

# The Hunt

*by Doomspark*

A Hogwarts teacher reflects on an incident in her past.

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*Chapter 1 of 1*

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### **The Hunt**

We aren't perfect, you know. Teachers. We're supposed to set examples for our students by how we behave and what we say. It's not easy living up to higher standards. Some of us have it rougher than others. Take Severus. He'll spend the rest of his life trying to atone for mistakes he made when he was younger. The hell of it is, only a few people know about what he's done. That makes it that much harder for him.

Hagrid – his mistakes are a lot more noticeable. It's rather hard to overlook a large hairy spider running around the school. Or a three-headed dog. Really! Perhaps that's why he deals with his mistakes better – people know about them. Or perhaps he doesn't really see them as mistakes.

Teachers are human, after all. We have our opinions, our thoughts, our feelings. And far too often we let our feelings get in the way. It'll be a miracle if Severus ever gets to the point where he can be anything other than barely civil to Sirius Black. Or Harry Potter.

Then there's me. Minerva McGonagall. I have my share of secrets in the past, including one that only Albus knows. The secret that both drives me to teach here and shames me as I do it. What kind of teacher can I be? I had my reasons, but somehow, late at night, that doesn't seem to be justification. So I stalk the halls looking for students out past curfew, or grade papers, or do anything until exhaustion claims me and I can sleep without dreams.

It's been nearly forty years, and the dreams come rarely now. But come they do, and leave me shivering and wondering if I truly deserve this place.

I had left school and been idle for a few years. My family was far too well off for my own good, I think. I was allowed to do anything I wanted. Perhaps that explains things. It doesn't excuse them. I didn't have friends of my own age. Even my Housemates had grown distant – they were working. I was at home. I did not have to sully my hands with work. And I was bored.

The McGonagall lands stretch for some miles, and much of it is wooded. We sometimes had trouble with poachers, but my father's wards usually warned them off. That night, though, the hunters crossed onto our land. As the oldest child, the land would become mine on the death of my parents. So it was my responsibility to expel these trespassers from my property. That's what I told myself anyway. I changed into a cat and went to investigate. What I found made my blood boil.

There was a tall dark-haired girl tied to a tree in one of the groves. She was no one I knew, and I thought she must be from one of the Muggle villages in the area. Her eyes were wide and blank, and she looked drugged. My senses are sharper in cat-form, and I smelled something foul on her breath.

The sound of hooves crashing through the underbrush caught my attention and I ran towards it. There were three men stalking one of the unicorns that roamed our land. I instantly knew that the girl was the bait. The unicorn would be helpless once he had laid his head in her lap.

In that moment of extreme anger, a plan came to me. Madness it was! I ran back to where the girl was tied, and regained my natural shape. A few quick spells later, and the

girl was Stunned (a precaution), and levitated up into the thick canopy of leaves above us. I sat down in her stead and feigned unconsciousness.

Yes, prim and proper Minerva could still bait a unicorn then. Knobby-kneed Minerva, with a face like a hatchet and a voice that could shatter glass could charm one of the most beautiful creatures that ever lived and hold it in thrall.

I was barely in time. The unicorn plunged into the clearing, his eyes wide with fear. His proud head was streaked with sweat and foam. They'd driven him hard. He saw me and trembled as he came to me. For a moment only I forgot everything but his beauty and innocence. He knelt and laid his horn in my lap.

Unicorns are sources of some of the greatest and most powerful magic in the world. Their blood can grant near immortality. Their hair is used as the cores of wands. Their horns have other magical properties. There is, therefore, quite the black market for these ingredients. Obviously, those who hunted here tonight were attempting to fill that market.

They stepped into the clearing then. Two men, dark and filthy. I didn't know them, and didn't care to. The unicorn had led them a merry chase. I watched them approach slowly. One held a long knife. I saw the blade glinting in the moonlight. The other carried a bowl. Before they could cut the unicorn's throat, I pointed my wand at them.

*"Petrificus Totalarian"*

It's a harsher, more powerful version of the hex that first-years are taught. It also affects multiple targets. The force of the spell knocked them off their feet. I almost laughed at the expressions on their faces as I rose to my feet. I stroked the unicorn and thought what to do next.

I could let them go with a warning to stay off McGonagall land. If I did, they would leave (almost certainly), with nothing to stop them from coming back later. Or hunting elsewhere. I couldn't just let them go! They had tried to slay a unicorn!

I could turn them over to the Ministry for hunting unicorns. It was, and still is, illegal. But it carried a relatively light sentence. I considered. They were obviously experienced at hunting unicorns – the use of the drugged girl as bait showed that. They must have slain others. This was no happy chance of fate; this was a planned murder that I had foiled. But would the Ministry see it that way? I had heard my father complain just last week that the Ministry was in dire financial straits – something about an embezzler. These would-be murderers might well buy their way out of it. No, this was not an option.

I needed to deal with them myself. But what to do? I couldn't bring myself to use the Killing Curse, nor any of the Unforgivables. I looked around desperately. The unicorn nuzzled me softly, realizing that I was upset. In that moment, I heard an owl hooting nearby and inspiration struck.

I always was good at Transfiguration. That's why I teach it. Two quick spells later, and the hunters had become small rabbits, still held by the Binding hex. I looked down at them and smiled. The owls tonight or the hawks tomorrow. Even if they survived the predators of the woods, they would never hunt unicorns again.