

Never

by kellychambliss

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Chapter 1 -- Minerva

Chapter 1 of 2

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A/N: I think that canon has room for a variety of plausible interpretations of Snape and McGonagall: we can view them, for instance, as insecure people plagued by varying degrees of self-hatred. I wanted to explore the sort of relationship they might have if they were damaged in those ways. This fic is the result.

Warnings: lots of emo. Not a happy story. You'll want to knock some sense into the both of them.

My everlasting thanks to my long-suffering beta, The Real Snape.

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January, 1996

Minerva

He never makes love to her. He rarely even fucks her...but it is a measure of how much he has changed her, that Minerva McGonagall even lets herself think such a word.

She has said it, too...has said "fuck" aloud in the privacy of her own rooms, trying to accustom herself to its harsh ugliness, hoping that the sound of it will reconcile her to the Minerva she has somehow become: an old woman, stern and unloved, unwanted even by the man who beds her.

At least, she assumes she holds only slight physical attraction for Severus Snape despite the fact that their affair...or whatever it is: their arrangement, their sexual exchange...has lasted for almost two years. True, he doesn't seem to want to end the relationship, but neither does he seem actually to want to be with her.

They first slept together during the year that Sirius Black escaped from Azkaban. It had been a time when everyone, even Albus, had been reeling from the breach of the castle's defences, when it seemed that a murderer prowled the school, preying on children. Severus in particular had been on edge; the presence on the staff of his old nemesis Remus Lupin had rendered him even more bitter and vicious-tongued than ever.

Throughout that autumn term, he would come to Minerva's rooms to rant and rage; she would offer understanding and argument in equal measure. And if Severus's angry passions had seemed to ignite other, more personal fires between the two of them, they'd both chosen...at least for a while...to ignore the flames.

At that point, they had been something she had called "friends" (though she does not venture to assume that Severus would ever have used the term). Still, it had seemed like friendship to her: for several years, they had been in the habit of spending evenings in each other's company, talking, debating, sharing a drink.

But those days gradually ended, done in by the arrival of Lupin and before him, of Harry Potter. Now, between the frightening return of the Dark Lord last spring and the

arrival of the unspeakable Dolores Umbridge this past autumn, Severus has almost abandoned Minerva, his interest in her reduced to only the occasional tryst. To their fellow staffers, he never gives the slightest hint that his relationship with her goes beyond that of competitive rivals. In private, he has come to her bed only rarely in these last few months, and he takes her to his own more rarely still.

On her good days, she thinks his lack of attention is a reflection of his own inability to form healthy relationships, and she tells herself that he gives her as much of himself as he could give to anyone.

On her bad days, she fears that he disdains her, that he beds her merely because she's there, because she's better than nothing, because who else at Hogwarts would let an murdering ex-Death Eater touch them?

She tries to be understanding, tries to remind herself of the terrible stresses Severus lives under, now that He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named regularly demands his presence. Severus will never tell her what he endures on those visits, which is as it should be, of course; it would be dangerous for everyone if she knew too much. But she doesn't think that the Dark Lord's return accounts for the whole problem, because Severus's indifference feels more personal than circumstantial: she thinks he has begun to tire of her.

And what else would you expect, Minerva, you old fool she scolds herself. *You're older than his mother.* (And truth be told...for she tries always to tell it to herself...she'd been no prize even in her youth.)

Still, she thinks that she could bear the infrequency of Severus's visits if he seemed to enjoy their times together or at least seemed to find them relaxing.

But he doesn't. Even during sex, even at his moment of climax, he seems pained, angry, impatient, and he never stays with her for long. Most of the time, their sexual encounters occur wherever he stops moving when he enters her rooms: the sofa, the floor, and once, against the door to the corridor.

Nor does he take her the way Minerva would prefer: slowly, softly (at least at first), with an occasional caress or perhaps even a kiss, and afterwards, an embrace. Instead, there is often no intercourse as such: sex consists of his relentless fingers roaming her body, or his relentless tongue driving her so close to the edge of orgasm that she has to fight not to sob in despair when he stops. Or sex is sometimes his cock in her mouth, his hands tight in her hair. He never removes his robes, staying fully-clothed while insisting on her nakedness.

But no matter what the particular act, sex for him, she believes, is always about conquest and domination, never affection.

And she never objects, for somehow, against all her better judgment and experience, she has come to need Severus. He's been such a constant in her world since he joined the Hogwarts staff, a valued ally on issues ranging from academic standards to fashion. She is often the only person to pick up his bone-dry humour, and she's come to crave the slight quirk of lips that counts as his smile.

Sharing jokes that no one else understood was only the first secret they held together; eventually they had an entire language of glances and raised eyebrows. But lately, Severus has become remote. Their occasional staffroom moments are now the only intimacy they have outside of sex, and she feels adrift if she can't trade looks with him over staff and student idiocies or share a moment of silent appreciation at Albus's genius for getting people to do as he wishes.

She remembers how surprised she was when she realised, five years after Severus started teaching, that she considered him a friend. Minerva has never formed friendships easily, particularly not the sort she forged in those early years with Severus, with its give-and-take of banter, its energetic conversations, and its unexpected solaces.

They had not come together painlessly, of course; both of them were too reserved, too shielded, too wary of others to have lowered their defences without struggle. Minerva at first had retreated behind her disapproving glare and her sharp tongue. Severus, for his turn, had baited her, sneering at her most cherished ideals: her admiration of Albus, her belief in the value of teaching, her love of her homeland.

She'd refused to respond to his taunts, at first because she hadn't wanted to give him the satisfaction of seeing that he'd upset her, but soon because she'd come to understand that he was testing her regard for him; he was trying to find what it would take to make her reject him. He'd been rejected so often before...and not always without reason...that he could not make himself believe that anyone, let alone the Head of Gryffindor, might actually accept him.

The friendship didn't really progress, though, until Christmas of 1982 or '83, she isn't sure which...but Severus had been teaching for no more than a year or two. On that particular Christmas, he and Minerva had been the only staff members who remained in the castle; everyone else, even Mr Filch, had friends or family with whom to celebrate.

But Severus, it appeared, had no one, and Minerva had long preferred to stay at Hogwarts to keep watch over the remaining children instead of visiting her brother and his family, where she was always treated politely and yet ended up feeling more alone than when she was by herself.

Why Severus had accepted her impulsive invitation to share a dram of firewhisky (Albus kindly gives her a bottle of her favourite Macbain every Yuletide), she doesn't know to this day, but accept he did. They'd sat for a quiet hour, sipping and saying little, until the third time that Minerva had held out the Macbain in silent offer of a refill. Severus, his tongue perhaps looser than normal, had suddenly tilted his head and looked at her quizzically.

"You don't find this odd?" he'd said, with just enough of a sneer to remind her to whom she was speaking. "To be sitting here, oh-so-civilised, drinking with a Death Eater?"

Minerva had not been about to let him ruin the calm of Christmas night, though it cost her something not to respond tartly. "According to Albus," she'd replied, as mildly as she was able, "and from what I've seen for myself, you're a *former* Death Eater."

"And that makes a difference?"

He spoke mockingly, but she'd chosen to answer seriously. "If 'former' truly represents a genuine change of heart, then yes. It makes a difference."

He'd studied his liquor, holding his glass toward the fire so that the light sharded off the edges. "People have died because of me."

Severus's tongue, Minerva admitted later, might not have been the only one loosened that evening. For she surprised herself by saying, "And people have died because of me as well. I've been in two wars, Severus, remember?"

He'd snorted. "But you were fighting for..."

"Don't!" There had been no concealing her sharpness then. If he were going to try to tell her that she could excuse her actions because she'd been serving a good cause or because she'd been acting in defence, she didn't want to hear it. She had a right to her remorse, the same as he did. "Don't say it. My dead are just as dead as yours."

There had been a pause in which the crackle of the fireplace flames had sounded abnormally loud, and then Severus had dipped his head and raised his glass to her in silent acknowledgement.

They had said their goodnights not long afterward and never referred to the evening again.

But it had been the turning point in their relationship. A few weeks later, she'd taken the hippogriff by the beak and invited Severus for a drink in her sitting room. He'd accepted.

It was the first of what were to become regular meetings, and eventually Minerva realised that, however infrequent, their evenings of talk and firewhisky had become the highlight of her life.

She's still not certain, though, how even a strong friendship between a 33-year-old former student and his 68-year-old former teacher could have changed into something so powerfully sexual. At first she hadn't recognised her desire for what it was, had told herself that her beating heart and flushed face merely reflected the intensity of her interactions with Severus, the force of their arguments about Remus and Harry, the passion of their debates about politics.

When she could no longer deny the fact that what she felt had little to do with politics and much to do with a wholly-inappropriate speculation about Severus's anatomy, she had taken herself severely to task as pathetic, risible, even twisted.

Yet on that unforgettable evening, two years ago now, when Severus had made his initial sexual advance, she had responded eagerly, all qualms forgotten. If, in her saner moments, she still feels irredeemably wicked in the old-fashioned sense of the term...sinful and depraved...those thoughts disappear the moment Severus touches her.

His first touch had happened late one night, after they'd spent hours in her sitting room talking about any number of things. For once they had not been debating Lupin or Potter or any of the fraught circumstances of that difficult year; it had seemed almost like their old, easier times.

She'd stayed up far later than she should have, knowing that she'd be sorry when rising time came early the next morning, but she hadn't wanted the evening to end, not when she so enjoyed their discussion and the smooth firewhisky and above all, Severus's company.

Though she still cannot put a name to it, something had changed for her that night. As she watched his expressive hands and noted the suggestion of hard, sinewy limbs under his robes, her arousal had become almost overwhelming. She'd struggled to keep from panting with the heat of it, for the only thing stronger than her desire was her need to keep Severus unaware of her feelings. He would be revolted, horrified, and she couldn't bear the thought of losing his regard.

When he'd finally got up to leave, she'd been almost relieved; she hadn't known how much longer she could refrain from doing something foolish.

She'd stood up with him, to see him out, and as they reached the door, he'd suddenly taken her hand and run his thumb along the inside of her wrist, then lifted it to his lips, brushing her skin so lightly that she would have thought she imagined the contact, had he not deepened his touch an instant later, pressing his lips hard against her palm.

She'd felt her cheeks flush and knew that Severus must have been able to see how heavily she was breathing. He didn't release her, just fastened his gaze on hers, his eyes offering both question and challenge.

"I don't want your pity, Severus," she'd said after a moment, trying to sound firm with what little breath she had left. He'd snorted and pulled back slightly.

"I pity no one," he said.

"And I won't be your convenience, either," she'd retorted a bit more strongly; she could deal with him better when he gave her something to push against.

He'd said nothing, had just lifted her wrist to his lips once more. The next moment she'd felt the touch of his tongue on her pulse, and she could control herself no longer. She heard herself moan, felt her legs give way. He'd caught her, pulling her close against him so that she could feel his already-hard cock, and then lowered her to her knees.

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Sometimes, in the dead of night and never in actual words, she will admit to herself how deeply she cares for him. It is a weakness, she knows, and knows that he would think so, too. So she is careful never to let him suspect, never to ask for more than he seems able to give, however little that is. He is a damaged man, as she knows all too well: to her eternal shame, she had been party to some of the damage herself.

She hadn't protected him as she should have, during his student days. He'd been a difficult boy, hostile and defiant, giving free rein to his caustic tongue. But still, she'd known of his problems with Potter and Black, and she hadn't intervened, hadn't let herself see the extent of the bullying, because she hadn't wanted to believe that boys of her House could be so much to blame. She'd closed her eyes, and because she had, a young boy's hard life had been made even harder.

So offering herself to him, giving him what pleasure she can...it is an expiation of sorts. If it is what he needs from her, she will give it, and she will not ask for more.

And she admits, of course, that she gains a great deal of pleasure, too, pleasure of a sort that she never would have thought she could want. Before Severus, she'd had only the most conventional of sexual experience, and not even much of that. She'd been married, briefly, to an older man who had been kind, but who had wanted more of a housekeeper than a wife. He'd been considerate in bed, even courtly, but there had been little in the way of foreplay or variety. Then his last, long illness had begun, and the physical side of their relationship had ended entirely.

After her husband's death, she'd had only one lover besides Severus...an American she'd shocked herself by allowing to pick her up on a summer trip to Crete. She'd been forty and had seen nothing ahead of her but lonely decades at Hogwarts, her bed empty, her body untouched except for the occasional absent pat on the shoulder from Albus.

The American, a widower, had been on holiday alone, the same as she was; they'd met in their hotel dining room and ultimately had spent three quiet nights together. And though she'd found the encounter pleasurable enough, she concluded that it had been an unseemly indulgence. Essentially anonymous sex in anonymous lodgings... it was tawdry, and cheap, and something she planned never to repeat. Thereafter, she had kept herself to herself.

Until Severus.

Minerva is of a generation and temperament that distrusts too much personal pleasure, that hedges it about with moral imperatives that part of her is still astonished to find she's so easily discarded at Severus's feet. At times, she feels that she hardly knows the Minerva she has become.

But at other times, it is the Minerva of the past...the one who'd treated sex as something both sacred and vaguely unclean...who seems like a stranger to her. If she had a time-turner and could show her current self to the thirty-five- or forty- or even fifty-year-old Minerva, she thinks those younger Minervas would look with horror at the person she so often is now.

Would they even recognise her, aging and wanton, naked on her knees with her mouth full of cock? Or on her back with her legs open, desperate to be taken...all right, to be fucked...by a colleague half her age?

Not that Severus readily gives her what she wants: he can be demanding in bed, capricious and withholding; he enjoys making her wait, making her beg, making her say words that had never left her lips until she had given herself to this dark man.

She should put a stop to it all, she supposes...should do something to reclaim her lost dignity, should insist on more...tenderness or...

But she doesn't. She'd been dignified...and alone, and mostly celibate...for decades, and it had gained her only two solitary rooms in a draughty castle and a reputation for forbidding sternness.

Still, she might have more qualms about allowing Severus such power over her if she hadn't seen moments of vulnerability in him, of need. The clues are small, but she treasures them.

Sometimes after sex, he pulls her into his arms, holding her so tightly that she can barely breathe, pressing his lips to her temple or her neck. Or sometimes, as he is leaving, he will brush her lips lightly with his own, just the whisper of a kiss coupled with an equally-light pass of his fingers through her hair.

And twice, he has fallen asleep in her bed, one arm wrapped around her, his breath warming her shoulder. True, he'd been gone when she awakened the next morning,

but each time, he'd spelled a warm nightgown onto her body and had carefully reset her wards.

Then, too, he never leaves her unsatisfied. No matter how long he makes her wait, he always finally brings her to completion, sometimes with such gentleness that she feels near inexplicable tears.

Usually, though, he is rougher, but the method never really matters, because by the time he is ready to allow her release, it rarely takes much to finish her. Most often, his lightest touch has her thrashing and bucking and crying out with an abandon that no longer surprises her, though whether this shameless *wanting* is something long-buried and inherent in her personality or is a response only to Severus, she neither knows nor cares. She knows only that he...his voice and mind and cock and fingers and sneer and unwilling quarter-smile...has become almost as necessary to her as her magic.

She knows that eventually, she will need to talk with him, to rebalance their relationship so that she does not endanger her self-respect. But she keeps postponing the moment, telling herself that now is not the time to add to Severus's stress. Each time she has firmly resolved to speak to him, some new crisis has arisen...first the danger of Sirius Black, then the strains of the Tri-Wizard Tournament, then the death of poor Cedric. This year, she tells herself that, given the menace represented by Umbridge, they can't afford to distract themselves with attention to personal problems.

But she is only partly successful in lying to herself; she knows that these are merely excuses.

The truth is, she is afraid. The danger of initiating an honest talk with Severus is that he might put into actual words the fears that she can usually ignore as long as they remain unspoken: fears that she bores him, annoys him. Disgusts him.

Minerva is well aware of the irony of her situation: she knows that in the face of a threat to her school or her students, she would brave the peril without a qualm. But when the threat is to her pathetic stolen moments with a man who might very well despise her, she is the rankest of cowards.

She will talk to him eventually, she promises herself. Someday. Soon. But not today. She needs him today.

At breakfast, he invites her, in his usual Snapian way, to spend the night with him. "Minerva, when I lent you my copy of *Gibbons on Gamp*, I didn't intend to make it a gift. I'll be in my rooms by eight this evening; return it to me then."

Ignoring Pomona's look of supportive sympathy, Mineva gives Severus a tight nod. She will be at his door at eight precisely, and she will probably be out of her robes and on her knees by quarter past, and even as she yearns for his touch, she knows that he will never want her as she wants him.

Chapter 2 -- Severus

Chapter 2 of 2

Their affair has been going on for two years now, and both Severus and Minerva believe they understand each other completely. Set during OoP.

Severus

In twenty-seven minutes, she will arrive. Minerva is nothing if not punctual, and Severus knows that when he says, "eight o'clock," she will arrive precisely to the second. It's her way of chastising him, he supposes...of reminding him that, unlike her, he is rarely on time.

Sometimes he's late because his schedule is not his own; he must come and go at others' whims. And sometimes he's late because his schedule is his own: on those few occasions when he is at leisure, he's not about to let anyone else dictate when he must show up to something. He'll arrive...if he arrives at all...when he's damned good and ready.

He's ready now, though. For Minerva's visit. He's finished his preparations, such as they are: firewhisky set out, two tumblers located and scoured with a cleaning charm. And a freshening spell for his sheets.

The sheets are important, for he intends to bring her to his bed tonight. Tomorrow is his birthday, quite possibly the last he will ever have...between Voldemort and Albus, it's a wonder he's lasted to the ripe old age of almost-thirty-six...and he wants to please himself for once. He wants an entire night with Minerva, one that will end with her asleep in his arms, after he's given her what pleasure he can. And taken his own, of course.

He'll give himself this one gift, but otherwise, nothing in their relationship will change. He'll continue to keep his distance from Minerva and to insist that she keep hers. Those are his terms, and they are not negotiable, because he has to protect himself. He can never let her know how much she has come to mean to him.

He doesn't quite understand it himself, for by all rights he should despise her, a Gryffindor who has never known what it is to be an outsider, whose confidence in her place and her magic shows through in her every brisk, decisive movement.

Yes, he should detest her, but instead, he feels at ease with her in ways he has never felt at ease with anyone else. Not with Lily, certainly. The fierce joy he'd felt as a boy in being with Lily had always co-existed with an equally fierce fear: of losing her, of fucking up and ruining everything...which, of course, was exactly what he'd done. The Death Eaters, too: there'd been no ease there, either; just as in his schooldays, he'd always been trying to prove himself worthy, and not surprisingly, he'd fucked that up as well.

But with Minerva, there's nothing to prove. He is what he is, as is she; there's no pretense.

There's just sex, and damned good sex, too, at least as far as he can tell. That's another thing that Severus feels he's been cheated of: a normal sex life. He knows for a fact that most people are not still virgins at twenty-one, the way he was...and might have continued to be for years, had not Lucius (exasperated, no doubt, by Severus's gormlessness) finally escorted him to a brothel off Knockturn Alley. (The place had been, not to put too fine a point on it, a dump; trust Lucius to find every way of reminding Severus that he was just a half-blood from Spinner's End.)

The prostitute hadn't been much older than he was, but she'd dispatched him with a quick, almost clinical efficiency that had been helped considerably by Severus's embarrassingly over-eager cock; he'd barely lasted three minutes. Still, the experience had been preferable to the hot shame of his own hand, and Severus had continued to visit brothels (or sometimes to seek out anonymous women in Muggle pubs) during his early years of teaching.

Mostly, though, it had been easier just to remain celibate or to resort to a hurried wank if his treacherous body absolutely demanded it. He'd needed and wanted nothing more.

Until Minerva.

Now Severus knows want and need. He wants Minerva's sharp-boned, spare-fleshed, not-young body with an intensity that surprised him the first time he felt it, on that surreal, long-ago Christmas night when he'd somehow ended up sitting alone with her, drinking too much firewhisky and finding his thoughts inexplicably flooded with disturbing images: of Minerva, lying naked on the hearthrug, Minerva with her hair loose...

It was the whisky, he told himself, his mind reeling with the utter and perfect irony of it: that when, for the first time since Lily's death, he felt something other than rage, despair, or numbness, it should be lust for an old woman. His former teacher, no less. He'd concealed his stupid erection as best he could and blamed the bloody drink.

Except that it hadn't been the drink. He kept seeing naked Minerva in his head even when he was painfully sober. He'd decided to deny himself food until he could get her out of his mind, but all that happened was that he got light-headed and faint and felt as if his brain had left his body: he floated to the ceiling of his dungeon quarters and looked down at himself lying on the bed. And he'd hated that scrawny, pasty, greasy *thing* that was Severus, pathetic and ridiculous and disgusting. He'd hated himself...and still he wanted her.

He'd managed to keep his absurd feelings in check for years, even though he had (stupidly) allowed himself to spend personal time with her. Early on, she'd been the only member of the staff who hadn't irritated him beyond measure, and though he'd had no interest in actual friendship, he'd reached a point at which spending an occasional evening in her rooms, drinking and debating, had been...not unpleasant.

Things would no doubt have continued in this safe way had it not been...of course...for Remus Arsehole Lupin and Sirius Fucking Black. During that miserable Year of Lupin, Severus had thought things could hardly be worse (oh, how the Universe must have snickered at that notion), and he had yielded to the temptation to complain to Minerva. He'd gone to her rooms more often than usual, to pace and rant and release some of his tension by debating with her, and over time, his desire for her had come rushing back.

The last thing he'd ever intended was to let her know how he felt. On that fatal night nearly two years ago, when he'd taken hold of her hand, he'd told himself even as he lifted her arm to his lips that he was going to stop, that he wasn't going to be so damned fucking *stupid*...

But he was that stupid, of course. He'd kissed her palm and touched his tongue to her wrist and had waited for her to strike him or laugh at him.

Instead she'd literally fallen into his arms, and when he'd pushed her to her knees in front of him...to shock her, to show her how perverse he was, to make her see how she was humiliating herself...she had refused to understand. She had simply taken his cock into her mouth, and he had been lost.

Two years have passed, and he's still lost; nothing has changed, except that he's less able to do without her now. He needs Minerva, and he clutches that information to himself with all the ardour of a jealous lover. He'll never let her know his feelings, for they are a weakness, and she would see them as such.

Severus knows precisely what he is to her: someone who asks no commitment, who doesn't complicate her austere life with tenderness or with emotions that she would never want to reciprocate. He is like a confessional to her, a way to work out her guilt and regrets, a way to punish herself. That is why she submits to him so docilely, he's convinced, for in no other way is Minerva ever docile.

As to why she feels such guilt...well, she must believe she has failed somehow: failed him, failed Albus, failed herself. Failed to save Diggory. Maybe it's that she failed to die in battle, when so many others were lost, some...at least according to what she'd told him all those years ago...dead by her own hand. Or maybe it is the return of the Dark Lord that has set her conscience to troubling her: another war is inevitable, and Minerva would have to be a fool (which she assuredly isn't) not to understand that she will no doubt have to kill again.

He doesn't know where her guilt comes from, and he doesn't really care. As long as she thinks she is paying him for her sins, he knows he can continue to be with her, to share his only intimate moments with her. That's why he can never treat her gently, can never make love to her...because then there would always be the possibility that she suffered his touch just for the sake of the sex, not because she wanted or needed *him* in particular.

But if she puts up with his disdain and his indifference, then he can allow himself the illusion that perhaps ~~it's~~ actually him she wants, and not just the sort of generic sexual pleasure that any warm and willing body could provide.

That this idea *is* an illusion, he does not doubt. Of course she doesn't really want him. He's merely of use to her, just as he's of use to Albus and the Dark Lord. Nothing more.

Usually he accepts this state of affairs as a given of the universe: Severus Snape is unwanted.

But occasionally he wonders if there is anything he could do to change the situation. He knows that he is not skilled at pleasing women; he's too impatient with the silly rituals of romance and flattery, too unwilling to make the sort of concessions that successful relationships appear to require. Perhaps he should try...

Still, even if he were willing to make such a fool of himself, it wouldn't work with Minerva. He can't imagine anyone who would be less interested in romantic trappings: flowers or sentimental verses or the like. At best she'd laugh at him; at worst, she'd scorn him. The only other thing he can think to do is to tell her outright how much she matters to him, and that would be the biggest mistake of all. He'd be mad to give her that much power over him.

And he doesn't want to see the disgust in her eyes.

Fifteen minutes to go now, before she arrives. He realises that he has been pacing like a nervous schoolboy, and he forces himself to sit in the armchair next to the fire.

The chair is where she'll find him when she comes in, he decides. He won't rise to greet her; he'll make her come to him.

He often tries to see how far he can push her; he'd like to discover the limits of her submission, to find out just how deep her guilt goes. Deep enough, clearly, to make her willing to debase herself to the point of being fucked by Severus Snape, who is not just a Death Eater...he's a Death Eater so worthless that he didn't even have the guts to do his own killing.

It's not that he actually *wants* to have killed anyone with his own hands or wand. But if people were going to die because of his idiocy, he should at least have taken the responsibility of their deaths onto himself and not been a pathetic murderer-by-proxy, betraying the one he loved while technically keeping his hands clean.

Unexpectedly, his mind flashes to his childhood. He's surprised, for he never dwells on his Muggle past. But suddenly he has a clear vision of the little church his grandmother Snape had sometimes taken him to. Gran had been Chapel, and she'd made Severus sit with her on the hard pews at least twice a month, until his Hogwarts letter mercifully delivered him from church and so much more.

But he's never forgotten the fire-and-brimstone preacher, Reverend Haltwhistle, a stern and unyielding man whose powerful words had pinned people in their seats like rats in front of a snake. Severus can hear him yet, his voice with its sing-song rhythms, first roaring, sending waves of sound crashing down upon the hapless parishioners, then dropping to a rasping whisper that, despite himself, Severus had strained to hear.

"And dear JEsus was betrayed...beTRAYED...by JU-das Iscariot. JU-das Iscariot, you must not forget him. This man, this apostle, this JU-das Iscariot, gave up the Lord of All for thirty pieces of silver, this JU-das, this base deceiver, betrayed our Lord with a KISS..."

JU-das Iscariot, as the Reverend Haltwhistle had never tired of pointing out, had been damned to hell, and Severus sometimes fancies that he knows just what JU-das's hell looked like: a castle dungeon filled with eternal fires that burned under potions cauldrons tended by imp-like child-demons.

And it's to a dungeon that Minerva will come in...eight minutes. Resisting the urge to pace again, Severus tries to calm himself by envisioning what will happen when she arrives.

The room will be dim, with no light but the flames in the grate, and Minerva will walk to his chair through patterns of brightness and shadow.

She will stop in front of him, waiting, for on these evenings it is their unspoken arrangement that he is in charge, and she will do as he wishes.

He knows there are communities for such things, with formal rules about dominance and submission, but that isn't what he wants...nothing organized or acknowledged outright. No rules. Rules are too important to Minerva...they give her, not pleasure precisely, but security, stability, and Severus needs to keep her off-balance. She must be kept uncertain lest he start to bore her.

He thinks that tonight, at first, he will not look at her; he doesn't want the sight of her prim lips (and the memories of them wrapped around his cock) and her pale, markable neck to arouse him too fully too soon. He wants this encounter to last. But eventually he will tell her to remove her robes...without magic...and will watch as she does so.

Her movements will be controlled but unhurried, and when she finishes, she will kneel before him and bend her head forward; she knows by now that he wants to take her hair down himself. It is one of the few soft touches he allows himself...he'll murmur a de-tangling charm as he lets the freed strands run through his fingers; then he'll smooth the silver-streaked dark mass over her shoulders and onto her breasts.

He will be tempted, as he always is, to Banish his own robes, so that he can feel her bare skin against his own, but also as always, he will stifle the thought. Remaining clothed while she is not is one of the ways that he likes to keep her unsettled.

But he also does it, he admits, because he wants to protect himself. The sight of Minerva's angular body, with its marks of age, of a lived life, never fails to excite him, but he prefers not to risk allowing her a sight of his. He knows too well what an off-putting vision she would see: scrawny flanks and a nearly-hairless chest and rounded shoulders. It's bad enough that she has to see his skinny cock.

He closes his eyes for a moment, his mind filled with the image of Minerva naked before him, awaiting his dictates. He will lead her into the bedroom at that point, he thinks. She will be surprised, for rarely does he give himself the leisure and the license to have her in his bed. But tonight he plans take her slowly and thoroughly and more than once. And he will let her come whenever she pleases.

She will be uninhibited and vocal as she always is, something that had amazed him at first...he couldn't believe that this was prim and proper Professor McGonagall, abandoning herself to sexual pleasure. But a few moments' thought had shown him that such passion was to be expected: no one who is as given to shouting in daily life as Minerva could be passive in bed.

He checks his mantel clock: two minutes left. Severus considers knocking back a quick dram, but decides against it; he doesn't want to dull even the slightest edge of the evening. And he doesn't want Minerva to arouse herself through drink, either. He will serve them the firewhisky later, after he beds her, so that when she opens herself to him and begs for him..."Severus, please"...he can convince himself, at least for tonight, that her desire is real.

The clock begins to chime softly. Eight o'clock. At exactly that moment, Severus feels the electric crackle along his skin and sees the shimmer of the air that announces the disturbance of his wards.

Minerva has arrived.

In another moment she will be standing before him. She will have made no special preparations, he knows: she will still be wearing her everyday teaching robes, her plain and practical underthings, her spectacles. He will not allow himself to be irrationally disappointed that the evening obviously isn't special to her.

For he has long accepted the fact that she does not want him the way he wants her, and never will.

Some day...maybe sooner, maybe later...she will end things between them. He knows this. He also knows how she will do it. There will be no drama, of course, no scenes. She'll be as brisk and matter-of-fact as she is about Ministry-approved curricular changes: it's simply the way things are, and she'll see no need for useless fuss. "Severus, we need to talk," she'll say, and that will be the beginning of the end. He doesn't know if he'll hear her out; he thinks he may simply walk away at that point...why waste any more words?

Yes, he knows she'll leave some day. He asks only that that day not be today. Never today.

He waits until the clock is completely silent and the air has stopped humming before he lowers his wards and lets Minerva in.

~~~end