force for good."

There was no answer, just a tightening of the already-tense shoulder, and suddenly Minerva couldn't bear not to see his face. She bent down next to him and gripped his chin, turning his head towards her.

"Severus, listen to me. You've made some serious mistakes, yes; we all have. But you've moved on, you're doing the right thing. You must try to find a way to forgive yourself."

His face twisted in anguish, then anger, and he pulled away from her.

"You don't know! You don't know a thing about it, about what I've done! Don't tell me..."

"I said listen!" She let her voice snap with the all the authority of the classroom, and Severus quieted immediately, standing stiffly in the middle of the room, his hands balled into fists at his sides.

Looking at him, Minerva nearly faltered, at a loss as to how to reach him. She knew that words would be inadequate, but they were all she had, so she spoke.

"I told you before that you have no corner on unhappiness," she said, "and you have no corner on conscience, either. I've fought in two wars, Severus. Do you think I have got out of them with my own soul unscathed?"

"You want to compare notes, then? Have a little wager on who's done the blackest deeds?" Severus's sneer was classic, but Minerva could tell his heart was not in it. She merely waited, staring at him levelly, and finally he dropped his eyes.

"I..." he muttered, tugging the fabric of his robes in agitation. He turned abruptly and started away, as if to leave the room, but then whirled back to burst out, "I never asked him, you know!"

In two strides, he was back at Minerva's side, gripping her upper arms tightly, painfully. "I never asked Dumbledore to keep me out of Azkaban! I never asked!"

Minerva was confused. "Did you *want* to go to Azkaban?"

"Yes! No! No, of course not. But I wanted...I mean, I *did* want..." His eyes glittered, and as he let go of her to wipe an angry hand across his face, she knew, all at once, what he needed.

Slowly, cautiously, she reached up to brush his hair out of his eyes and to let her fingers graze his cheek. His skin was soft and warm, and she shivered with sensations she hadn't felt in a long time.

At her touch, Severus had gone utterly still; his sallow face flushed, then paled again, and he licked his lips nervously.

"I know what you want," Minerva said, sure of herself now. "You want to be punished."

Of course he did. Like Finn had been. Like she had wanted to be. He wanted that clarity, that firm line drawn between wrongdoing and atonement, a line one could step over, leaving the mess of error behind, to stride into the clean light of a new start.

Father had meant well with her, and Albus meant well with Severus. They thought they were protecting their charges from pain, but they were wrong. Having necessary punishment withheld had merely trapped Minerva and Severus inside their remorse and shame, the mark of their sins forever staining them, leaving them no way to make themselves clean.

It was too late, now, for her, but it was not too late for Severus. He could be cleansed, and she could help him.

"You want to be punished," she whispered again, and Severus whispered in reply, "yes...", his face moving closer to hers, almost as if he would kiss her, and she felt helpless to stop it, felt as if she were watching it happen to someone else, she could feel the heat of him, see the desire and panic in his eyes as he...she?...moved even closer...

Then the fire settled with a crackle of wood and a shower of sparks, and the moment was broken. Reality returned in a rush.

Removing her hand from Severus's face, Minerva stepped back from him and smoothed her robes, ignoring the pounding of her heart to speak with what she hoped was her usual crispness.

"I think you need a punishment, Severus," she said. "You need to feel you've paid with something real, something beyond your own sorrow and regret."

She wanted to say more, to tell him about her brother and her father, how Father had caned Finn, and how it had been harsh but ultimately, as Father had said, for his own good. Finn had grown into a fine man...quiet, like Severus, and perhaps not always happy, but a fine person, far finer than she. Father had always been proud of Finn.

But she forced herself to say nothing further. She would merely be babbling, using meaningless words to cover up how much her unexpected feeling of arousal had unsettled and dismayed her. After twenty-five mostly-celibate years in a boarding school, she rarely thought about sex, and she wasn't about to start now, not with a damaged colleague young enough to be her son, a colleague who clearly needed her most careful and disinterested attention.

Severus didn't seem to notice her discomfort. He was looking at some spot beyond her shoulder, his eyes unfocused. "A punishment," he muttered. "What kind of punishment?"

"Well...I don't know. What do you think you would find effective? My father...my father used to cane my brother, though of course Finn was much younger at the time than you are."

"Caning?" Severus sounded dubious, as well he might. Minerva hadn't been meaning to suggest such a thing for him. It would be unseemly, surely, for a grown man, but even if it weren't, she doubted that Albus would agree to administer the strokes. And the punishment would need to come from Albus, of course, from a man of stature whom Severus respected, whose good opinion mattered to him.

Still, perhaps she could ask Albus what he considered suitable. He would think of something.

"I could..." Minerva began, but was interrupted by Severus, speaking much more loudly than he usually did, his face burning painfully.

"Would you do it?" he demanded.

What was the man talking about? "I?" she said sharply. "Do what?"

"What do you think? Punish me, of course."

"Punish you? I?" Minerva was aware that she was behaving with uncharacteristic dimness, but somehow she wasn't thinking clearly. She was fighting to turn her mind away from the sudden vision that Severus's words had conjured, a vision of him lying across her desk, his trousers down, his bare skin waiting to be marked...oh, god...

"What on earth do you mean?" she cried, much more brusquely than she'd meant to. "I won't be made a mockery of, Professor Snape. Perhaps we had better pretend that this conversation never occurred." She could feel her face flame as she stepped smartly around him, intending to leave his chambers at once and never return.

His hand shot out, closing on her wrist with a grip of iron. "I'm not mocking you," he said, speaking with a quiet directness that she rarely heard from him. No sneers, no sarcasm, no disdain...just a somber request, though he still would not look at her. "I'm asking you. Will you punish me?"

"Severus, I wouldn't begin to know what to do. I..."

"Cane me."

The words sent a jolt through Minerva's body, of heat and fear and something more. "I couldn't..."

Now his eyes moved to her face, and with a sinking feeling she saw that all his bitterness and suspicion had returned. He dropped his hand from her wrist and stepped away. "No, of course you couldn't. Perfect brave Gryffindors don't get their brave little hands dirty, do they? Not for Slytherins."

"Severus..."

"I think it's time for you to go, Professor."

He was trying so hard to act as if he didn't care, as if he weren't young and distraught and alone...

Minerva made up her mind. To whom could he turn, if not to the people at Hogwarts? Would he have to look to the Death Eaters for support? No. She could not let that happen. She would not fail Severus a second time.

"All right," she said. "If it is truly what you wish, then I will punish you."

The expression that flickered over Severus's face was gone before she could identify it. He said nothing, merely stood waiting, and Minerva felt both hot and chilled at the same time. Could she...could she actually do this? But another look at Severus firmed her resolve. Of course she could. He needed her.

She spoke briskly as she surveyed the room for a suitable implement. "I'll need something to transfigure...that is, if you really do want the cane?" The question was genuine; he must be allowed the chance to change his mind if he chose.

He was silent for so long that she finally glanced back at him. He'd tilted his head forward so that his face was obscured by his long hair.

"Do you?" she asked again.

"Predrhnd," he said.

"I can't understand you, Severus; you're mumbling."

This time, he shook back his hair and looked at her. "I said," he enunciated with exaggerated clarity, "that I would prefer you to use your hand."

His eyes dropped at that, and for just a moment, he looked like a misbehaving sixth-year, caught in some infraction and awaiting a sentence of detention. But then he visibly collected himself, and when he looked back at her again, it was with a man's solemn face, his chin raised and his features set; only his high colour betrayed his strong emotions.

Minerva could feel her breathing quicken. Her first impulse was to refuse, and sternly, but she held her tongue. He was testing her, she thought...trying to see how far she would go to help him, to see if she were actually willing to "dirty her hands" or if she would insist on the distance of the cane.

Well, Minerva hadn't been the best student in her class for nothing. When it came to tests, she did not fail.

With her wand, she conjured a solid, straight-backed wooden chair and let it walk itself to the center of Severus's sitting-room. Then she crossed to it and sat down carefully, tucking her skirts behind her knees and stiffening her back. She knew she must look prim and judgemental, but among the many things that age had not given her was the ability to deal gracefully with embarrassment. Severity remained her only defence.

"You will come forward," she said. "Lower your trousers and then bend over."

He didn't hesitate, but obeyed immediately, and in very short order, he lay across her lap. She'd not thought to tell him to face towards her left, so that her right hand would be properly positioned, but by accident or foresight, he had done so. Now there was nothing for her to do but begin.

She took a deep breath, trying to steady herself, to nerve herself to study the too-thin, too-pale flanks, the narrow buttocks. She could feel his genitals, soft against her leg...except that he was not completely soft. A partial erection prodded her, and she nearly gasped at the sensation. What sexual experience she'd had was limited and not recent; she'd forgotten how powerful the excitement could be, how much she had once enjoyed the sensation of a strong man filling her...

She forced her mind back to the situation at hand. *For shame, Minerva*, she told herself. She was wronging Severus to think of him in that way, when she was here to help him. His reaction was merely physical, nothing more...

And without further ado, she raised her arm and brought her hand down with stinging force.

His body jerked, but he made no sound, not then and not as she rained more blows on his unprotected skin. Just like her Finn, her Severus was strong.

At first the marks of her hand were clear, bright red against the pale flesh. But gradually, the red spread, until his entire backside was aflame. Still she did not stop...she counted aloud, as Father had done; she tried to ignore the pain in her hand and shoulder, and even more did she try to ignore the heat of Severus's skin, the sensation of his body hair against her palm...and the increasing length and hardness of his erection as it pressed into her lap.

Eventually she realised that they were both rocking their bodies together in rhythmic synchrony. She could no longer restrain her gasping breaths, and Severus was clutching her knees tightly, pushing forward with each slap of her hand, driving his organ hard against her.

Soon his hips were thrusting uncontrollably, he was grunting, and finally she felt him spend himself on her thigh, the wet stickiness of his release soon soaking through her robes.

Severus's limbs went slack, and he groaned aloud in what sounded like despair.

"Shhhhhh," Minerva murmured, bringing her hand in stinging contact with his flesh once more. He must not let himself feel shame, no shame, none. Not about this, at any rate. He had enough legitimate shame to work through; she wouldn't add to it. She would take no direct notice of the ejaculation, she would continue as if nothing had happened...

"Shhhhhhh, it's all right, it's all right, shhhhh...."

She went on whispering: soothing sounds and nonsense words and a charm to clean and dry them both, for he must not feel shame, it would be as if his lapse had never occurred, it meant nothing, just a physiological response, it was not about sex, not about wanting, shhhhh, shhhhhh...

Very soon she was no longer spanking him, just rubbing his angry red flesh gently with one hand and smoothing his sweaty hair with the other. She didn't try to see his face; she didn't want to know if tears marked it, for like Finn, he must be allowed his dignity, his privacy.

And so she sat, murmuring what comfort she could, moving her stroking hand from his buttocks to his black-clothed back and then down to his lean, bare thighs, resisting the shocking temptation to slide her hand between his legs to cup and massage him, for it wasn't about sex, not at all.

Time passed...how much, she wasn't sure...and then Severus pushed himself off her lap, pulling up his trousers quickly. Minerva stood, too, but before she could wonder what to say, Severus made her an oddly-formal little bow.

"Thank you," he said. "Minerva."

She inclined her head formally, too, not quite trusting herself to speak. Her hand still tingled, her shoulder ached, and her drawers were most unconsciously damp. She needed the quiet and solace of her own rooms.

But she forced herself to stand her ground and not hurry off; it wouldn't do to let Severus think she regretted having helped him or thought any less of him. Nor did she: on the contrary, she admired his fortitude.

He would need it, this strength; in the days and weeks to come, he would need all the courage he could muster. She was not foolish enough to think that one evening's punishment could provide him full expiation for his sins; the process would be long and arduous. Of course she would do what she could to support him, though she feared it would not be much. Whatever forgiveness he found could not come from her, not from someone he'd never wronged and who had sufficient sins of her own.

Suddenly, Minerva was exhausted. She needed to be alone, and surely Severus, solitary soul that he was, must be feeling the same. She would leave him now, to his thoughts and to himself.

And as she watched him stare into the fire, his face shadowed by the flickering light, she thought that it would be best if she did not return. She would miss their evenings together, but...yes. It would be for the best.

Allowing herself just the lightest of touches, she patted his arm. "Good night, Severus," she said, and left his room without waiting for him to answer.

If she had been a vainer woman, she might have fancied that he looked disappointed as she left; she might even have thought that he half-extended a hand as if to keep her with him.

But not even her father had ever called Minerva McGonagall vain, and so she pushed these notions firmly from her mind. Severus Snape was a young man with his salvation to work out; she hoped she had helped him to begin, and there was an end of it. She would report to the headmaster in the morning that she'd talked with Professor Snape about teaching and was pleased with his progress.

And if, later, in her solitary bed, she thought about Severus as she touched herself in the dark, thought about how he had felt, soft under her hand and hard against her thigh, no one but Minerva would ever know.