

He Calls My Name

by MMADían

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Chapter 1 of 1

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"Minerva. *Minerva*."

Minerva stirred from sleep as whispering lips tickled her ear. "Hmmm." She sighed, not opening her eyes.

"*Minerva*." A mere breath across her cheek.

Now he was warm beside her, slipping beneath the quilt, the bed barely registering his weight. His arm encircled her and he kissed her shoulder.

She remembered the first time she had heard him say her name, whisper *Minerva* in her ear. She had not been lying in a soft bed beneath warm down then, and any delay in opening her eyes hadn't been from early morning drowsiness.

She had been lying on hard, cold ground, wet snow against her cheek, her body buzzing from the curse that had knocked her across the garden.

A holiday visit to an old school friend, Enid Franklin, and her rather large extended family...a motley group that included relatives visiting from Australia, Canada, and Madagascar, even a handful of Muggles...had begun as a festive, cheerful, rambunctious evening, but had turned into a nightmare of fire and blood.

Like the trumpets blare announcing imminent attack, there came the crack, crack, crack of multiple Apparitions. As though the family had rehearsed it, several of the adults scooped up one or two children each and Disapparated before a tremor and the smell of ozone indicated that an anti-Apparition ward had been thrown up. The few Muggles and two remaining children rushed toward the back of the house, Minerva never learned where to, but they did survive unscathed. Physically unscathed ...

She had never been more glad of her difficult, almost brutal, Auror training of many years before. When the first figure appeared in the shattered doorway, Minerva raised her wand and began to spell-cast with not a moment's hesitation. Hex followed *Protego*, immediately followed by another hex. She stepped forward, Transfigured a window into a door, and brought the battle to the enemy.

Most of the others hadn't had her training, but her decisive action and their own commitment to defending their loved ones led them forward. Some fell, but none wavered. Minerva sent a blasting hex at one attacker who had just cast a bloody slicing curse at Alfred, Enid's brother. As Alfred fell to his knees, his attacker flew back, landing in the slush beside another Death Eater. The odour of sulphur wafted across the garden as a tall, angular Death Eater cast a spell lifting the anti-Apparition jinx. Two wounded Death Eaters Disapparated. Minerva turned to shout to Enid, to tell her to get her brother away, when Alfred's attacker raised himself up on one elbow and cast a curse. Minerva fell back in a shower of orange mist, her skin prickling, her vision filled with stars. She landed hard, not knowing whether it was the curse that kept her breath from returning or the fall itself.

More pops of Disapparition...Death Eaters retreating, Minerva hoped...and her sight began to return. She took a short, painful breath, and then tried to twitch away, to raise her wand hand, as the dark form of a Death Eater bent over her.

"Minerva! Minerva!"

Minerva's eyes widened as she was able to focus, and she recognised the dark eyes in the hideous Death Eater mask, and knew now whose voice, hoarse and urgent, called her name.

"Fool!" she croaked.

The eyes blinked, and with no further delay, the Death Eater Disapparated.

She didn't know who was more the fool, she for believing that Snape's arrival on staff a few months previously meant that he was no longer an active Death Eater, or he, for stopping there beside her...or for being with the Death Eaters at all, for that matter.

In the early hours the next morning, she woke Dumbledore in his tower. He listened quietly, sombrely, to all she said.

"I am glad to hear that none of your friends' injuries were life-threatening," Albus said when she was done.

"Alfred's nearly was, and others will be in St. Mungo's for some days," Minerva pointed out. "And I still don't know what spell hit me and whether being black-and-blue all over is the final effect of it. The house won't be inhabitable again for a while, if the Franklins even want to go back to it after this."

He nodded, his face grim. "And what the children experienced ..."

"But that's not why I'm here. It's Snape. What are you going to do? I know he is your agent now, or so you have said. What are you going to do about him?"

"Do about him? Is he injured?"

"Do not play that game, Dumbledore. I'm too tired to pretend that I believe your pretense that you don't know what I mean." Her shoulders slumped.

"If he is not injured," Dumbledore said quietly, "then there is little I can do. I couldn't do much for him even if he were injured. I am not supposed to know that he still participates in these raids. I could not grant him any leave to recover from his injuries or it would reveal to Voldemort that I know more of Severus's activities than he...Voldemort...believes I do."

"But how can you countenance his continued participation in these raids?" Minerva asked, outrage burning in her voice. "They were attacking civilians, Albus! *My friends!*" Tears gathered in her eyes, and she blinked them away.

"Did Severus hex them? Whom did he injure?"

"I ... I don't know. It was very confused." Even as Minerva said that, she began to replay the attack in her mind. This skill, the perfected recall of hectic events, was one she had scarcely used in over thirty years, and this time, her Auror training had rusted with disuse. Nonetheless, as she struggled to recreate the attack in her head, she could not recollect the angular Death Eater, who she now knew had been Snape, ever casting a devastating hex at anyone. He had Stunned two young witches, he had done some rather flamboyant pyrotechnics and made a lot of noise in the process, he had dashed from one end of the garden to the other, but as far as she could recall, she didn't think that he had actually injured anyone. There had been a lot she hadn't seen, of course.

"Would you care to borrow my Pensieve?" Dumbledore asked, as if following her thoughts. He waved toward the Pensieve, illuminating a candelabrum beside the large, heavy basin. Without waiting for her response, he left his office, ponderously ascending the spiral staircase that led to his rooms.

Minerva paused, unsure whether she wanted to relive the events of that night. Then, resolutely, she raised her wand to her head and drew out a thin, silvery thread of memory.

Afterwards, she sat in Dumbledore's high-backed chair, exhausted and bemused. Severus had not cursed anyone with anything devastating. The two witches he had Stunned had been in the line of fire of another Death Eater, a large, hulking man with little finesse but sufficient brutality to leave his other victims lying in the snow with crushed bones. If Severus had not Stunned them, they would have been battered in the same way. Severus had been the one who had lifted the anti-Apparition ward, as well. She had thought it had been to allow the Death Eaters to escape, but now it appeared more likely that it was to allow the family to flee. He had somehow managed to appear to be intensely involved in the raid whilst doing little in its aid and actually subverting it.

Minerva went to bed as a grey Scottish dawn crept over Hogwarts. Whatever Snape had been doing there, she thought as she drifted to sleep, she had never invited him to call her by her first name.

Severus was coolly correct with her in the following days and weeks. He gave no indication to her that he had been there at the Franklin home, and he acknowledged her no more than usual, perhaps less so. And there was no trace of the urgent voice that had whispered her name.

For her part, Minerva observed him a bit more closely than she had, though she never approached him. Her distaste for his activities in general and her grudging admiration for his successful theatrics at the Franklins' led to an unaccustomed ambivalence. Minerva did not like to be uncertain about anything, and it made her cross. In staff meetings, her crossness gave rise to a curt professionalism; when she was forced together with him in other circumstances, she was frosty but correct. Snape was the same always, always the slight twitch to his lip that seemed ready to form a sneer, always the dance on the edge of rudeness, always the brusqueness that was as like to familiarity as it was to distance. He was a stranger to her.

Minerva rolled over, reaching out to find the bed warm but empty. She started, lifting her head, blinking in the half-light. Draped in a deep blue robe, he stood by the window, his features indistinct but his profile limned by the pearlescent winter's dawn. His breath had frosted the window panes.

Minerva relaxed. He was here. She watched him till her eyes grew heavy and the morning light tinged his cheeks pink.

She ignored the tap on her office door. When it came a second time, she flicked her wand. The door squeaked on its hinges. She removed the cool cloth from her eyes.

"Minerva." His voice was soft.

"Professor Snape?" The last person she wanted to see. She'd had a headache since the night before, when the Gryffindors had decided that the last night in the castle before spring holiday meant it was time for a party. She'd never heard such dreadful music.

"Professor McGonagall," he corrected himself.

She blinked and shook her head. She hadn't meant to sound as if she were correcting him. She may not have invited him to use her first name, but he was a colleague. And she still remembered the first time she heard him call her name.

"Please, Severus, come in. I am just nursing a headache." With a flick of her wand, she disposed of the cool cloth.

"Ah." He took a step forward and closed the door behind him. "I understand from the Headmaster ... that is, he mentioned that your father is ... he has been poorly."

Poorly. Minerva didn't think she'd ever heard a wizard under ninety use that expression. Probably Dumbledore had sent him.

"No, he hasn't been well," she replied briefly.

"If you wish to leave ... that is, if you are going to be gone from the castle ..." Severus swallowed and shifted.

"I will probably go home for a few days this week," Minerva said.

"If there is anything you require, I will be in residence for the week."

"Thank you, Professor. If I do, I will let you know." She nodded in dismissal.

Severus began to leave, then turned, hand on the doorknob. "I have a Headache Potion freshly brewed."

Minerva smiled grimly. "Thank you, Severus, but I am, sadly, unable to take Headache Potion. I break out in hives. Believe me, if I could, I would have had some from Poppy already."

He raised an eyebrow. "Allergic? To which ingredient?"

"Black Haw. But only in conjunction with Shrivelfig, apparently. I've learned to live with it."

"Unfortunate."

"Very."

Shortly after Snape left, Minerva decided that lying in her cool, dark bedroom was better than sitting in her dim, stuffy-seeming office. She was just falling asleep when someone knocked on her door. She bit back an expletive and swung her legs out of bed. "Coming!"

Shrugging on a dressing gown, she shuffled from her bedroom and waved her wand to open the door to the corridor. It was Snape. Again.

"Is something the matter?" she asked.

He held out a vial of blue liquid. "Headache potion." He shook his head to forestall her objections. "It has neither Black Haw nor Shrivelfig. It is not specifically for headaches, but it does work effectively on them. No more than five drops at once, and no more than twice a day. You may put it in water."

When Minerva just looked at him, he stepped in and put the vial on her mantel, then left without another word.

The potion was just as effective as Snape had said, if rather foul-tasting, and she had no ill side-effects. It was one of the best presents she'd ever received.

The wizarding world was celebrating still, but Minerva was not. The death of He Who Must Not Be Named...or his banishment from the world...had come at a high cost. Minerva's eyes burned with unshed tears. At least little Harry was with family, even if they were the most dreadful sort of Muggles she'd seen in a long time. And the wizarding world did have cause to celebrate, so she would not begrudge them their relief. With his disappearance, the final Death Eaters could be rounded up, and peace...or at least the lack of attacks...would ensue.

Over the next days and weeks, it did seem that peace had fallen over the wizarding world after a long dreadful night, but Minerva saw that Snape seemed more surly, more sullen, and more angry than ever. Until then, she had not really noticed that he had become less laconic with her, not quite warm, but almost relaxed; now that ease with her was gone. He was laconic, stiff, aloof. She found that she missed the wizard she'd been coming to know. There was no way to speak to him about it, though, and she thought she knew at least a part of what was bothering him.

Christmas eve, and everyone was making their way to Flitwick's annual party. Severus sat alone in his rooms, scowling at the book in his lap as though it had insulted him...which it hadn't, although he did own two that could insult him, but only if he were a dunderhead. He was a dunderhead, he thought, just not the sort the books would recognise. He was, after all, still at Hogwarts. That probably made him a foolish optimist. He snorted, the closest thing to a laugh that he had left.

The bell jangled over his head. Bloody Merlin! It had to be Dumbledore there to cajole him into attending the Ravenclaw's party. He hated parties. Sheer torture, and more so now than ever.

He slammed his book down on the table in front of him and stomped over to the door. Stomping on a hard stone floor wasn't very satisfying, but that didn't stop him. Grimacing, he opened the door a crack. His grimace melted into surprise.

"Good evening, Professor Snape."

"Professor McGonagall."

"I was wondering if, when you have an opportunity over the holiday, you might brew more of the headache potion."

Severus nodded. "Of course."

"Thank you. Also"...she reached into her pocket..."I found something. It's for you." She held out a small package wrapped in brown paper and twine. He took it reflexively.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Just something I found when I was cleaning out a drawer. I've got to get up to the party. I promised Albus I'd be just a few minutes."

She turned and left as he closed the door. He sat on his sofa and slowly untied the string on the package, glad it wasn't ribbon around gaudy wrapping paper. He didn't exchange Christmas gifts.

The paper fell away and revealed a photograph in a small folding leather photo wallet. It was a picture of Lily, taken sometime in their last spring at Hogwarts. She was laughing.

Severus gripped the photo hard and let out a choked cry. Holding the small wallet to his chest, he shook, finally letting tears of grief and anger roll down his cheeks.

He fell asleep on the sofa. When he woke at the stroke of midnight, he went into his bedroom, put the photo in his bedside table drawer, and spelled it to open only for him.

Weeks, months, and school years passed, and with the traditional Gryffindor-Slytherin rivalry, there grew a rivalry between Minerva and Snape. It looked sharp from the outside, but for Severus and Minerva, it was a pleasure. Each baited the other, and each took enjoyment in rising to the bait. They took to spending evenings in the staff room together after Ravenclaw-Hufflepuff games, dissecting the various deficiencies of both teams, and then speaking broadly of other things, or sometimes not speaking at all, but reading or correcting student essays. They shared the funnier things some of the students wrote, and Minerva occasionally reading aloud something she found particularly intelligent or engaging. Severus would scoff if it was from a Gryffindor, preen if it was from a Slytherin, pretend boredom if it was from a Hufflepuff, and sniff dismissively if it was from one of the Ravenclaw "show-offs."

One winter's night, after the other staff had long before evaporated from the room, less amused by Minerva and Severus than they were by themselves, the two were reading in companionable silence. Severus looked up from his pile of essays. Minerva sat on the long, worn couch, half-curved by one arm, her Transfiguration journal closed in her lap, her glasses set on the table beside her. Asleep, he thought.

"Minerva," he whispered to himself. She opened her eyes.

"Yes?"

Severus flushed. "I thought you were asleep. I didn't want to wake you. That is, I thought I would see whether you were asleep. I am sorry if I woke you."

"No, I wasn't asleep. Just thinking." She smiled crookedly. "I like that, you know."

"I should hope so. You are no dunderhead."

Minerva laughed. "I didn't mean *thinking*. I meant when you say my name."

Severus raised an eyebrow.

"You needn't call me 'Professor McGonagall' all of the time."

"It is most appropriate." Severus stood, gathering his parchments into a neat stack and shrinking them. "It is late."

"I suppose," Minerva agreed reluctantly. She stood as well, leaving her journal on the couch. "I think I will take a quick stroll through the castle to check no one's breaking curfew."

"Wise. The students often take advantage of the approaching holiday to get up to no good."

Minerva laughed. "There are few enough of them left, but best to keep them on their toes, eh, Professor Snape?"

Severus nodded.

"Come with me?"

He sighed. "Very well. I will not finish these essays tonight."

They walked through the still castle, their footsteps echoing in its emptiness. They visited the Great Hall first, and Minerva insisted they pause to look up at the ceiling, which seemed much the same as always to Severus, but which Minerva said was especially beautiful that night. They went on to the trophy room before meandering towards the library, Minerva taking an occasional look behind a suit of armour or into a shadowed nook.

"Shall we go in?" she asked when they reached the heavy doors of the library.

"I doubt they'll be swotting now," Severus said, though he waved his wand to open the doors.

Inside, Minerva took a deep breath. "I love that smell. Books. Parchment, paper, leather, ink, dust." She took in another deep breath, then sneezed.

Severus choked back a laugh. "Very healthy, I'm sure." He liked the smell of the library, too. It was not just books, it was adventure, novelty, discovery, satisfaction, curiosity ... and refuge. A safe place.

Minerva drifted over to one of the set of large windows that looked out towards the lake. The lawn lay under a thin layer of wind-blown snow, the icy crystals glittering even in the dark, and the sky a thick blanket of twinkling stars in the clear sky.

"It is beautiful," Minerva whispered. "You see."

"Better than the ceiling in the Great Hall," Severus said grudgingly. He was standing close behind Minerva, closer than he'd ever been, he felt. When she leaned back against him slightly, he did not move. He didn't even breathe. She seemed to relax more, and she rested her head against his chest as she looked up at the sky.

"*Minerva*," he whispered.

She sighed and leaned back, turning her cheek so that it brushed against the wool of his robes. When he touched her cheek, she trembled and closed her eyes.

"Minerva ..."

She turned, and Severus thought that he had misunderstood, or gone one step too far, but she raised her hand to his face and caressed his cheek, mirroring his gesture. He put his left arm around her slowly, waiting for her to step away, for her to speak, for her to withdraw from him. She stepped into his embrace, put her hand behind his head, and kissed his lips.

He did not know which of them moaned, but his blood raced through his veins as he pulled her closer, enveloping her with his robes, pushing her against the window, the glass so cold and Minerva so warm.

He wanted more, but he stopped, breathing hard, trying to will himself to let her go. Minerva seemed content where she was, snuggled against him. He thought he could feel her heart pounding.

"Minerva?" he said after a while.

"Mhm."

"Shall we continue to patrol?"

"Don't be silly, Severus." She paused. "I suppose we could do, though. On the way up to Gryffindor Tower. If you would care to come in for a drink. A cup of tea? Something warm."

"Yes. Something warm."

They didn't tarry on the way up to Minerva's rooms, and when they got there, Minerva gave her password, then turned to Severus. "If you don't want to..."

"I don't need a drink. I do want to come in."

Minerva smiled.

He called her name. "Minerva? Minerva?"

She blinked. "What is it?"

"You looked a million miles away."

"No, Severus. Just a few years ... just thinking." She patted the bed. "Come back to bed."

He shrugged off the heavy blue robe and crawled back into bed beside her. "What were you thinking about?"

"You."

"Ah. Of course." He gave a crooked grin.

"Of course?"

"Do thoughts of me not occupy your every waking hour?"

"Oh, hush, you!" She slapped his face lightly, then sobered. "I am glad you are here, Severus. I am."

He kissed her lips gently, then her throat. He pushed up to look down into her eyes. "You know I would do what I had to to return to you, to stay with you. Minerva, my Minerva."

"Still, I fear..."

"Now you hush!" He kissed her fears from her lips.

When he lay back and closed his eyes, she caught her breath. "Severus..."

"I said to hush. Do I need to emphasise that again?" he asked, opening one eye.

"I wouldn't mind, but I just wanted to know if there's anything in particular you want for Christmas this year."

"It's less than a week away. You usually have everything planned and taken care of by Halloween."

"No, I don't!"

"Sorry, Easter."

Minerva laughed. "Be serious."

Severus snorted. "Still, you do usually take care of all that folderol early. Never want to bother with it when you have to worry about Hogwarts."

"Don't be sulky."

"I'm not. I don't even care about folderol."

Minerva choked. "Folderol?"

"Mm, it's the word of the month, don't you know."

"You are avoiding my question."

"No. There is one inevitable answer. You must know it."

Minerva furrowed her brow. "What?"

"Minerva. Minerva. Minerva. And I have you."

The End