

Afterwards

by Dreamy_Dragon

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One

Chapter 1 of 1

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August 1998

Minerva stood at her office window. A bright summer sun shone over the Hogwarts grounds; the lake glittered in the distance, its surface ruffled by a gentle breeze. Everything looked peaceful as if nothing bad could ever happen here.

She drew her black robes tighter around her, turned from the window and picked up the parchment on her desk, even though she knew its contents by heart. She hated these things, and she'd had to do them too often lately. How many had there been in these last few weeks alone? And yet this one was special.

A knock at the door interrupted her melancholy musings. Wilhelmina poked her head in. 'It's time,' she said.

Minerva took a deep breath and followed her down the stairs.

The entire staff was gathered in the entrance hall, all wearing sombre expressions with their sombre robes. Even Sibyl had ventured down from her tower. Today she had forgone her usual array of brightly coloured beads and shawls for more muted colours. Horace looked already close to tears, but then it was always that bit harder to bury someone from one's own house. Or a close friend. Though, strictly speaking, they weren't burying anyone today. Severus Snape was still listed as missing, since his body had never been found.

All the ghosts had assembled too. Their number had grown in the last months, but the one face Minerva had been searching for had never appeared among them. She was glad that her selfish wish hadn't been fulfilled. Now the ghosts formed an eerie background to the gathering of witches and wizards.

Minerva nodded silently at her colleagues before she led the way to what had become the Hogwarts memorial ground. In its middle stood Dumbledore's tomb, freshly restored. During the last two months several more gravestones had been erected around it. There was peace and a strange beauty to the site that invited people to grieve and to remember.

She surveyed the people standing around and those already sitting in the rows of seats that had been put up, facing the lake. It wasn't as big a crowd as at some of the other ceremonies, but there were more people than she had expected. Harry Potter was there of course, and with him the entire Weasley family, though the youngest boy looked slightly petulant. Which could have something to do with the fact that Miss Granger had just hissed something at him and then started talking to Bill and Fleur instead. Minerva's eyebrows went up. The girl seemed to have come to her senses quicker than she had hoped. Miss Robbins's eyes on the other hand were following the youngest Weasley male with interest. Perhaps she should invite some of her former students for tea together soon? Just for old times sake?

Wilhelmina nudged her. 'Don't start matchmaking again,' she whispered into her ear.

'I've no idea what you're talking about.'

'Uh-huh.'

Further observation showed that most order members had turned up for the ceremony, sans Mundungus who according to Amelia had to sort out a minor misunderstanding with Magical Law Enforcement.

Horace was hovering protectively around a number of former Slytherins. Minerva's stomach clenched. There had been no time to explain, not with a battle right on their doorstep. At least Horace had understood that she had wanted to keep the Slytherins out of any possible crossfire or conflict of loyalties. Not all of them were the children of Death Eaters, and not all of them had shared their parents' beliefs. Still, every time she saw one of her former pupils, she felt like she should apologise or explain, and yet she knew she wouldn't. In September, when the school would officially open again, she would have to find a way to deal with the Slytherins. So would everyone else it wouldn't do to ostracise a whole group of students.

Minerva turned her eyes away from the Slytherins and reminded herself that the man they were honouring today had been a Slytherin, too and one of her best friends.

Miss Granger came over to her, carrying a parchment. 'Professor, I have you down as the first speaker, right before the Minister.'

'That's fine.' Minerva nodded. The girl had sent her the list of speakers two weeks ago and a reminder yesterday, but then Miss Granger had always been thorough and efficient. No wonder Kingsley valued his temporary assistant so highly.

After Miss Granger had ticked off the item on her list, she remained standing in front of Minerva as if she was searching for something else to say. Which was quite unusual for the usually loquacious girl. She looked pale and tired, and there were deep shadows under her eyes. Then again, she had been through things no nineteen-year-old should have to go through. Not for the first time, Minerva thought that it was a shame that Albus wasn't around anymore, as she would have liked to have a few words with him about sending children to fight a war.

'I'm glad you're coming back to sit your N.E.W.T.s,' she said.

Miss Granger looked even more harassed than before, so this had obviously been the wrong thing to say.

'I just hope, I'll be up to snuff. The Ministry offered me a position right away, but it didn't seem right to me.'

'You'll be absolutely fine, Miss Granger. You don't need to worry.'

She looked at her, doubts visible in her eyes, before she dashed off again. Minerva stared after her. Maybe, what that girl needed was less an internship at the Ministry rather than a long holiday. They all did, really, and nobody had the time. She made a mental note to speak to Poppy about having some sort of counselling for the returning students.

As she walked up to the podium, she remembered her father. As a child she had loved to hear him speak to the congregation on Sundays. He had always seemed so grand and wonderful. How long ago that had been and in a very different world.

Though she wouldn't need it, Minerva unrolled the parchment and placed it in front of her, securing it with a sticking charm against the treacherous wind before she began her eulogy, 'Welcome to Hogwarts, Minister, Members of the Order of the Phoenix, Mr Potter, dear friends, Ladies and Gentlemen. Thank you all for coming here today to honour a man without whom the outcome of the last war would have been very different.

'Severus Snape was a brave man. He had more courage than most of us, and he endured things most of us don't even want to think about. He was a member of the Order of the Phoenix, Head of Slytherin house and Headmaster of Hogwarts. But first and foremost he was my friend.

'I did not place as much faith in him as I should have. I suspect that was part of his plans, but I am ashamed of myself that I didn't trust him more.

'He was not a man to invite confidences, yet I wish I had told him how much I valued our friendship and what he meant to me. I hope he knew anyway. Severus Snape was my friend and I miss him.'

After she had finished, she stood for a moment in silence before she stepped down. Warm relief spread through her when people nodded as she made her way back to her seat. After she sat down, she felt Wilhelmina's hand squeeze hers. 'Well done,' she said. 'I'm glad you decided to go with a personal approach rather than with listing his merits.'

Minerva briefly returned the squeeze, suddenly not trusting her voice any more. Only then did she notice that a stubborn tear was insisting on making its way down her cheek. She quickly blinked it away and started to listen to Kingsley's longer and more ceremonial speech.

She tried to focus on what he was saying when she realised that the hissing and murmuring around her had nothing to do with Kingsley's eulogy.

Everyone seemed to stare in the same direction. She followed their gaze to see what was going on. A man was standing at some distance from the proceedings. Despite the summer weather, he was wrapped in a black cloak; his long, blond hair was reflecting the sunlight. He stood motionless, tall, almost proud. There was no doubt. It was Lucius Malfoy.

The crowd was becoming restless. There were whispers.

'How dare he.'

'He's got some nerve to show up here.'

'He should be in Azkaban.'

'No, mate, he should be rotting in some hole.'

A chill was creeping down Minerva's spine.

Now Kingsley seemed to have noticed that something was going on as well. He paused and looked up. His eye caught Minerva's. He inclined his head almost imperceptibly before continuing his speech.

'Right, I've had it. I'm going to sort that bastard out.'

Minerva's head swivelled round. Ron Weasley made a motion as if to stand up. 'You will do nothing of the sort,' she hissed.

The youngest Weasley boy looked mutinous, but he remained in his seat. That his mother looked daggers at him too had probably advanced his decision considerably.

'And the rest of you,' Minerva continued. 'This is a memorial.' She glared at those she had heard voicing their displeasure just now.

'She's right y'know.' It was clear that Aberforth didn't try too hard to keep his voice down.

Rosmerta, sitting next to him, added, 'Live and let live that's what I say.'

Gradually, the crowd calmed down. Minerva allowed herself to relax again, just as Kingsley was finishing his speech and Harry Potter stepped up to the dais.

She looked at the man standing a bit apart from the rows of seats again. He hadn't moved since his arrival, even though he must have noticed that people had reacted to him. Though upon closer inspection, his posture looked less tall and proud than stiff and vaguely uncomfortable as if he was forcing himself to remain still and stand like he had always done. It seemed he had acquired a new cane as well. And he appeared to be leaning on it.

She remembered him. Not only as the Death Eater of recent years but as the boy he had once been. A privileged child, sure of his standing and place in the world, even arrogant, yet also clever and sometimes almost surprisingly kind. The boy who had made Severus Snape feel welcome in Slytherin house, who had looked out for the poor, awkward eleven-year-old and taken him under his wing. From what Horace had told her, their friendship had continued well beyond Hogwarts and seemed to have survived all political changes and upheavals.

She hadn't seen much of Lucius Malfoy after he had left school, though she remembered him as a handsome, charming young man.

She had been furious when it turned out that he had been a member of the Death Eaters during the first war what a waste of potential and oddly relieved when he claimed to have been under the Imperius curse.

Not that she had been blinded by a pretty face and charming manners. She wasn't that easily impressed. Yet, she hadn't vetoed his appointment to the board of Governors at Hogwarts.

Even though she despised Malfoy's political views, she had enjoyed his discussions with Albus. The board meetings had been a lot less boring then. She hadn't seen much of him after he had been sacked from the board his affiliation with the Death Eaters had been abundantly clear, and this time it was obvious that there was no Imperius curse. For some reason, it had almost felt like a personal betrayal.

Rumour had it that he had come to his senses before the end of the war; even Mr Potter appeared to think so as he had testified in favour of the Malfoy family and thus had kept them all out of Azkaban. It seemed Lucius Malfoy had had a change of heart. A year in prison and having one's mansion occupied by Voldemort would probably do that to a man. He still looked good, though...

An elbow connected with her ribs. 'Ow, what was that for?'

'I see the old *tendre* is still there,' quipped Wilhelmina.

'I have no idea what you're on about now.'

'Of course not.'

Finally, Mr Potter performed the spell that unveiled the memorial statue: an obelisk made of black marble, inscribed "In Remembrance of Severus Snape. Forever in our thoughts." They had all agreed on keeping it simple. Kingsley and Amelia had insisted on not putting any dates on it as technically Snape couldn't be declared dead as long as his body hadn't been found.

After the ceremony, people were milling about, exchanging pleasantries and memories of Snape. There wasn't anyone who needed to be offered condolences as Snape as far as they knew didn't have any living relatives. No one talked to or even approached Lucius Malfoy. He remained standing apart, unmoving, looking at the statue.

Minerva extricated herself from the tale of Wilhelmina's latest rescue a Diricawl who had been mistaken for a rare Muggle bird and driven its Muggle owners to distraction and wandered over to the lonely man at the edge of the crowd. Up close, it was very evident that he was leaning on his cane, and that quite a few strands of his hair were more silver-white than blond. His face looked haggard; he was impeccably groomed a always, yet there was an almost dishevelled air about him.

He didn't acknowledge her.

Minerva stood next to him, following his gaze to the marble obelisk.

'My condolences, Mr Malfoy. I know he was your friend, too.' She extended her hand.

He shook it, finally turning to look at her. 'Thank you.'

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A dark eye opened.

Bright light and a cold draught. Hmmm. Was this the afterlife?

He tried to sit up and was stopped by a wave of pain that shot through his body. If this was indeed the afterlife he was going to have words with the powers in charge, as their amenities and their sensation management left something to be desired.

'Hello there, sleepyhead. About time,' a familiar voice announced.

With a groan, his head sank back onto the pillow.

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A/N: All things Harry Potter belong to JKR. I make no money here and will return the characters. Can I keep Lucius?

Originally written as a gift for queen of snapes during the HoggyWartyXmas Exchange 2013 on lj.

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