

# Sybill Trelawney and the Unexpected Gift

*by Squibstress*

"You can't use your Gift, it uses you," Professor Dorsett tells Sybill, and over the years she finds out how lonely a Seer's life can be. But when she turns to drink to help her manage it, she finds help from an unexpected source. (No pairings, background Minerva/Elphinstone) Warning for alcohol abuse, some violent imagery.

Winner of a 2014 Mugglenet Quicksilver Quill Award.

## Sybill Trelawney and the Unexpected Gift

*Chapter 1 of 1*

"You can't use your Gift, it uses you," Professor Dorsett tells Sybill, and over the years she finds out how lonely a Seer's life can be. But when she turns to drink to help her manage it, she finds help from an unexpected source. (No pairings, background Minerva/Elphinstone) Warning for alcohol abuse, some violent imagery.

Winner of a 2014 Mugglenet Quicksilver Quill Award.

**Author's Note:** This was written for the 2013 HP Friendship Fest on LiveJournal. Prompt: After being sacked, Sybill turns to drink again. Minerva intervenes. Can be either a hopeful fic or more ambiguous.

There are several lines you'll recognize from chapter eleven of Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban...they're JKRs, not mine, as are the recognisable characters and settings.

---

□

Sybill Trelawney learned her first big secret at age eleven.

The night before she left for school, her grandmother sat her down and told her, "There has not been a true Seer in our family in four generations."

That was not the secret. As far as Sybill was aware, neither her mother, nor her grandmother, nor her grandmother's mother had ever made a single accurate prediction about anything more interesting than whether the next-born Trelawney would be female, which they always were, or if their fathers would marry their mothers, which they never did.

No, what stunned Sybill was what her grandmother said next:

"You are the first."

Gran explained that the "tendency to talk out of turn" of which little Sybill's primary school teachers had written so despairingly on her term reports...until Gran had pulled

her out of school...was, in fact, a sign of the Sight.

"My granny did it all the time," Gran said. "We couldn't sit down at table without her predicting that the roast would be stringy or that someone would drop a plate. It got worse as she got older. She couldn't help it any more than she could help breathing, but it drove my grandfather off, and my father after him, and your mother's father, too."

"What about my father?"

"Your mother managed that on her own," Gran said. "The point is, Sybill, that you need to be prepared."

"For what, Gran?"

"Loneliness."

\*\*\*

Despite her grandmother's warning, Sybill rejoiced.

She was a Seer!

At last, there was something she could do that would be valued in the wizarding world. She didn't have much magic; her mother had always said so, and it had been amply demonstrated when her grandmother took her to Mr Ollivander's. Six tense hours elapsed before they found a wand that would produce even anaemic sparks in Sybill's hand. Mr Ollivander gave her a queer, almost satisfied smile.

"That's silver lime and unicorn hair," he told her. "The first I've ever sold. My father harvested the wood from *aTilia tomentosa* he found in Belgium. He estimated it at over three hundred years old. It was struck by lightning and incinerated only hours later. Extraordinary."

Sybill didn't know if he was talking about the tree or the fact that this unusual wand had chosen her.

She turned it over and over, her fingers leaving smudges on the polish, as she stood on platform nine and three-quarters, waiting to board the train. Would it ever produce real magic for her? Or was this rare wood wasted in her trembling hands?

She'd been dreading Hogwarts since hearing her mother's tales about Transfiguration exams and Quidditch matches...stories which Sybill found bewildering and more than a little frightening. When Deputy Headmaster Dumbledore's letter had arrived in June, Sybill had half hoped Gran would forbid her to go.

But now she was hopeful. Happy, even.

It lasted until she met Minerva McGonagall.

Sybill had just found an empty compartment and placed her trunk on the seat next to her when the door slid open and a tall, dark-haired girl wearing a pleated white shirt and a green tartan skirt appeared, looking annoyed.

"You'll need to move that," she said, pointing at Sybill's trunk. "We're going to be full today." She took a pair of square, wire-rimmed spectacles out of her breast pocket, put them on, and peered at Sybill. The specs made her eyes look small and beady.

"Oh," she said, softening a little. "A firstie, I presume?"

Sybill nodded, unable to produce a sound in the presence of this imposing young witch.

"I'll help you get this on the rack," the girl said, entering the compartment and pulling a very long, highly polished wand from a hidden pocket in her skirt.

Sybill found herself saying, "That's not a good idea. The vibrations suggest disaster."

The girl's lips pressed together in a thin line, and Sybill couldn't tell if she was trying not to laugh or to shout. Sybill was accustomed to both.

"Nevertheless," the girl said, the rolling "r" of her brogue making the word sound harsh and unforgiving. She pointed her gleaming wand at Sybill's dirty old trunk, which rose and settled itself on the rack above Sybill's head. Eyeing Sybill's peasant top and orange georgette skirt, the girl said, "Tuck in your blouse. We like everything shipshape at Hogwarts." Then she left, letting the compartment door clatter closed behind her.

The compartment filled up with other students. They chattered excitedly, which Sybill found disturbing. It was as if voices were competing in her head...the ones coming from the students and the ones coming from inside her, telling her about them. This one's brother would be called "Merwyn"; that one hated parsnips but didn't yet know it; another would place second in the Hogwarts Gobstones tourney . . .

Sybill put her hands over her ears, and the other students went quiet, staring at her.

The train gave a lurch, and a moment later, Sybill was thumped on the head by several heavy books, then showered in cloth. The latch on her trunk had broken, and her belongings rained down upon her, prompting gales of laughter from her compartment-mates, who, having found a common object of derision, became the fastest of friends.

Sybill had to take a stocking and tie it around the trunk to keep it closed. Nobody helped her.

When Sybill disembarked from the Hogwarts Express, the stocking ripped and the trunk opened again, depositing half her things in the dirt and owl droppings that coated the Hogsmeade Station platform. The other firsties looked at her, tittering, while the older students were too busy rushing to get queued up for the carriages to notice her plight.

She tried to gather her clothes, which were scattering as the winds blew them about the platform.

"Here."

Sybill looked up through watery eyes. The tall girl from the train was holding out several items, including, Sybill was mortified to see, three pairs of knickers.

"Thank you," Sybill said. She stuffed the clothes back into her trunk and closed it. It popped open again, and several items spilled out before she could slam it shut.

The girl, who was now wearing black robes and a badge that read *Minerva McGonagall, Head Girl*, knelt down and picked up a book, squinting to read its title, *Daughters of Hecabe: A History of the Womynly Art of Prophecy*.

Her lips pursed.

"Divination isn't until third year," she said.

"I know," said Sybill. "It's going to be my best subject."

But that had clearly been the wrong thing to say, not that she could have helped it.

Hoping it might erase the sour look on Minerva's face, Sybill took the book and said, "My great-great-grandmother's in here. She was a famous Seer."

"Put your robes on, and be quick," Minerva said.

"But..."

"I'll sort it for you." Minerva pointed her wand at Sybill's trunk.

"*Adhaere!* That ought to hold it until you get to the castle. Have one of your prefects remove the charm if you can't do it."

Minerva McGonagall wielded her wand as if it were part of her arm, her movements seeming both natural and precise. It left Sybill feeling a little in awe and a lot uneasy. Was everyone at Hogwarts as good at magic as the Head Girl?

A frowning Minerva said, "Go on with you, now. Everyone's waiting."

As Sybill struggled to fasten the black robes over her full skirt, she watched Minerva stride off calling, "Gussie! Wait!" She caught up and took the other girl's arm, and Sybill had a feeling that the laughter that erupted from them both was at her expense.

\*\*\*

By the time she finished school, Sybill knew two things:

One, that her grandmother had been right about loneliness, and two, if she wanted to earn her living as a Seer, she was going to have to lie.

She left Hogwarts after her O.W.L.s, having achieved passing marks only in Charms and Divination...an "Outstanding" in the latter, of course.

A farewell tea with Professor Dorsett in her third-floor office was both enlightening and discouraging.

"Sybill, my girl, I worry about you."

"Why, Professor?"

"You're a right mess, and no mistake."

Professor Dorsett put two fingers under Sybill's downcast chin and lifted her face.

"That grandmother of yours did you no favours, keeping you away from people, but she was right about one thing: you have the Sight. I may not be able to predict the colour of the sky on a sunny day, but I can tell when someone else has a Gift."

She chuckled at the expression on Sybill's face.

"That's right, girl...I'm a fraud. Like ninety percent of the folks who claim to See. Ninety-nine. Oh, there's a few folks have a glimmer of it...got a knack for knowing what tomorrow's weather will be, or which team's going to win the next World Cup and by how much. But I'm not one of 'em."

"But you're a professor."

"I'm a decent teacher, I don't mind saying. But there's nothing I could teach you about Divination. It's an accident of birth, not a skill. I've taught you and your classmates how to do what successful Seers do best: put on a good show. Tasseomancy, cleromancy, the Tarot...it's all a load of Thestral shit, but tea leaves and crystal balls make good props. You learned the art of stagecraft, not Divination."

"But my Inner Eye! I planned to use it to..."

"Just listen. You can't use your Gift; it uses you." The professor's stubby fingers poked Sybill in the chest. "The trick, Sybill Trelawney, is to survive it."

Sybill was near to crying. All those hours she'd spent poring over the cards, the praise Professor Dorsett heaped on her painstakingly detailed astrological charts, always meticulously cross-referenced with her natal chart...it all meant nothing. Her skills, her only real magical skills, were an illusion.

"What will I do?" she wailed.

Professor Dorsett grabbed Sybill's hands and squeezed hard.

"That's what I'm trying to tell you. You *can* use the things I've taught you. Lucrative careers have been built on the skilful manipulation of two things: hope and fear. Pay attention to your audience, figure out which one they expect, and give it to them, and they'll thank you. Do it well enough, and they'll make you rich."

\*\*\*

Sybill didn't get rich.

But she did all right, for fair few years.

She set up a little shop off Diagon Alley with the bit of money left over from her great-great-grandmother Cassandra...her mother and grandmother had clearly pinned their soon-to-be dashed hopes of fortune on Sybill...and she had a steady stream of clients, thanks, she suspected, to Professor Dorsett's whispering in the right ears.

Hope and Fear was what they wanted, all right, and Hope and Fear Sybill provided. She read her clients well, sensed what they needed, and "predicted" everything from the birth of a long-desired heir to the death of a beloved...or detested...relative, and if many of the predictions didn't come true immediately, they almost always did eventually. The real predictions that littered her sessions never interested the clients, but they did lend an air of oddness to the proceedings that Sybill found helped things along, even if the clients never believed them.

The shop was a minor success, and over the years, she found that the more outlandishly she dressed and the mistier her behaviour, the more clients she had. She took to wearing enormous glasses she didn't need that magnified her already bulbous eyes, and added incense and sitar music to her salon, which she found made clients a bit soporific and easier to read, if not Read.

But Hope and Fear came to have more concrete meanings as whispers of a new Dark Lord began to arise from the general din around the Alley.

The rumours grew louder, the deaths and disappearances more frequent, and clients were no longer satisfied with Sybill's quaint prognostications. They came to her now for two things she couldn't give them: safety and séances.

The first time a woman wanted to know if her half-Muggle children were in danger, Sybill could only say, "Yes, of course." When the distraught mother pressed for useful information..."Will Hogwarts fall?"...Sybill refused to answer, and the woman left without paying, just as Sybill had, incidentally, predicted.

More disturbing were the clients who wanted to speak with dead loved ones. Surely, they said, Sybill's Gift allowed her to See beyond the Veil? No, Sybill replied, it did not. No one could do that, not even her great-great-grandmother. The clients were angry and disbelieving. They told her of Muggles who spoke to the dead, and if Muggles

could do it . . . but Sybill couldn't, and she wouldn't pretend.

The reward for her refusal to cross the line into what she considered, if not Dark Magic, a Dark Art, was penury. Little by little, clients stopped coming as wizarding Britain locked itself up tight for the duration, and the meagre enticements of Sybill's benign brand of Hope and Fear were not enough to lure anyone to Knockturn Alley, where she'd had to relocate, given her reduced means.

Her last tea with Professor Dorsett changed the course of her life.

They'd just been discussing the shocking murders of the Prewett twins and Marlene McKinnon, who'd been a classmate of Sybill's, when Sybill came over oddly warm and drowsy.

Everything began to move in slow motion. She blinked, and found herself looking into the pale face of her mentor, who was staring at her, eyes wide.

"I'm sorry," said Sybill, "I must have dozed off. I'm feeling a bit funny, actually."

Professor Dorsett stood abruptly, knocking over her chair.

"I've got to go. Gods preserve you, dear Sybill," she said, kissed an astonished Sybill on the forehead, then left without another word.

Three hours later, Hildegard Dorsett was dead. Splinched trying to Apparate over the Channel.

Which was how Sybill Trelawney came back to Hogwarts at last.

\*\*\*

"Albus says you prefer to reside in the North Tower rather than in the West Wing with the other regular teachers," the Deputy Headmistress said, disapproval in every click of her smart, polished heels.

"Yes," Sybill said, slightly breathless with the effort of keeping up with Minerva's brisk pace. "The Inner Eye needs quiet if it is to See properly."

She ignored Minerva's snort.

"Here it is," Minerva said when the door clicked obediently open to the neat swish of her wand.

The room was clean enough, but it looked as if it hadn't held a living soul in centuries.

Sybill shivered, and it was on the tip of her tongue to ask Minerva if she would stay for a cuppa, an odd impulse, to be sure...Sybill was accustomed to being left to her own devices and had come to prefer it...but the room felt so dead and empty that it frightened her.

"You may reset the wards as you wish," Minerva said. "The door will always open, of course, to the Headmaster and to Madam Pomfrey, our matron, in case of emergency."

"Not to you?"

"No."

"You'll want to get in," Sybill said.

"I sincerely doubt that." Minerva's smile was tight and not at all reassuring. "If that's all, Professor Trelawney..."

"Call me Sybill. Please."

"If that's all, I'll be getting on with my duties."

And Sybill was left alone in that dreadful room.

\*\*\*

Sybill Trelawney had never had friends, so she didn't miss them. But she did miss Professor Dorsett and their regular teas. They reminded her that she existed...Sybill the person, not the Seer.

If pressed, Sybill would admit to having harboured a hope that Minerva McGonagall might come up for the occasional tea, or invite her down, just as a friendly, collegial gesture. They were the only two witches near in age at Hogwarts, and it might have seemed natural.

But it quickly became clear that Minerva McGonagall would never...ever...consider Sybill Trelawney a colleague or worthy of any conversation beyond what was required for the discharge of her duties.

Meals were torture. There were the voices, as always, but they were more frequent and more intense than they had been when she was student. Sybill couldn't help the prognostic ejaculations that escaped her, while Minerva seemed incapable of simply ignoring them as everyone else learned to do. Her barbed comments stung and ruined what little appetite Sybill had.

Funny, but she seemed to affect Minerva similarly.

One night, after Sybill's statement that they wouldn't be having langoustines again, which was a pity, because Minerva loved them, the Deputy Headmistress set down her fork, pushed away from the table, and left without a word. So she was not there to see the new professor...that boy Sybill had seen at the Hog's Head, in fact...grab at his throat, his face red and looking like it had got on the wrong end of an Engorgement Charm. He spent a week in the infirmary recovering from a severe allergic reaction.

After that, none of the staff wanted to sit next to her at table, and eventually, Sybill asked the Headmaster to grant her leave to take her meals in her rooms.

Over the months, the rest of the castle became unbearable as the voices got louder.

As her Gift had grown over the years, the voices, those occasional bursts of intimate human contact, had become her companions. The Hopes and Fears of clients and people passing her tiny basement flat in London had been like momentary WWN broadcasts from someone else's life, and they had been a comfort.

But here, in a castle full of magical adolescents...whose voices had always been the loudest and most insistent...it rose to a terrifying cacophony of anger and anxiety and desire. Alarmingly, much of what Sybill Saw lately was death and danger. The recent unpleasantness seemed to have redirected the Inner Eye towards the Dark, and it didn't want to let it go.

She left her rooms less and less as the months passed. Teaching ten children at a time, twenty-four hours per week nearly killed her. She was assaulted with negativity...most of it trivial, but occasionally, what she Saw was devastating.

"Find a way to survive," Professor Dorsett had advised her, and Sybill did. Increasing amounts of Firewhisky helped, but what really did the trick was selecting one student

per class on whom to focus; the resulting images and voices that arose within her crowded out, mostly, the babble from the others. The things she saw for her chosen students were almost inevitably bad...accidents, bereavements, and occasionally, death.

The Deputy Headmistress came to speak with her about it.

"Professor Trelawney," she said, her long legs sticking out awkwardly from the velvet pouf on which she sat, "I must ask you to refrain from frightening the students pointlessly. The Headmaster has had several owls from parents. Surely even you can see...lower-case 's'...how distressing it is to hear that a teacher has predicted that their daughter will die from a Kappa's bite, or that their son is destined for Azkaban."

Sybill told the Deputy Headmistress that she would guard her tongue henceforth, and when Minerva left, Sybill finished a bottle of Ogden's and wept. She could no more prevent herself from uttering what she saw than she could stop her heart from beating. Perhaps a quickly deployed Tongue-Tying Jinx . . . ? But Sybill was not up to that kind of magic, and certainly not wandlessly or wordlessly. Maybe she'd have to cut out her tongue.

Because she needed to stay at Hogwarts.

Sybill Trelawney might have been nearly a Squib, but she was no fool.

Something had happened during her interview at the Hog's Head...something that had to do with young Snape, who, as everyone knew, was a Death Eater. Sybill didn't understand what it was, but Dumbledore had done a complete volte-face after the interruption of their interview. He'd already told her that, impressive as her credentials were, he was planning on discontinuing Divination as a Hogwarts subject in the wake of Professor Dorsett's unexpected demise . . . and then he was shaking her hand and insisting that she move into the castle *right away*...that very night, in fact, and had even gone with her to her flat to collect her things.

The Death Eaters wanted her. Something about what he'd heard had convinced Snape that she was the real thing, a true Seer, and they would expect her to use her Gift for their benefit.

Sybill wondered now if Professor Dorsett didn't have more of the Sight than she'd claimed.

Eventually, she pulled herself together. After all, what choice did she have? What choice had she ever had? But what could she do?

Strangely enough, the answer came to her in Professor Dorsett's gravelly voice: Do what you're best at. Put on a show.

The following Monday, when she heard herself tell William Weasley that the half-moon would be his saviour and his curse, she quickly drew his attention to the sloppy astrological chart spread across his table.

"See!" she cried, "See how Mars conjuncts Venus to oppose Jupiter here!" She pointed to a random section of the chart for 1997 and let her voice go hollow and deep for effect as she spouted nonsense: "That allows the moon to exert its influence in Scorpio."

She knew her ruse had worked when the Weasley boy grinned over at his table-mate. He'd forgotten all about the dire prediction in favour of a comfortable conviction that Professor T was off her nut.

\*\*\*

The war ended suddenly and unpredictably, and Sybill was pressed into attending what the Headmaster described as a "special Christmas celebration" in the staff room on 25<sup>th</sup> December.

The reason it was "special" became obvious when Professor Dumbledore made his toast:

"Ordinarily, I would offer the first glass of the evening to the joy of the season," he said, "but I know you will all forgive me as I raise it to something more important: to love!"

Sybill knew little of love, but she was happy enough to raise a glass, particularly one filled with the Headmaster's best elf-made wine.

They drank, and Dumbledore said, "And in the same spirit, I hope you will all join me in offering congratulations to Minerva and Elphinstone, who were married by Minister Bagnold herself this very morning."

The room erupted in a chorus of good wishes, and the rest of the staff crowded around Minerva, who threw an annoyed look at Dumbledore and accepted hugs and handshakes from her colleagues with better grace than Sybill might have predicted.

After several more glasses of wine, the voices had quieted enough that Sybill was calm, and she decided it was time for her to offer her best wishes to the happy couple.

Minerva's new husband was considerably older than she was, and Sybill was surprised to see his arm around her waist as they stood talking to Pomona Sprout. As she approached, she heard Pomona say, ". . . in the greenhouse while Minerva's working. I can get you started with some cuttings, if you'd like," and suddenly, Sybill saw.

A plump, white-haired man lay on a dirt floor, surrounded by leafy plants, his blue eyes staring lifelessly into the sky. She saw Minerva holding his hand, weeping. She saw Minerva dressed in black, unveiled and dry-eyed, tossing a large white flower into an open grave. She saw Minerva lying on the floor . . .

Sybill felt her mouth begin to move, and she prayed to her grandmother's mysterious gods that it would stop. But the words came out like a belch: "Green will be the colour of your death."

Elphinstone turned to Sybill and smiled pleasantly, saying, "I'm sorry, madam, I didn't quite..."

Minerva said, "Elph, this is *Sybill Trelawney*," and by the meaningful look she gave her husband, Sybill knew that they'd spoken of her.

"Evidently, she doesn't think much of the colour of my robes," Minerva said, indicating the deep green velvet she was wearing. The look she gave Sybill made her wonder where Minerva's wand was.

"No, I..." Sybill said.

"Professor Trelawney has a unique way of expressing herself," Minerva said, speaking over her.

"But, Minerva, he mustn't..."

She reached out to take Minerva's arm...she had to make her understand that the greenhouse was a terrible idea...but Minerva pulled back. Sybill lost her footing and went sprawling at Minerva's feet.

Pomona and Elphinstone knelt down to see if she was all right, but Minerva just glared down at her. Sybill's mind overlaid Minerva's disgust-twisted features with the face she'd seen in her vision, a face raw with sudden grief, and she vomited into the wool carpet.

\*\*\*

When a solemn-faced Professor Dumbledore gathered them in the staff room again three years later, Minerva was conspicuously missing, and Sybill didn't need the Sight to tell her what he was going to say.

Afterwards, she went into Hogsmeade, but the man at Tiptplethwaite's refused to sell her Firewhisky or anything else.

"Sorry, Professor. I'm not to take any more of your custom. Headmaster's orders."

The story was the same at the Three Broomsticks and the Hog's Head, except Aberforth told her it was the Deputy Headmistress who had delivered the interdiction.

"If it'd been my brother, I'd throw it back in his face. But I reckon Minerva's got her reasons. So you'll have to get your stuff somewhere else."

As she was leaving, he said, "There's an off-license in Dingwall. I know the man runs it. Might be he'd send you something by post. For medicinal purposes."

\*\*\*

"What do you mean, nothing?" Sybill said to the woman at the post office.

"What I said: there's nothing for you, Professor."

"But it's the day before Christmas!"

"Yes, it is, and that's why we're so busy," said the clerk, pointing out the line of increasingly impatient witches and wizards queued up behind Sybill. "I'm sure your delivery will be here Monday, but I need you to move aside now. There's others want to get their parcels and get home to their families."

It was Friday. How would she manage until Monday?

By the following afternoon, she was shaking, and her head was pounding. When the house-elf delivered her lunch, the odour of the food was overwhelming, and she told the creature to take it away.

"Wait!" she said after the elf picked up the tray.

"Professor?"

"What is being served for Christmas dinner in the Great Hall?"

"Roast turkey, professor, and potatoes, chipolatas, and..."

"Is there wine?"

\*\*\*

As soon as Sybill went through the doors to the Great Hall, she knew she'd made a dreadful mistake.

Everyone was staring at her.

She was perspiring heavily, and she could feel the stains creeping through the only decent dress she owned.

As she made an excuse for her impromptu interruption of the meal, her eyes were drawn to the bottle that stood near Dumbledore's plate.

The Headmaster conjured a chair for her, and as he did so, he did something else. Something terrible. He took up the bottle and poured its precious contents into Snape's glass. She watched in horror as the stream trickled into droplets, and couldn't help emitting a sound when Dumbledore Vanished the empty bottle.

She had to get out of there. The room was too hot and filled with too many voices. She heard herself utter something about thirteen at table, and Minerva said something acid.

She had no choice but to sit...her legs were like jelly. The smells from the food reached her nose and she clamped her lips together tightly to keep from being sick.

As she glanced at Snape, he dropped a chipolata onto his plate, and for a moment, Sybill could have sworn the sausage took the form of a monstrous snake.

She closed her eyes against the almost-vision.

"Tripe, Sybill?" came Minerva's voice.

Sybill opened her eyes to see a ladle hovering over her plate.

Oh, gods . . . she was going to vomit, or worse, utter a prediction.

Panicked, she let her eyes roam around the table, desperate for a distraction

She spotted a student wearing an orange-and-black jumper bearing the legend Wolverhampton Wanderers, and she said the first thing that leaped into her mind.

"But where is dear Professor Lupin?"

During the exchange that followed, Sybill did something she'd always sworn not to: she spoke about something she'd Seen. She didn't mean to let it slip about Lupin's fate, but her head was aching, and Minerva wouldn't be quiet, her words echoing the terrible pounding in Sybill's head. Fortunately, Dumbledore said something that shut Minerva up, and the Deputy Headmistress spent the rest of the meal pointedly ignoring Sybill.

The dinner was interminable. Sybill managed a few bites of potato and nothing else; even if she had had any appetite, her hands were shaking so badly that she could barely get the fork to her mouth. Finally, blessedly, the pudding arrived, signalling that Christmas dinner was nearly over.

When Dumbledore stood to offer a closing toast...in pumpkin juice, sadly...he caught Sybill's eye and smiled encouragingly. A vision of him lying in the mud, his long white hair matted with blood, danced before her.

She screamed.

When she took her hands from her face, the vision faded, but she couldn't look at Dumbledore.

Desperate for anything to distract the Inner Eye from the terrible thing she had Seen, she fixed on the two boys standing near the end of the table.

"My dears!" she said to keep herself from uttering anything she shouldn't. "Which of you left his seat first? Which?"

Minerva said something, but Sybill couldn't hear it. The voices were speaking to her again.

As she fled the Great Hall, no one heard her murmur, "Choosing death, you will defeat it."

\*\*\*

It was all Sybill's fault. She'd let the Gift control her. And Hope and Fear, but this time, it had been her hope and her fear.

When Umbridge had called her to her office..."and bring your crystal"...Sybill should have known better. She was a Projector, this pink nightmare of a person; her desires weren't very far from the surface, and Sybill hoped that she could satisfy the woman with some minor predictions...true or not...that would make her happy and prevent what Sybill suspected was coming.

Umbridge asked in that little-girl voice of hers, "Will I be Minister for Magic?"

Sybill gazed into her crystal, seeing nothing, as usual, but she gave it a touch of her wand anyway, for show. The mist parted, and she Saw.

Not in the crystal, of course, but inside her.

The fuchsia-stained lips, parted in a silent scream . . . the rotting thing bending over the toad-like face, attaching its shadowy, undead lips to hers . . .

"What? What is it?" Umbridge asked.

"I . . . I don't . . ."

"I see. It is as I suspected at your inspection. You have no Sight," Umbridge said.

She stood, saying, "I was hoping I might be able to amend my report, but as it is..."

"No! I Saw! Truly!"

"Did you?"

Sybill nodded earnestly, and Umbridge gave her an appraising look.

She sat back down and poured a cup of tea from a pot that sat at the side of the desk.

"Drink up, dear," Umbridge said. "Then we can discuss what you Saw."

Sybill drank the tea, to give herself time to make something up...something vague but good enough to keep her job.

When she set her cup down again, Umbridge asked, "And what did you See?"

It was as if Sybill were a bystander, listening in horror to own voice as she told her inquisitor about the vision.

Umbridge's face turned the colour of her dress, and she ordered Sybill out of her office, saying, "Pack your trunks. You leave tonight."

"No, please . . ."

"Out!"

Sybill went back to her room and had just poured the last of her sherry when a house-elf appeared to help her with her trunks.

Her composure lasted until she got to the entrance hall and saw the great oak doors rumble open to eject her into the Darkness that waited beyond Hogwarts.

She howled.

This couldn't be happening.

That awful, that *evil* woman . . . she was standing there smiling at Sybill. Sybill tried to reason with her once more, but to no avail.

Another vision came to her, terrible and wonderful. She Saw light leaving brown eyes, the creature drawing back, a thin line of saliva forming a glistening, translucent bridge between Umbridge's mouth and the creature's. For just a moment, Sybill rejoiced, but the face of the thing that was left after the Dementor took its infernal kiss turned her bowels to water.

She sank down on the trunk that had landed behind her, moaning and rocking.

Then there was a firm hand on her back, rubbing it, and when she turned to look up at the person offering comfort, she could not quite believe it when she saw Minerva's pointed features looking down at her with an expression she didn't quite recognise.

Minerva and Pomona escorted her back to her room...it was still hers, praise be to Dumbledore...and Minerva put her to bed, saying only that things would be all right, that Sybill would be taken care of.

\*\*\*

The first day after summer term ended, Sybill received, instead of her regular delivery from Smythe's, a note. Mr Smythe was terribly sorry, he wrote, but he could no longer do business with Miss Trelawney. She was not to worry about her outstanding bill, however, as it had been paid in full. He included a receipt for £44.13 with a cheery-looking "Thank you for your business!" scrawled at the bottom.

Her panic grew with every step back to Hogwarts, but when she got to her room, there was a bottle and a glass sitting on her table. Rolled up inside the glass was another note:

*This bottle is charmed to magically renew itself. It will allow you 1 oz of Firewhisky per hour. Eat something with it, even if you have no appetite. These will help settle your stomach.*

A box of Ginger Newts sat next to the bottle.

The bottle lived up to its billing. The first four nights, Sybill woke every hour, desperate for her allotted ounce, but after that, she found she could sleep a bit longer at a stretch. Her benefactor was right about the biscuits.

By the end of the summer holidays, there were some days when she went several hours without a taste of liquor. The castle was quiet, and there weren't so many voices as during term. For a long time, her terrifying, agonising walks into Hogsmeade for her weekly post office visit had been almost the only time she left her rooms, but now she found herself drawn out into the fresh air, at dusk only, to protect her sun-deprived skin, for walks around the Black Lake.

It was on one of these walks that she met the centaur for the first time.

When Dumbledore had told her about him, he clearly thought she'd be upset. Sybill had remembered her Diagon Alley days and gave the Headmaster what he expected. In truth, she'd been relieved to hear that he would be taking half her classes in the coming term. She was secretly a little excited, too. At last, there would be someone who understood about the Sight. Centaurs Saw differently than human Seers, she knew that, but surely he would understand the difficulties of living among witches and wizards

who did not See, but Projected. Perhaps she could even help him, provide guidance based on her experience of managing the Inner Eye in a castle full of voices and visions.

She came upon him as she rounded the promontory that overlooked the lake. Twilight had come and gone, and he was staring into the sky. She hesitated to disturb him, but he turned to look at her.

He said nothing, so she stepped forward to introduce herself. His gaze fell to her wand, which lit her way, and she recalled reading that centaurs had an aversion to wand-magic. She doused it and put it in her pocket.

"Professor Firenze," she said, almost offering her hand, but drawing it back at the last moment. "I am Sybill Trelawney. Please forgive me for not introducing myself before this, but during term, I rarely leave my tower. Surely you understand."

The centaur remained silent and turned to look at the sky again.

Sybill felt a fool. But friendship had to be won, her gran had always said, so she approached him cautiously and asked, "Do you See something?"

"Mars is bright."

"Yes."

She had been about to add that it boded ill, but she didn't want to insult him by stating what was obvious. He didn't seem anxious to talk, and another thing her gran had told her was not to push, so she turned to go.

In her path was a white marble monument that hadn't been there a moment ago. As she watched, the top slid aside, and she Saw what was within.

She put her fist to her mouth, trying not to scream, and fell to her knees. As she looked at the tomb in horror, the Headmaster's face changed. It melted and coalesced into the youthful features of Harry Potter. He was dead, his eyes empty.

But that was impossible. She'd Seen the Potter boy grown. Seen his son sitting in her classroom . . .

Had something changed?

She became aware of the centaur standing beside her.

"This place is resonant," he said.

"Resonant, yes . . ."

He didn't ask her what she had Seen, and when she tried to tell him, he shook his head.

"It is not for me to know what you have Seen, Sybill Trelawney."

And he walked away, leaving her alone in the dark with her Gift.

\*\*\*

As the weeks passed, visions continued to assail her. Some were terrifying...the worst was one of Dumbledore, screaming and crying as Potter held a cup to his lips...some were merely puzzling...Potter standing naked in what appeared to be King's Cross...and they were coming fast, sometimes two or three per day.

She tried to speak with the centaur, but he refused to listen and became angry when she tried to insist.

"We must tell the Headmaster. You must help me make him see!" she said.

"Whether or not Dumbledore knows as you and I know is unimportant."

"But we're lost without him. And if Potter dies..."

"He dies. And the world moves on. Trouble me no more with your petty human concerns, Sybill Trelawney. You cannot change what will come to pass."

The Headmaster was more polite when she finally broke down and visited him by herself, but he was strangely unconcerned when she told him about her visions.

He looked increasingly tired and ill, but the day he told her to stop coming to him, she screamed at him.

"You will die, you stupid, stupid man!"

He merely looked at her with what she used to believe was kindness but she now recognised as condescension.

"Of course I will."

When she got back to her room, she pointed her wand at the bottomless whiskey bottle and tried everything she could think of to break the charm that prevented her from getting good and stinking.

In desperation, she smashed it, hoping to siphon up the liquor, but the pool of amber fluid disappeared before she could recall the spell.

Sobbing, she tore around the room, pulling books off shelves, tearing at cushions, smashing whatever was in her reach until she was panting and sweating and the room looked as if a herd of bloody centaurs had gone rampaging through it.

By the time the house-elf delivered her dinner tray, Sybill was famished. Her exertions had given her more of an appetite that she'd had in weeks...so much so that she ate the pudding, a raspberry trifle, and licked the spoon clean. Something about it was irresistible.

A memory came to her of her grandmother in the Trelawney family kitchen, pouring out something from a bottle to put in the pudding.

"Wooster!"

"Professor?"

The house-elf had appeared in the corner, its huge eyes darting around the ruined room.

"What's in the trifle?"

\*\*\*

Sybill's head was pounding.



Which was odd...she never had a hangover.

*Bang, bang, bang!*

Gradually, Sybill awoke enough to realise that the pounding was not inside her head, but outside her door.

She was in the process of rising from the floor when the door exploded and a harried-looking Minerva McGonagall stepped through.

"Sybill!" she said. "Thank Merlin you're all right. I thought... well, never mind what I thought. You're here and in one piece."

Sybill's brain was fogged with sleep and the effects of...she looked around and counted...one, two, three bottles of sherry.

Minerva had obviously made the same count.

She knelt down and picked up one of the unmarked bottles, sniffing at it.

"Oh, Sybill. I didn't think to tell the house-elves about the cooking sherry."

"I don't know what you're implying," said Sybill, straightening her shawl around her in an attempt to regain a bit of dignity.

Then something happened that Sybill never could have predicted, Inner Eye or no: Minerva sank down on the floor next to her, put her face in her hands, and sobbed.

Sybill had no idea what to do, never having been in a position to offer comfort to another soul in distress, so she merely sat and watched as Minerva cried. Then she remembered Minerva's hand rubbing soothing circles on her back after the terrible incident in the entrance hall. She couldn't reach Minerva's back, as it was pressed against the settee, but she put a tentative arm around her shoulder, half expecting Minerva to hex her.

But Minerva seemed to calm a little, and when she finally lifted her face from her hands, Sybill wondered what she had been doing.

Her hair haloed her face in wild tendrils, and there was a long scratch across one cheek, shockingly red against the paleness of Minerva's skin.

"Minerva, what's happened?" Sybill said, expecting Minerva to return with a barbed comment about Sybill's inability to divine it.

"Dumbledore's dead."

The blood rushed to Sybill's head, and she thought she might pass out, but the sight of Minerva's pale, tear-streaked face somehow fortified her.

"How?" she asked.

Minerva relayed the story that Sybill already, partly, knew, and then she shocked Sybill again, saying, "It's all my fault."

"What do you mean?"

"I summoned Severus. I told him his . . . his *friends* were in the school."

"You didn't know what he would do."

"No, but I should have."

"How? You're not the one with the Sight, Minerva."

"No. Thank goodness. I don't know how you manage."

This was perhaps the biggest shock Sybill received that shocking night.

It sounded as if Minerva actually believed in Sybill's Gift.

Sybill stood, surprisingly clear-headed, and offered Minerva her hand.

"Come on. Let's get you cleaned up."

Minerva took Sybill's hand and got to her feet, moving slowly, as if every muscle in her body were rebelling against the movement.

She said, "No. I've got to get back. The governors . . . the Ministry . . ."

Before she could leave, Sybill caught her arm.

"Why did you come up here?"

"I sent Hagrid to check on all the teachers. He said there was no answer at your door, and I was afraid something had happened to you, so I came up to see. But the door wouldn't open to me, so I had to use a *Bombarda*. I'm sorry."

"Thank you, Minerva," Sybill said.

"It's my job."

"I know. But you have other things besides a foolish old drunk to worry about right now."

Minerva peered at her, but this time, there was something other than disdain in her gaze.

After a moment, Minerva said, "I do." Putting a finger to her cheek, she winced and asked, "Have you any Dittany, by chance?"

\*\*\*

Sybill Trelawney learned her second big secret at the age of fifty-six.

Her tower, along with much else at Hogwarts, had been destroyed in the battle, but that didn't matter, because what Sybill had Seen came to pass.

The Boy Who Lived had died. And lived. She hadn't understood...still didn't, really...but the Inner Eye hadn't been wrong. Sybill had merely misinterpreted.

And after the dead were buried and the Dark Magic cleared from the castle and its grounds, Minerva called Sybill into her makeshift office and invited her to live with her.

"With you?"

"Yes," Minerva said. "At my cottage in the village. For the summer. We can't stay here during the repairs, it's too dangerous. The castle's enchantments are very unstable."

"But you don't even like me."

Minerva took off her square-rimmed glasses and looked at her. "I daresay, Sybill, that I don't really know you."

"Then why would you ask me to stay with you?"

"Because we can help one another."

Sybill failed to see how she could ever help Minerva McGonagall, and said so, and that was how she learned her second big secret, only this time, it wasn't about her.

"I had no idea," she said after Minerva told her.

"No one did. I made sure of it."

"But how did you..."

"Not alone. Albus helped. We spent the summer after Elph died together in the castle. He stayed by me the whole time, even slept on a Transfigured bed in my room so I wouldn't waken alone at night."

"He was a good friend."

"He was."

Sybill Trelawney and Minerva McGonagall never became good friends. But they did help one another that summer, Minerva tending to Sybill during the sickness that accompanied her first sober weeks. For her part, Sybill was never certain what she offered Minerva, who still often snapped at her when a prediction escaped her, but Minerva's irritated words were no longer laced with disdain, and if Minerva ever took anything stronger than Gillywater, Sybill didn't see it, so perhaps her presence was a help after all.

August came and went, and the castle was repaired. Minerva and Sybill moved back into it, and the former took her place as Headmistress. The children returned, and with them, the voices, but the visions were less Dark now, and when Sybill felt a thirst for something more than pumpkin juice, she called on Minerva, who came without question or recrimination, only endless cups of tea, after which she made Sybill read the leaves for her. Sybill saw nothing of Minerva's future in them, of course, but making things up was a good distraction. She went heavy on the Hope and easy on the Fear.

There was one night after the war when Minerva appeared at Sybill's door, eyes hollow-looking and hands shaking. Sybill knew better than to ask her what was bothering her...Minerva had never shared a confidence beyond the basic fact of her alcoholism...but Sybill took her in, put her in her own bed, and called a house-elf to deliver a message to Deputy Headmistress Vector that the school was in her capable hands for at least a day.

Over the twenty-four hours that followed, Sybill read to Minerva, Muggle novels..*Rob Roy* and *The Bride of Lammermoor*...that she thought might appeal. Minerva never said anything about Sybill's selection, but the night after she'd left, a house-elf came to Sybill's room bearing a parcel that turned out to be the collected works of Charles Dickens.

Three years later, when Minerva came to Sybill's tower to tell her that she planned to discontinue the teaching of Divination at Hogwarts, Sybill was not alarmed. She'd seen herself, grey and impossibly wrinkled, dying in her bed in the very room in which they sat.

Sybill Trelawney, who had never had friend nor lover, trusted in two things: the Gift and Minerva McGonagall. Neither ever failed her.

~Fin~