

# Smiles of a Summer Night

by *kellychambliss*

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lost his leg.

The *only* one since he lost his eye.

## Chapter 1

*Chapter 1 of 2*

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The *only* one since he lost his eye.

**Author's/Notes:** The title is stolen from an Ingmar Bergman film of the 1950s, which was later the basis for the musical *A Little Night Music*. There's no similarity of plot, however.

My thanks to my brilliant beta, The Real Snape.

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"[At Grimmauld Place, Harry] also caught sight of his Transfiguration teacher, Professor McGonagall, looking very odd in a Muggle dress and coat, though she also seemed too busy to linger." ... *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, Chapter Six, "The Noble and Most Ancient House of Black"

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**Tuesday, 16 August 1995, 3:40**

Mad-Eye Moody, his mad eye spinning, stood motionless in the upstairs corridor of Number 12, Grimmauld Place. One part of his mind was focused on scanning the complex wards protecting the headquarters of the Order of the Phoenix.

And another part was focused on bed.

Only a few minutes ago, he had been in his. But he had got up in the predawn darkness to run a safety check on the security enchantments.

He did so every night ... several times a night, actually. He got up and let his magic eye penetrate every corner of every place he stayed in, because you never knew what could creep in while you were wasting time sleeping. Darkness, all kinds of darkness, was everywhere, and if keeping it at bay meant sleeping only a couple of hours at a stretch, then that's what it meant. Any fool knew that constant vigilance wasn't compatible with a full night's sleep.

Still, just because you had to get out of bed didn't mean that the getting was easy. In fact, on this night in particular, it had been damned hard. And so had he.

Because tonight, for the first time in longer than he cared to admit, someone had been in his bed with him.

His magic eye could see her now, through the walls of the room. She slept curled inward, one arm stretched out in front of her. Right now, that arm touched only the sheet. But quite recently, it had touched him ... had been wrapped around him, in fact, and that unmistakable body, so like her with its sharp angles and unexpected softnesses, had been curved against him instead of in on itself.

Hence the hardness. In several senses.

Minerva.

If anyone had told him even yesterday that Minerva McGonagall would be sleeping with him today, he'd have laughed ... or maybe spit ... in their face. But here she was, and he still wasn't quite sure how it had happened. Minerva always had that effect on him: she could cut the ground out from under his feet faster than a DE could say "AK."

Yet, just a week ago, he had almost convinced himself that he wanted to have nothing to do with her unless it involved necessary Order business. After all, she had let him languish in a goddamned trunk for a year while Barty Crouch, junior ... Barty. Fucking. Crouch. Fucking. *Junior* ... had impersonated him at Hogwarts.

All those hours Minerva had spent in his arms during that never-to-be-forgotten summer of 1975, and now she couldn't be arsed to pay enough attention to him to figure out that the "Alastor Moody" teaching at Hogwarts for nine damn months was not the man she'd once shared her bed with?

True, their affair had happened twenty years ago, but so what? Moody might be missing a leg here and half an arse there, but the important bits were still the same. And they hadn't parted on bad terms. They'd both known they couldn't stay together for the long haul ... well, not without driving each other to Unforgivables ... but they had remained friends.

Oh, aye, they'd had their little set-tos over the years. She'd been quite shirty, in fact, after she'd started keeping company with Gilver Macmillan, and Moody had tried to warn her ... for her own damned good ... that Macmillan was all wrong for her. She'd stood up sharp as you please and informed him that her "private life" was none of his business. As if he himself hadn't *been* her effing private life at one point!

But they'd got over that bump in the road (and maybe a few others) and had been friends again, or so he'd thought. Even though he hadn't seen much of her once the first war ended, he'd never stopped caring about her.

He might even have said he loved her, if he'd been the sort of bloke to believe in love. But whatever he called it, she mattered to him. Very much. He'd thought she felt the same about him, and even if she hadn't ... even if she'd held that Macmillan business against him ... well...she still should have known. Dammit, Minerva should have known that Crouch was an imposter.

A few times, when he was in Crouch's trunk, Moody had come to a confused, drug-hazed consciousness of the hell he was in, and the only tiny comfort he'd had to cling to was the thought that Minerva would finally understand and would save him.

But she hadn't. She evidently hadn't cared enough to talk to him ... or the man she would have thought was him ... even though she'd been seeing him every day. And it wasn't as if that damned Azkaban of a school offered her much else in the way of romantic male companionship. She'd hardly be interested in that girl's blouse of an Albus, and Flitwick was like a brother to her. So who was left? Filch? Hog-hung Hagrid? That pasty-faced, lying Death Eater Snape? Not likely.

No, Moody would have expected her to jump for joy (or, being Minerva, to have given a sharp nod of approval) to learn that her old flame Alastor was joining the staff. Yet she had apparently either ignored him or else knew him so little that she couldn't even spot a faker.

Or at least, that's what he'd initially thought. So he'd been ready to write her off. Wasn't that the bitter lesson that he had re-learned during his months in the trunk? Never let his guard down with anyone. Ever. Trust no one: not his few remaining relatives (distant cousins, and he'd never liked them to start with), not his old Auror corps, and not his old lovers. Especially not his old lovers.

And extra-especially not Minerva. At Hogwarts, she'd apparently wanted to rub his nose in the fact that the past was the past, as if the two of them had been nothing to each other. Well, fine, he had told himself firmly. Fine bloody fine with him. The hell with her. If she didn't want to know him, then he didn't want to know her.

That's why, when she'd twice come to Grimmauld Place this summer to try to talk to him, he'd refused to see her. He didn't stay at Headquarters very often ... no matter how safe Dumbledore said the place was, it wasn't smart to make a habit of sleeping in the same house too often ... but Minerva had known when he was around.

So she'd come and asked for him, but he'd got that scruffy Sirius Black say he wasn't in, even though Min knew damned well he was. Moody thought she might be hurt by that. Told himself he'd be pleased if she was.

But then, last week, after he'd told Black to send Minerva away once more, he'd let his magic eye watch her as Black talked to her in the entry hall. The boy, Potter, had been there as well, standing gormlessly in a doorway, and he had watched her, too, staring at her like he'd never seen a woman in Muggle clothes before.

She wore a dark red dress under a black jacket, and as far as Moody could tell, she looked pretty convincing. He didn't like Muggle women's clothing as a rule, but he wasn't going to complain about any garment that showed Minerva's legs.

"I'm sorry, Professor, but Mad-Eye...I mean, uh, Moody, um, well, he isn't in," Black had said awkwardly, all but announcing the fact that he was being cavalier with the truth.

Damned mongrel. What the hell kind of a performance was that? He'd been a good enough liar in his Hogwarts days, always getting into scrapes and trying to bluff his way out of them. Minerva had despaired of him. And now ... what? He couldn't even manage a little social prevarication in his own home? Merlin save them if the DEs ever got hold of him; he'd spill his guts in a blink.

But it wasn't until later that Moody thought about the DEs; at the time, he was concentrating only on Minerva. He didn't know if Potter caught the flash of pain that crossed her face when Black delivered his message, but Moody saw it.

And contrary to what he'd expected, it didn't please him in the least. No, it damn well shook him, although Minerva handled it the way she handled all the world's blows: by hiding whatever hurt she felt. She had squared her shoulders and set her face into those stern lines that grew deeper every year and had taken her leave.

Moody had felt like shit.

Black stormed back to him, sunken eyes flashing. "I don't know what your game is, Moody, but I'm not going to play it for you any more. I'm not your errand boy or your paid muscle or whatever-the-hell. Next time you want to sucker-punch Professor McGonagall, you do it yourself. Or don't you have the balls?"

Moody's only reply had been to curl his lip, but Black had been right, of course. Moody could have faced down Voldemort himself without a tremor, but when it came to Minerva, he apparently didn't have the bottle even to talk to her.

Well, that was going to change. Before Black had finished slouching out of the room again, Moody had made up his mind to give Minerva the chance to tell her side of the story. He decided to talk to her at the earliest opportunity.

Which had come last evening. An Order meeting had been called at Grimmauld Place, and Minerva had been there, of course. She hadn't tried to speak to him, though, and when the meeting ended, she was up and out of the drawing room before he could drag his sorry arse out of his chair. He'd had to get one of those ubiquitous kids to go after her and ask her to wait.

It had been Harry Potter's friend, that girl with the odd name...Honorina, something like that? The brainy one with the broom up her bum. She reminded him of Minerva, come to think of it.

Aye...at least the schoolteacher side of Minerva, anyway. As he stood in the upstairs corridor now, letting his eye start to scan the ground floor, Moody grinned. Definitely *not* the side Min had shown in his bed tonight. Or on all those other long-ago nights...and afternoons...and mornings...when their affair had been new and red-hot and just hearing someone say her name could give him a raging stiffie.

When he looked back, it seemed to him that he and Min had not got out of bed during the entire eight months they'd been a couple, but he suspected that memory wasn't quite accurate. They must have had a few other things to do. Surely there had been work, and Order business, and probably she had been at that damned Dumbledore's beck and call, as usual. There'd been a war on, after all. Which was part of the reason they had come together in the first place, of course: any minute might have been their last, and you took your pleasure while you could.

He rather missed those libido-driven days, but he had to admit that life was definitely easier now that he controlled his hormones instead of the other way around.

Not that his control, or lack of it, was really the issue any more, not now that he was Mad-Eye the maimed. No one but Minerva was daft enough to fuck the old cripple these days. She was just the second woman who had let him touch her ... for free ... since he'd lost his leg.

The *only* one since he'd lost his eye.

But before they'd reached that point, they'd first had to settle the issue of Barty Crouch.

Last night, Minerva had got Moody's message from Honoria and had been waiting for him in the Grimmauld Place entry hall when he finally managed to gimp his way out of the drawing room and down the stairs.

To anyone else, her expression would have looked forbidding, but Moody could tell she was anxious. The angrier she was, the thinner her mouth became, but only when she was worried did she bite her bottom lip the way she was doing as he approached.

"Spare a few minutes?" he'd asked, probably more gruffly than he should have. He'd have preferred to talk with her somewhere else, away from this constant crowd of Weasleys and schoolkids and those blasted portraits and that damned smirking Black. But he wasn't about to go out somewhere public; he wanted to talk, not watch his fucking back. So they'd have to make do with where they were.

"All right," Minerva had said. Moody jerked his head toward a little-used side parlour, and in they went...

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**Monday, 15 August 1995, 21:46**

Minerva perched primly on the edge of a plain wooden chair, leaving enough space between its straight back and her own to have made any Victorian grandmother proud. The sight brought out the worst in Moody.

"Could you just relax for five minutes?" he demanded. "You look like you think I'm going to hex you blue."

Minerva's eyes narrowed, and Moody cursed himself. Damn. That wasn't the way he'd intended to start this conversation. He covered his mistake by taking a swig from his hip flask, then tried again.

And muffed it just as badly.

"Why the hell didn't you know?"

"Know what?" Minerva asked, perhaps not unreasonably, but the question set Moody off.

"Barty Crouch," he gritted. "That's what. Remember him? Mr Bartemius Death Eater Crouch *junior*? The one who pretended to be me for an entire sodding year, and you didn't notice? You saw him every day in the staff room and at the high table and probably in his goddamn *bed* for all I know, and you didn't notice it wasn't me?"

He was shouting now, could feel the rage and humiliation and, yes, the fear of the trunk filling him again, and he forced himself to shut up, to take a deep, ragged breath and shut the hell up before he did something really stupid. Well, even more stupid than yelling at Minerva when all he'd wanted to do was talk to her. Now the whole damned house had probably heard him, and no doubt that effing portrait would start shrieking any minute. Gods, what a cock-up.

Minerva had gone sheet-white while he'd been ranting, and now he waited for her to yell back at him. Min always gave as good as she got in a fight, as Moody well knew: the two of them had had some legendary ones.

But tonight was different. There was none of her trademark shouting or stalking off, none of the wayward magic that used to snap sparks out of the very air around her when she was angry.

Instead, her face wore that same look of pain he'd seen a week ago, on that day when Black had told her Moody wasn't in. And, as she rose slowly to her feet, she seemed to have aged by a decade just since they'd entered the room.

"I'm sorry, Alastor," she said. "Of course you're angry. I failed you, and I'm sorry. If I knew a way to atone, I would, but it's too late now. I know you'd prefer to have nothing to do with me, and I understand that, but I hope we'll be able to work together for the good of the Order. I suppose that's why you told Miss Granger you wanted to see me? Something for the Order?"

Moody ran his hand over his face. It felt scratchy; he must have forgotten to shave again. "The Order? No. No, it's not about the Order. It's..."

Merlin, but he hated this. Part of him had been itching to tell her off for weeks, and now that he had done it, he didn't feel better at all. He wanted...damn, he didn't know *what* he wanted, except that it wasn't this quiet, abject woman who seemed like a stranger.

If this was what they had come to, the two of them, no wonder she hadn't known him: evidently time and loss had changed them both beyond recognition.

Well, sod that for a game of soldiers. He'd been doing a lot of rethinking in the last few weeks, and now, standing in that grim excuse for a parlour, with the dust of pureblood corruption acrid in his nose, Moody vowed that things were going to be different. Starting now.

Starting with Minerva. This woman, standing here with her dark head bowed, wasn't his Minerva. *His* Minerva wasn't apologetic and sorrowful. She was sharp and sarcastic, fierce and infuriating. Smart. Funny. Opinionated. Caring and passionate.

And he wanted her back. No matter how livid he was with her, no matter what levels of distraction she drove him to, he wanted his Minerva back.

That's what he'd finally realised after that business with Black last week. Moody was unhappy with Minerva about Crouch ... he was narked as hell, actually ... but when he considered what it would really mean to cut her out of his life, he'd come face-to-face with the fact that it wasn't a prospect he enjoyed.

At all.

In fact, if they could get past the Crouch thing, he thought he might like to see even more of her than he normally did. They were both older now, and wiser ... well, at least *she* was probably wiser ... and maybe they could manage things better this time.

Not that he was thinking of anything long-term or permanent. Of course not. Hell, he was 72 years old, he was missing almost as many limbs as old Silvanus Kettleburn, and there was another fucking war about to start. Probably not a single damned member of the Order of the Phoenix had any "long-term" to think about, anyway.

But if whatever time he had left included a night or two with Minerva, Moody wouldn't complain.

He wanted her back.

A short, sharp shock, that's what she needed. Something to jolt her into herself. And though he did say so himself, no one was better at jolting Minerva McGonagall than Alastor "Mad-Eye" Moody.

"Well?" he barked. "Did you?"

"Did I what?"

He saw a welcome touch of exasperation returning to her face and went in for the kill.

"Did you fuck him?"

Her head jerked up, and her lips all but disappeared. "I beg your pardon?"

"It's not a hard question, Minerva. Did. You. Fuck. Barty. Crouch?"

She hated that sort of language, Moody knew, and he watched as she flushed, the blood rushing into her pale skin to remind him of how she used to look in bed, when she'd come to his touch. He could almost feel her beneath his hands...

"And just why, precisely, does this matter to you?" the present-day Minerva enquired, the icy edge to her voice also just the way he remembered it.

But all at once Moody didn't feel like playing his game any longer. All he wanted was some straight talk, man to woman. "What matters," he said, "is that you didn't know me from Barty."

The Minerva who looked at him now was still sorrowful, but no longer abject. He could feel her intensity reawakening, and without thinking, he took her hands.

Her wand, he saw, was just visible under the edge of her sleeve; she'd had it ready to hex him if he'd been dangerous. Moody nearly smiled. Good. She hadn't lost her vigilance.

"Why didn't you know, Min?" he asked quietly. "Had you forgotten me so completely?"

"Oh, Alastor, don't be silly. I haven't forgotten anything about you. The reason I didn't spot Barty is that I scarcely saw him all year. He kept very much to himself, and, well...for the most part, he simply refused to speak to me."

She smiled suddenly, and the change softened her face wonderfully. "When Albus told me he'd engaged you to teach, I was so pleased. It had been so many years since we'd spent any time together, and I'd missed you. On the night you...I mean, on the night Crouch arrived, I went to his rooms after the Welcoming Feast. I hoped we could talk..."

She began to worry her lower lip again; obviously just thinking about Crouch was making her anxious, and Moody felt himself bristle. If that prick had hurt her...

"He came to the door," Minerva went on, "but he barely opened it, just enough so that I could see his magic eye. I said, 'May I come in? I thought you might like to share a dram, for old times' sake.' And he said, 'As far as I'm concerned, there *are* no old times. Just stay the hell away from me, do you understand?' And then he slammed the door."

"And that was it?" Moody said, scowling. "That's all it took? He said 'go away,' and off you meekly went like a good little girl? For the rest of the damned year?"

"No, of course not." She frowned at him. "Are you going to let me explain or not?" When he said nothing further, she continued, "I tried several more times to talk with him, but he either refused to answer his door, or if we were in the staffroom, he'd simply get up and leave. I realise now, of course, that he was protecting himself. Crouch knew who I was because he'd been my student, but he would have had no idea how well I might know *you*. But I didn't think of that at the time. I just thought..."

She trailed off in a very un-Minerva-like fashion, so Moody prompted, "You thought what?"

"Well, there had been rumours about you, Alastor ... that you'd gone rogue, that you were unbalanced. I refused to believe them at first; in fact, I was quite sharp with Augusta when she owled to complain about your hiring.

"Then when Crouch arrived, he *did* behave oddly, and I was worried ... but not, I confess, about whether he was the person he appeared to be. I was worried that you weren't well. There was one disturbing incident in particular, when Crouch tried to discipline the Malfoy boy by turning him into a ferret and bouncing him on the flagstones. I put a stop to it. Probably I should have realised then that such behaviour wasn't like the Alastor I had known, but ..."

"But there were those tales about how paranoid and unstable I'd become," Moody finished. "The ferret business just made you think they were true."

"I must say, I was concerned, yes. Finally I determined that I would speak to you whether you wanted to listen to me or not. I went to the DADA classroom one day after lessons and spelled the door shut and confronted you...him."

"Very Gryffindor of you."

She grimaced. "Yes, well. Crouch had obviously realised by that time that you and I had once been more than friends. And he...well, he was quite vicious about it, Alastor. Quite vicious indeed. Very crass, and <sup>O</sup>well, as I say, vicious. It was hurtful, I don't deny it, and when he told me again to stay away from him, I was only too happy to comply. I thought, 'very well, if that's how you want it, that's how it will be.' And I kept my word."

Moody quirked a smile of half amusement, half regret. "That's my Min. Stubborn as ever."

She didn't smile back. "So it seems. In any case, after that afternoon, I spoke to him only when absolutely necessary for school business. We had only one additional encounter that could be considered an actual conversation, and I know now that his purpose in speaking at that time was to funnel information to Harry Potter.

"It's a long story, but he managed it by baiting me, telling me how stupid Harry was, that he'd never be bright enough to think of using gillyweed to help him in the Tournament. I was rather harsh in response, and <sup>O</sup>I suppose I was just too angry to pay sufficient attention to *him*, as a person."

She stopped and drew a breath. "That's how it happened. But in reality, there's no excuse. I'm sorry, Alastor," she said, squeezing his hands. "I should have known."

He grunted. Her story made sense; he could see it happening that way. "Well," he said finally, "At least you didn't just ignore me. And no one else twigged, either. Dumbledore didn't."

"Dumbledore never spent a summer in your bed," she retorted, and then arched an eyebrow at him. "That I know of."

Moody lifted his head and laughed aloud. His Minerva was coming back.

"Unlike *some* people," he said, tapping her cheek with his fingertips and spinning his magic eye at her suggestively, "he's not invited."

## Chapter 2

*Chapter 2 of 2*

She was the just the second woman who had let him touch her—for free—since he lost his leg.

The *only* one since he lost his eye.

### Chapter 2

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**Tuesday, 16 August 1995, 3:48**

A scurry glimpsed out of the corner of his eye brought Moody's attention firmly back to his surveillance work. He concentrated...yes, there it was again, in the basement kitchen.

He quartered off the kitchen in his mind and scanned each quadrant methodically. Ah...mice. Or what *appeared* to be mice. But of course they might not be what they seemed. He wasn't about to take any chances: Sirius Black and his cronies wouldn't be the only unregistered animagi who ever existed.

But after a moment, even Moody had to admit that the chances of there being three unregistered mouse animagi, all of which had sneaked into the basement of Grimmauld Place at the same time, were slim.

Damn vermin. Merlin, hadn't Black ever heard of anti-rodent charms? What the hell did he do all day? Or why wasn't that Honoria girl's half-Kneazle taking care of the things? This little mouse problem had cost Moody five minutes, which was time that he could have spent back in bed with Minerva.

He shook his head slowly, still marvelling at the very idea. When he'd said the word "invitation" to her earlier in the evening, he'd been serious. He'd meant it as a genuine proposition, and he'd been fairly certain she would hear it as such. Whether she'd take him up on it, though...aye, well, that was the question.

They'd soon ended their conversation, and he'd walked with her back to the entry hall. Black emerged from some hidey-hole of his own to let her out and to reset the wards, and by the studious way he'd avoided looking at either of them, Moody was fairly certain he'd heard some of the shouting.

Well, who cared? It wasn't as if the git had never heard angry yelling before, not with that battle-axe of a portrait hanging on the wall. And if he didn't already know that his elders had personal lives, then it was high time he found out.

"Black," Moody had said, nodding "goodnight" to him and turning towards the staircase. "Min."

He hadn't looked back at her as he began his long clump up to his room. He'd made his offer. She'd have understood. It was just a matter of waiting to see what she decided.

And wait he had ... for all of about three minutes.

Moody looked at Minerva now, through the wall. She'd turned over in bed and was facing him, her hair spread around her in black profusion. He was rather disappointed to see that her arms were crossed over her chest; he wouldn't have minded another look at her lovely breasts. Moody was an unabashed tits man and always had been.

Well, he'd have another chance. There were still a few hours left of this night, after all. Just the attics to scan now, and then he'd be ready to climb in beside her once more.

He didn't think she'd be opposed to another round of hide-the-sausage with him; she'd been quick enough to join him in the first place.

He cast his mind back to what had happened just a few hours earlier. After he'd left Min in the entry hall and gone to his room, he'd barely shut the door behind him before she appeared, startling the hell out of him. He'd heard the crack of apparition and turned around at once, his wand out and pointed...

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**Monday, 15 August 1995, 22:27**

...and there was Minerva, her gaze fastened sardonically on the wand, as if it were a student's transfiguration experiment gone wrong.

"Bloody hell, Minerva! How did you get in here?"

"Sirius didn't stay to actually watch me leave. So I Apparated back in before he got the wards reset."

Moody cursed under his breath. He'd give Black a right bollocking next time he saw him, for a beginner's balls-up like that. "What's the tattoo on my arse?" he demanded of Minerva.

"That's your identity question?"

"What is tattooed on my arse?"

"An Auror staff."

"Fine." He lowered the wand. "And now what the sweet F-A are you doing here?"

She raised an eyebrow and let the silence ride until she saw his eyelid flicker. Damn her. After all these years, she could still stare him down, and he even had a magic eye. "I was under the impression that you had invited me," she snapped.

"I didn't expect you tonight, for god's sake! I reckoned you'd want to think it over."

"Obviously I've already thought it over, Alastor, or I wouldn't be standing in your bedroom. But it seems I misunderstood you. So if you'll lift the wards again, I'll be going."

"Not so fast," he growled. "I was just a little surprised to see you this soon, that's all. Do you have to be so prickly?"

"Pot, cauldron, black," she countered.

Moody felt himself start to grin. "We're in the same room for two minutes, and you're fighting with me already. Like old times, isn't it, Min?"

Her glare faded, and she slowly smiled back. "Very old times, I'm afraid. And it's you doing the fighting, not I."

Then she spoke seriously. "What is this all about, Alastor? What are we doing here? A week ago you didn't even want to see me. Tonight you were still angry, and rightfully so, I don't dispute that. So what happened? A few minutes' explanation from me is all it took to make things right between us?" Another smile, a wry one, flickered briefly across her sharp features. "Had I known how easily persuadable you were, I would have twisted you round my finger years ago."

Moody snorted. "Don't flatter yourself *too* much, lass. It's not just your silver Scottish tongue that's changed things. Ever since I got out of Crouch's trunk, I've been thinking."

She didn't make any jokes about this being an unusual occupation for him. She merely cocked her head under its tall hat and said, "About?"

"About things. About us ... you and me. About the old days, the first war. Being in that trunk, Min...dammit, it's unsettled me, I have to admit it. But I tell you what: there's nothing like a few months in a trunk to sort your mind. To let you figure out some things, about where you've been and where you want to go and about what matters to you. Do you understand what I'm trying to say?"

He paused, debating whether to go on and then deciding that he might as well. "And then I came across something...well, here. Have a shifty."

He fumbled in his pocket and handed her the photograph he'd recently found. It was of the old Order of the Phoenix, all of them who had fought the first Voldemort war, the one that was supposed to end the Darkness once for all.

Minerva wasn't in the photo, though Moody couldn't remember why. Something had kept her at the school, no doubt. But the rest of them were there: the Longbottoms. The Prewetts. Dorcas Meadowes. Caradoc Dearborn.

Minerva stared at it and then at him, her expression unreadable.

"I...that is, well...I wondered..." Moody felt like a stammering idiot.

He hated to feel like a stammering idiot. And he'd never been good with words, anyway, so he just gripped her shoulders and kissed her, at first gently and then fiercely, his arms tight around her. He vaguely noticed that he'd knocked her hat off, but he didn't care.

After a startled moment, she kissed him back, and he would have been content to clutch her to him forever if she hadn't pulled away eventually and gasped, "This is very nice, Alastor, but so is breathing!"

Moody grinned and straightened, still holding her. "Will you stay with me tonight?"

Moonlight, far brighter than the one candle he'd lit, flooded in through the grimy window and silvered everything as she nodded. "I will."

"Why?" He raised his hand to forestall any kind of tart response. "It's a real question. I need to know."

He needed to know that she wasn't coming to him out of pity for a broken man, or as some form of Minerva-martyrdom, her payment for not having seen through Crouch. But he was damned if he'd tell her so; he wanted to hear what she'd say.

All her sharpness was gone, though, and the face that looked at him in the moonlight was the face of twenty years ago, the same face that had stared at him unblinkingly when he'd been the one who'd had to tell her that her husband of nearly two decades was missing in action.

Warnell Dearborn. He'd been a quiet man, Warnell, easy-going unless he felt an injustice was being done; then he was implacable.

It was his nephew, Caradoc, who was in the Order photograph; Caradoc had been among the earliest to join. Warnell hadn't been a member, though. He had disapproved of such "vigilantism," and Moody knew that Minerva's involvement had caused some friction between her and her husband.

But member or not, Warnell had staunchly and vocally opposed Voldemort, and had died for his trouble, he and his nephew together, on a rainy spring night when they had simply been going about their ordinary business. No bodies were ever found, just a Dark Mark in the sky above a hex-scarred copse of trees.

Dorcas had volunteered to break the news to her old friend Minerva, and Moody had gone with her. He hated that part of the job with a passion, but no Auror worth his piss would shirk it.

They'd told Minerva that Caradoc and Warnell were "missing," but Min had been in the Order too long not to know what "missing" meant when it came to being captured by DEs. "Missing" meant "dead" ... and not in any quick or painless way.

There had been no tears then, no scenes. Just a white-faced acceptance.

It had been almost a year to the day later, after another ambush on the Order had left two Death Eaters dead by Minerva's own hand, that she and Moody had spent their first night together.

And now, twenty years on, it was that same white-faced Minerva who answered his question about why she had come to spend yet another night with him.

"Sometimes it seems as if there's nothing left," she said. "Nothing but war and loss and the deaths of more children we can't protect. And nothing for you and me but empty beds and old age. If we're lucky. I want to change that, Alastor. I want us to remember the good times we had. And I want us to have new good times, too, and not let any Barty Crouch or his Dark Lord steal them from us. That's why."

He didn't answer directly ... what was there to say? ... but he offered her one more chance to back out if she wanted to.

"You do know this place is crawling with your bloody students. Aren't you afraid they'll find out their Head of House has stopped in for a shag?"

"Why would they? Unless you're planning to scream my name in ecstasy and don't remember how to cast a silencing charm?"

Moody laughed aloud, the second time in a single night, and pointed his wand around the dingy room. "*Muffliato firmo!*" he said. "There. Now we can both scream our bloody heads off. And don't think I won't make you."

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She undressed the way she always had, slowly and carefully; she knew he liked to watch. First she folded her green robes with Minerva-neatness onto the chair next to the

bed. Then the under-robe, the thin white sheath she'd always favoured. Then the underwear. As usual, her lingerie was practical (as she was) and designed for comfort (as she definitely was not) but soon it, too, had joined the pile on the chair, and Minerva was ready for him.

She'd aged, of course, he could see that, but it didn't matter. So had he, and when he stepped behind her to slide his arms around her, her breasts fit his hands just as perfectly as they had always done, and he wanted her as much as ever.

They made it to his bed somehow, and he waved a few more candles alight. He wanted to see her, wanted to light the memories into his mind as clearly he could.

Minerva lay on her side next to him, her expression intent as she smoothed his ragged hair out his good eye. She must have taken her own hair down magically, because suddenly it was hanging long over her shoulders and brushing against his chin as she began to untie his stock.

She'd always enjoyed undressing him herself, and tonight she took her time as he pressed his lips to her neck, her shoulder, a swell of breast, whatever part of her he could reach, relishing all the sensations...

...until he felt his pants disappear, felt first the cool air on his cock and then Minerva's warm hand.

Suddenly, he felt awkward and exposed, acutely conscious of his scars and his damned wooden leg. The leg was in the way, but he didn't want to remove it...he didn't want Minerva to see his stump, lest she find him repulsive. Or worse, feel sorry for him. And without his leg, he couldn't really balance, couldn't fuck the way he wanted to.

Not that he could manage very well even *with* the leg, damn it all. But without it, he'd be near helpless, and he liked ... he needed ... to be on top. He wasn't comfortable on his back, revealing his weakness like a dog showing its belly.

He struggled to sit up. "Min, wait...you'll have to...hell, I can't...I'm a goddamned cripple..."

"Shhhh..." she said, pressing him back gently. Then she was warm on top of him, her mouth covering his as she guided their bodies together, lowering herself onto him.

Her hair fell around them, closing out the world, and for an instant, Mad-Eye Moody felt ... not safe (for only a fool believed that safety was even possible) ... but something close to it.

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Afterward, they had lain contentedly in one another's arms, Moody idly twisting a lock of Minerva's hair around his finger as she stroked his arm and shoulder.

Then he took a deep breath and girded his loins for a possible battle. The last thing he wanted to do was put Min's back up, but now that she'd ended up in his bed, there was something rather important that they needed to get out in the open.

"Can I ask you a personal question?" he said.

"Personal?" Minerva cast an eye over their entwined nakedness. "Well, I suppose now *would* be the time."

"Amelia Bones said she saw you in London last term with Gilver Macmillan."

"That's not a question."

"Damn it, Minerva," he snarled, grabbing her shoulders. "Don't play the teacher with me; I'm not in your fucking classroom."

"Just ask your damned question," she snarled back, wrenching free. They glared at each other, and Moody was reminded again of the many reasons they had parted all those years ago. Even he knew that there had to be more to a relationship than fucking and fighting, however enjoyable those activities were. He gave a long-suffering sigh.

"Are you getting back together with Macmillan?"

She answered quietly, and he could tell she was taking care to smooth any edge from her voice. "No. He did invite me for dinner, that's true. You know he's been abroad for several years, something to do with the Department of International Magical Cooperation, and he only recently returned. But we met only as friends, though I admit, when he owled me, I did wonder if perhaps he wanted more."

"You've been there before, Min." And you and Macmillan didn't work out, he thought, but didn't say.

"I've been here, too," she said, waving her hand at him and the rumpled bed. And we didn't work either, she didn't say, though he was sure she must have thought it.

"Aye, and that's why I need to know how *here*" ... he indicated himself and the bed in his turn ... "fits in with Minerva and Gilver."

"As I believe I said, there *is* no 'Minerva and Gilver.' I didn't think it was a good idea. So there won't be a problem."

"Won't be a *problem*?" he flared. "Well, that's all right, then, isn't it? As long as I'm not *a*problem."

"You asked," she spat.

"Hmpf." She had him there, not that he was going to admit it. Best just to turn things back on her. "Right, then," he said. "Gilver's not a problem. Good. Glad that's sorted. And now do you think maybe you could stop talking about your legion of old lovers?"

Her eyes flashed for a moment, but then laugh lines replaced her frown as she chuckled. "I don't know what you mean, Alastor," she said. "I don't think you're all *that* old."

Moody gave that remark the snort it deserved, but inside, he relaxed. All was fair weather now. Well, for the moment.

He was surprised that her other liaisons could still be such a sore spot with him, so many years after he had accepted that he and Min would never last as a couple. He'd resigned himself to the fact that she'd moved on to other partners ... not many, of course, Minerva being Minerva and not given to anything like promiscuity. But there had been one or two other men. She'd been extremely discreet, but he'd heard things.

Mostly because he had sought them out, true, but that was neither here nor there.

And he'd coped with it all. Had even been civil to that rotter Macmillan, who had never been good enough for Minerva, no matter how decent a chap Amelia claimed he was. Moody had smiled through gritted teeth whenever he ran into Macmillan at the Ministry and told himself he was happy for Min.

He had to admit, though, he'd been even happier when it became clear back then that she was finished with old Gilver. He was even more happy now that she was apparently still finished with him, dinner in London or no.

Because deep, deep down, a permanent part of Moody wanted Minerva to want *him* and only him. Only Mad-Eye.

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They'd fallen asleep after a time, spooned together under the thin old duvet. Before they'd put out the candles, Moody had finally removed his artificial leg, and Minerva, of course, had been very matter-of-fact about it. She had neither stared nor pretended not to see; she'd just waited for him to finish and then moved over so that he could lie next to her.

They'd both needed a few minutes to settle down. It had been a long time since either of them had shared sleeping space with another, so there were the inevitable shiftings and movements, noses that needed to be scratched and arms that got awkwardly placed.

But soon a comfy drowsiness had stolen over Moody, and he had drifted off, feeling a warmth that had little to do with the actual temperature of the draughty old house.

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He'd awakened two hours later for his regular stint of security surveillance, and for the first time since his release from Barty Crouch's trunk, he'd been tempted to skip it. He just wanted to stay in bed and continue his dream, one that had been very much like his actual last waking hours ... he'd been dreaming of Minerva's body moving against his, fierce and sweet.

But duty had called, of course, and he'd gone through the process of *accio-ing* his leg and charming it on in the dark, moving as little as possible to avoid disturbing Min.

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**Tuesday, 16 August 1995, 4:02**

And now here he stood, in this dusty, mouldering corridor, scanning Grimmauld Place from attics to cellars. All clear, if you didn't count the vermin, and obviously neither Black nor his house-elf cared about it, so Moody didn't know why *he* should.

There was no danger at the moment, and he could return to Minerva at last.

She stirred when he slid into bed beside her and smiled at him sleepily; he loved how relaxed she seemed, how girlish, with her flowing hair and pale skin.

"Alastor," she said without surprise, as if she woke up next to him regularly. Stretching, catlike, she sat up and reached for her wand, casting a *Lumos*.

Moody was startled. "What are you doing?"

"It's late. Or early. I should go."

"Minerva, it's four in the morning," he told her irritably.

"I know. I want to get back to Hogwarts before anyone is stirring."

"It's summer. Who's even there? And the school gates won't open for another couple of hours anyway; you won't be able to get through the wards."

Minerva pursed her lips, an expression so characteristic of her that it had etched permanent lines in her face; Moody suddenly wanted to reach out and trace them, but he restrained himself. Instead, he grinned as she snapped, "Give me some credit. I've been at Hogwarts nearly forty years. The Weasley twins aren't the only ones who know how to get in and out without being seen."

Moody's amusement changed abruptly to concern. "What do you mean? Are the castle's defences that easily breached? Why the hell doesn't Dumbledore do something about it? He ..."

"Calm down, Alastor! The defences are fine. The big, bad Auror," she said with a small smile, tracing her finger along the scars on his chest, "forgets that he's been consorting with a woman of authority. I *am* the Deputy Headmistress of the school, after all. I know you think Albus is dismissive of me, but he's very good about making sure I have the powers I need. I can get in and out of the castle when I need to. And what's more" ... she kissed him lightly ... "I can get others in and out, too."

Moody felt his heart lurch. Did she mean that she wanted to continue seeing him?

"Are you propositioning me, Deputy Headmistress?" he growled, leaning over to nip her ear, so that she wouldn't see the yearning in his face. "We didn't work out last time, you know," he mumbled into her hair.

Not the most diplomatic of remarks, maybe, but she ought to know by now that tact wasn't in his nature. And he needed to make sure they were clear about everything. The war provided little enough in the way of real hopes; he didn't want either of them to cling to false ones.

Minerva pulled back in exasperation. "Good heavens, I'm hardly proposing an eternal magical bonding! Just an occasional visit. That is ... "she interrupted herself, looking rather painfully vulnerable, "that is, if you're interested..."

"Oh, aye," Moody assured her, pushing against her so that she could feel his stiffening cock. "I'm interested."

"Good." She brushed her lips across his temple and stood, wanding the candles alight; then she donned her underwear and pulled her shift over her head. Moody watched appreciatively.

"You really don't have to leave just yet, you know," he said. "I'll make sure you're gone before that damned passel of Weasleys gets up."

"I'm sure you would, but perhaps we shouldn't try for too much too soon." She glanced at him as she took up her green over-robe, and he nodded. She was probably right.

"I'll put down the wards, then, whenever you're ready," he said, summoning his leg and starting to attach it yet again while still watching Minerva dress. He enjoyed her methodical precision, the lines of her body as she moved.

A complicated twist of her wand restored Minerva's hair to its customary bun, and she picked up her hat. Professor McGonagall was back.

Moody finished adjusting his leg and moved to stand next to her. "Ready?" he asked, taking out his wand.

"Yes, thank you."

"You'll be here Friday? For the meeting? Dumbledore's not going to make you stay in the castle and mend the damn Sorting Hat or something?"

Minerva's lips tightened; she didn't like it when he criticised Albus. "I will be here Friday," she said.

"I'll still be staying here, I expect. I'll leave the *muffliato* in place on the room, shall I? Just in case there might be some use for it? You know, after the meeting?"

She raised an eyebrow. "That sounds wise," she acknowledged. "After all, one must maintain constant vigilance. Or so I've been told."

"Aye," he said, giving her his best wolfish grin and spinning his eye for good measure. "Constant vigilance."

He put the wards down, then nodded at her. "You can leave now, Min. Don't splinch yourself."



She rolled her eyes and gave him a peck on the cheek. "Until Friday, Alastor," she said, and with a crack was gone.

Moody replaced the wards and then stood in the center of the room for a long time, scanning the darkest corners of the house and smiling.

\*\*End