



Witch Please (Grimm Mawr)

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Category: Fantasy

Description: When grumpy potions professor Minerva Everhart puts the schools star athlete in detention weeks before the championship game, she expects pushback. What she doesnt expect is Coach Archie Hawthorne her high school crush turned nemesis barging into her classroom demanding special treatment. Hes still as infuriatingly handsome as ever, and he still makes her want to hex him into next Tuesday.

But when a mysterious curse strikes his star player, these two rivals must work together to save both their student and the Grimms shot at their first championship title. Between exploding cauldrons, rampaging unicorns, and an attraction that definitely isnt caused by a students illicit love potion (okay, maybe a little), Minerva and Archie discover that sometimes the best defense is falling in love with your opponent.

A steamy magical romantic comedy where enemies become lovers, curses run amok, and true love just might be worth more than a championship trophy. Perfect for readers who love their romance with a side of witty banter, magical mayhem, and sports rivalries that end in kisses.

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Perched atop a hill overlooking the eccentric town of Grimm Mawr, the Grimm Mawr Academy for Witches and Warlocks stands as a beacon of magical education. The sprawling campus is a hodgepodge of architectural styles, with towers and turrets jutting out at odd angles and ivy-covered walls that seem to shimmer in the sun.

Inside, the halls are a labyrinth of winding corridors and hidden passages, where mischievous students often get lost on their way to class. The classrooms themselves are a sight to behold, each one tailored to a specific magical discipline. The potions lab is a cacophony of bubbling cauldrons and hissing steam, while the charms classroom is a kaleidoscope of swirling colors and dancing lights.

But the real heart of the academy is the faculty, a motley crew of magical misfits who are as brilliant as they are bizarre. There's Professor Finnegan, the absent-minded charms teacher who once accidentally turned himself into a teapot, and Madame Moonbeam, the eccentric divination instructor who predicts the future using a set of enchanted knitting needles.

And then there's the headmistress, a formidable witch known only as "The Raven." With her jet-black hair and piercing green eyes, she cuts an imposing figure as she stalks the halls, her familiar (a grumpy talking raven named Edgar) perched on her shoulder.

Despite the occasional magical mishap (like the time a wayward potion turned the entire student body into singing slugs), Grimm Mawr Academy has a reputation for producing some of the finest witches and warlocks in the tri-town area. Its graduates go on to become master potioners, spell crafters, and even the occasional magical matchmaker.

Some say the town of Grimm Mawr is a crucible, a place where witches are tested and forged in the fires of adversity. Others claim it's a haven, a sanctuary where the magically gifted can live and love freely, without fear of persecution. But one thing is certain – in Grimm Mawr, anything can happen, and usually does.

Welcome to Grimm Mawr, where the magic never stops and love is always just a spell away. Brace yourself for hijinks, heartbreak, and hexes galore – it's going to be one wild ride.

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The hallways of Grimm Mawr Academy for Witches and Warlocks were pure pandemonium every morning, and Minerva Everhart loved every chaotic second of it. A symphony of clattering cauldrons and sizzling spell ingredients greeted her as she strode into the Potions classroom. Minerva waved her wand and the instructions for today's yarrow potion scrawled themselves across the blackboard in spidery script. She turned to face the motley collection of students, their cauldrons already bubbling over with various concoctions - some vibrantly hued, others emitting worrying plumes of puce smoke.

One particularly lurid potion belched a glob of chartreuse goop onto the table.

"Easy there, Rhubarb! You want to gently shave those yarrow stalks, not decapitate the poor things," she sang out, eyeing a pimply teenage warlock furiously hacking away at his cutting board.

Rhubarb Rumplekin's tongue poked out in concentration as he gripped his battered copper knife like an executioner's blade. "Unless your aim is to put your classmates into a fever dream?"

Rhubarb gulped audibly. His ears turned a vivid shade of puce to match his disastrous brew. "No, Professor Everhart. S-sorry, I'll start again."

With a casual flick of her wand, Minerva demonstrated the proper slicing motion. The yarrow stalk obediently separated into perfect little minced pieces, arranging themselves in a tidy pile. She leaned in, voice lowering conspiratorially. "Perhaps a lighter touch next time, hmm?"

Rhubarb scowled at the flawlessly chopped herbs like they had just insulted his mother. "Why do we need to learn this healing garbage? I want jinxes and hexes, not boring remedies."

"You'll thank me when you're off to college and you need to know how to staunch a dueling wound," Minerva said over her shoulder. A loud bang echoed from the front of the class, followed by a noxious yellow smog cloud billowing up from one of the cauldrons. So much for her famed healing potions being "boring."

"Agatha Abernathy, did you follow my notes on not overdoing it with the powdered toadstool this time?" she asked, waving her wand to disperse the toxic fumes.

A slender arm sporting a bright turquoise sleeve shot out from the murky cloud, frantically waving for help. "Oops...I...may have...added a few extra...pinches of monkshood too," came Agatha's strangled reply between coughing fits.

"Merlin's toenails, you kids will destroy this lab if you're not careful." With a put-upon sigh, Minerva flicked her wand again, conjuring a gentle breeze to waft the noxious vapors up and out the arched windows. No harm, no foul – just another morning in Potions 101. "Why don't you and your partner start a new batch from scratch? And take it slow this time."

As she vanished the congealed mess from Agatha's cauldron, a drawling voice cut through the renewed bustle of activity. "When are we going to actually brew something useful around here? Like, I dunno...a love potion or something?"

A titter of snickers rippled through the classroom. Rolling her eyes skyward, Minerva fought the urge to magically glue the Jezebel Nightshade's feet to the ceiling. Some things never changed - like Jezebel's perpetually smart mouth.

"Miss Nightshade, I highly suggest taking your Potions studies a bit more seriously.

After all, potions are fundamental to all magic, from charms to transfiguration. And as for love philters..." Her lips thinned in disapproval. "Those are expressly forbidden at the Grimm Mawr Academy. Meddling with someone's emotions is not only unethical, but extremely perilous magic."

Jezebel made a big show of rolling her heavily kohled eyes, throwing her hands up in patent disinterest. "Yeah, yeah, blah blah, ethics-schemethics."

She leveled Jezebel with a stern look, hoping to impress upon the girl the gravity of her words. But the field hockey star just smirked, examining her nails with an air of supreme unconcern.

Minerva sighed. Getting through to Jezebel was like trying to teach a troll ballet - nigh impossible and likely to end in blunt force trauma. But she refused to give up on the girl, no matter how exasperating she could be.

Clapping her hands briskly, she called the class back to order. "All right everyone, let's refocus. You have twenty minutes left to complete your potions. And do try to avoid any further explosions."

As the students bent over their cauldrons with renewed determination (or at least slightly less reckless abandon), Minerva allowed herself a small smile. They may be a ragtag bunch, but they were her ragtag bunch. And she'd move mountains (or at least vanish a few botched potions) to help them succeed.

Just then, the door to the potions classroom burst open with a resounding bang. Minerva whirled around, ready to unleash her most withering glare upon the unfortunate soul who dared disrupt her lesson.

But the admonishment died on her tongue as she caught sight of a familiar broad-shouldered frame. Archie Hawthorne, Grimm Mawr Academy's esteemed field

hockey coach, strode into the room like he owned the place.

Minerva bit back a groan. Of course. It was always something with this man - if he wasn't barging into her classroom unannounced, he was haranguing her about grades and eligibility forms.

She raised an eyebrow coolly. "Coach Hawthorne. To what do we owe the pleasure?"

"Everhart! I need to talk to you." The burly, mustachioed Archie boomed, chestnut hair adorably mussed as he scanned the now silent classroom. His muscled forearms strained against the sleeves of his black Grimm Mawr T-shirt in a way that was too distracting for words.

Smoothing the front of her robes primly, she put on her best nonplussed expression to mask the butterflies that stubbornly fluttered low in her belly whenever she saw the field hockey coach. From his tousled hair to that cocksure swagger, the annoyingly handsome coach epitomized all the frustrating jock stereotypes that put athletics before academics at Grimm Mawr Academy.

"Normally, I'd say we could discuss this after class..."

"It can't wait," he interrupted.

Minerva bit back a sigh. She figured as much. "Fine, Coach. Let's take this out in the hall so you don't disturb my students. Carry on," she said to them. "I'll be right back."

Shutting the door behind them, she crossed her arms over her chest, flushing a bit when his gaze dropped to her cleavage before quickly returning to her eyes. "Well?" she drawled.

"One of my best scorers is failing Potions. That's unacceptable, Ever-Lame."

Oh how she hated that nickname. It was one that had followed her from when they were both students here at the Grimm Mawr Academy. As did her stupid crush on him. She had hopelessly been in love with him during their high school days. Archie had been the Grimms' star quarterback and she had been... well Minerva had excelled in her classes, despite the emphasis Grimm Mawr put on their sports teams instead of education.

"Yes, Meathead," she said, using his hated nickname back at him. It earned her a scowl. "Jezebel is a terrible student and deserves her grades."

"You don't understand. The Grimms have a chance of winning the states championship over Why and Because for the first time ever. Nightshade can't play in the big tourney if she tanks her grade in here."

"That's correct."

A tense silence fell as Archie stared at her incredulously. "I can't believe you're going to ruin her chances at a scout picking her up to play pro."

"Athletic pursuits will only carry your students so far in the real world. They need an enriching educational foundation, something you'd understand if you had an ounce of—"

Another thunderous bang cut off the rest of Minerva's retort as a fresh cloud of acrid smoke billowed up from under the closed door, effectively halting their heated back-and-forth. Coughing, she threw open the door and looked around to see that Jezebel had escalated her careless potion-making to disastrous new heights.

"What in Merlin's saggy shorts did you dump in there this time?" Minerva's cranky

reprimand was met with an exaggerated shrug from the delinquent field hockey star. Jezebel examined a chip in her amethyst nail polish, the very portrait of indifference.

"Relax, it's not like these potions are to help us win the state championship or anything."

The insolent words were like a match to dry kindling. Something inside Minerva flared as bright as the smoldering cauldron, snapping her legendary patience like a dry twig. "Your obstinate refusal to apply yourself is not only disrespectful, but jeopardizes your entire academic future." Minerva went on in a heated rush, cheeks flushing scarlet.

"Now everyone, let's calm down here," Archie said, looking from Jezebel to Minerva.

He backed off with his hands raised when she whirled on him with a shaking wand.

"This is a classroom, not a glorified sports arena where you can simply skate by on your brute athletic abilities. There is far more to life than chasing some ridiculous rolling ball back and forth across a grassy field."

She punctuated her diatribe by slamming her palms down on Jezebel's desk, startling the girl from her indolent slouch. For once, the raven-haired rascal looked briefly taken aback. But Minerva was on a roll, the words tumbling out in a furious torrent that had been building for years.

"You may be the most talented field hockey player to ever grace Grimm Mawr's squad, but as a witch, you're sorely lacking in skill. You have detention after school today."

"But I'll miss practice." Jezebel shot a look to her coach.

“You can spend the time studying,” Archie said. “I need you to get your grades up before the big game. You don’t need to practice field hockey. You’re good enough already.”

Surprisingly enough, Archie wasn’t backing his key player. The dolt had actually taken Minerva’s side for once, backing her decision to give Jezebel detention. It was a far cry from their usual butting of heads, trading barbs like "Ever-Lame" and "Meathead."

“Thank you,” Minerva murmured, unsure how to take his about face.

“You got it, Teach.” He gave her a saucy wink and left her staring at his wide muscled back as he left.

Then the bell rang, signaling the end of class. As the chaos of rambunctious students gathering their belongings filled the suddenly vacant air, Minerva felt a strange sense of disquiet. Had she just imagined the flicker of something more heated behind Archie's parting look? Her heart fluttered traitorously in her chest. Merlin help her, the man was pure temptation in a tracksuit. This was going to be a long semester...

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Minerva watched Jezebel slump into the hard wooden chair in front of the lab table. Her expression was as sour as a lemon drop. The star athlete looked about as thrilled to be there as she would getting a root canal. It was painfully obvious that Jezebel thought this detention was dragonshit.

Too bad.

Jezebel's grades in Potions had tanked to an appalling level. If the girl didn't shape up soon, she was going to straight up fail.

"You're in luck today," Minerva said crisply. "We're going to review the basics of potion brewing to patch up the giant holes in your knowledge."

"Yeah, lucky me," Jezebel muttered, slinging her backpack on the table with a graceless thud. Textbooks, crumpled papers, and sparkly pencil case tumbled out. A small, unlabeled bottle rolled out too, coming to a stop right by Minerva's hand. Jezebel snatched it quickly up and stuffed it into her field hockey kilt.

"What was that?" Minerva asked suspiciously.

"Nothing. Just a topical pain relief. It's like lidocaine only magical," Jezebel hedged.

Minerva held out her hand expectantly. Reluctantly, Jezebel passed over the bottle, biting her lip nervously as Minerva took a sniff.

It didn't smell like any of the sports creams she remembered the jocks used to use. But there was something familiar about it.

“Hmmm.” Minerva wasn’t convinced it was what Jezebel said it was, but the clock was ticking on their detention time, and Minerva needed her to focus on potions. Reluctantly, Minerva handed the bottle back.

"Get the ingredients for a basic Enlarging Potion from the supply closet.”

As soon as the field hockey star was out of sight, Minerva sighed and rubbed the bridge of her nose under her glasses, trying to ward off a stress headache. Merlin’s toenails, this semester was going to be the death of her, she just knew it. Everyone was on pins and needles hoping that the Grimm Mawr field hockey team was going to bring the Grimms their first state championship. Trying to teach the students while that anticipation was building was like herding cats most days.

And then there was the added headache of Coach Archie Hawthorne...

As if she'd conjured him just by thinking his name, the door to the potions lab burst open, banging against the wall. There in the doorway, looking like he'd just walked off a sports magazine cover, was the man himself.

Minerva's stomach did a giddy little swoop at the sight of him, his broad shoulders and boyish charm hitting her like a sucker punch as always. His sweatpants clung to his hips almost indecently and she forced herself not to look down. His outfit was an assault on her senses, hugging every muscular curve.

"Is detention over yet?" he asked with a crooked grin.

"It hasn’t even started yet,” she replied, ignoring the fluttering his deep voice always triggered in her stomach. Honestly, did the man have to look like a romance novel heartthrob 24/7? It was a wonder any of the girls at the Grimm Mawr Academy learned anything, with him strutting around oozing testosterone.

"I was hoping Jezebel could cut out early." He folded his arms, biceps bulging distractingly under his short sleeves.

Minerva fought not to sputter. She held on to her temper by a cat's whisker. "No," she forced out, not trusting herself to say anything else.

"Do you smell something?" Archie said, sniffing around the room.

Minerva suddenly felt lightheaded, like all the air had been sucked out of her chest. A pool of heat curled in her lower belly. Her mouth opened and closed soundlessly, words evaporating on her tongue.

What was happening here? This new, spine-tingling tension was simmering, raising all the hairs on her arms. It was thrilling and terrifying and totally throwing her off balance.

Archie seemed to be grappling with a similar internal crisis. He was still staring at her intently, but she noticed his hands clenching into fists, almost like he was physically stopping himself from reaching for her. From cupping her burning face in his strong hands. Pulling her into his arms and claiming her mouth with his. Tangling his fingers in her long hair and tugging until she gasped against his lips...

Alarmed at the wild direction of her own fantasies, Minerva mentally slapped herself. Get it together, Everhart! You're a professional, for crying out loud, not a cartoon character with hearts floating around your head. There's no way you're letting this egotistical gym monkey break your brain with a few steamy looks.

Taking a deep breath and channeling her inner frost queen, Minerva stepped back and crossed her arms, putting a few feet of much needed distance between them.

"What was I saying?" Archie blinked, then quickly cleared his throat. He stared down

at the floor and frowned. "What's this?"

"Careful," Minerva said, seeing that a bottle had broken on the floor.

They reached down and their fingers brushed. A roaring went off in Minerva's head. In the very back of her mind, a part of her recognized that it was the bottle Jezebel had snatched away from her. It must have fallen out of her kilt's pocket.

Something was very wrong. It felt like fire ants were crawling in her veins, searing her nerve endings as they went. A deep, pulsing ache blossomed low in her belly and between her thighs, stealing her breath and setting her whole body throbbing.

"This isn't sports medicine," she tried to say, but the words slurred on Minerva's tongue as the world narrowed down to pinpricks. She needed...oh God, she needed...

"Minerva..." The sound of Archie rasping her name sent lightning streaking down her spine. She turned heavy-lidded eyes on him, mouth falling open on a ragged gasp.

He looked as wrecked as she felt, tanned skin flushed and eyes glassy with desire. Gone was the cocky charm, replaced by something much darker and more primal. It radiated off him in waves, buffeting her already sensitized body.

Archie reached for Minerva, crushing her soft curves against the steel wall of his chest.

She made a strangled sound as she ignited at the first touch of his hands. Wildfire raced through her blood, every nerve sparking and spitting with need. It pooled, molten and urgent, at the apex of her thighs.

Lust potion, she realized dimly. It scrambled any semblance of rational thought, filling her head with an endless litany of "want, need, now, please..."

"Tell me you don't feel this," Archie growled against her ear, voice rough as gravel. "How much you want me." His breath was hot against her neck, as he pulled them to their feet.

Minerva couldn't even pretend to protest. Not with her body pulsing in time to his heartbeat, not with the desperate moan clawing its way up her throat. He was a livewire against her, hard and hot and vibrating with barely leashed hunger.

"Tell me you don't want this," he rasped, eyes burning into hers. "That you haven't imagined my hands on you, my mouth tasting every inch of your skin..."

A soft whimper escaped Minerva's throat at the sinful images his words conjured. Her palms splayed over the firm muscles of his chest, the heat of him seeping into her bones. She yearned to tangle her fingers in his hair, to pull that tempting mouth down to hers and lose herself completely.

"We shouldn't," she breathed, even as she leaned into his embrace. "It's not...not appropriate..."

"To hell with appropriate," he growled, and captured her lips in a searing kiss.

Minerva made a helpless, wanting sound as his mouth slanted over hers, firm and insistent. His tongue teased the seam of her lips and she opened for him on a gasp, swept away in a maelstrom of sensation. He tasted of cinnamon and dark spices, utterly intoxicating.

Large hands slid down her back to grip her hips, pulling her flush against the unyielding strength of his body. She clutched at his shoulders, nails digging into the fabric of his T-shirt. Heat unspooled through her veins, stoking the mounting ache between her thighs. She had never been kissed like this before - hungrily, desperately, as if he couldn't get enough of her.

Archie wrenched his mouth from hers to trail biting kisses along her jawline, down the column of her throat. Minerva let her head fall back on a moan, completely undone. Some distant part of her knew this was wrong. That it was the lust potion making them lose control.

But oh, she couldn't bring herself to care. Not with Archie's teeth scraping over her racing pulse. His fingers digging into her hips with delicious force. Minerva wanted him with a ferocity that stole her breath, left her trembling and wanton in his arms.

And then, as quickly as it began, the fog abruptly lifted.

They sprang apart as if burned, chests heaving and eyes wide with shock. Minerva raised a shaking hand to her kiss-swollen lips, her skin still tingling from his touch. He looked equally stunned, hair mussed and a telltale bulge tenting the front of his pants.

"Morgana's sagging tits," he breathed, a dark flush stealing up his neck. "Nightshade, you better have a damn good explanation for this!"

Minerva whirled behind her to see Jezebel staring at them with a mixture of embarrassment and reluctant fascination. She fiddled with a loose thread on her robes, avoiding their accusing stares.

"It was just supposed to be a harmless prank," she mumbled, cheeks flaming. "I never thought...I mean, I didn't know you two would react like that."

Minerva fought the urge to hex the impertinent chit six ways from Sunday. Her body still thrummed with unfulfilled arousal, skin overwarm and too tight. Minerva didn't dare look at Archie, too mortified by her wanton display.

Taking a deep, unsteady breath, Minerva drew herself up to her full height and fixed

Jezebel with her most forbidding glare. "Detention. For the rest of term."

Jezebel's mouth fell open in protest. Minerva slashed a hand through the air, cutting her off. "I will be speaking to the headmistress about how you got access to the forbidden herbs. Now start your enlarging potion."

Jezebel blanched, no doubt thinking what The Raven would do to her. She hastily stacked up her supplies on the desk and got to work. Minerva closed her eyes briefly, regaining her composure before turning to face Archie.

"Coach Hawthorne, I don't know what to say." Her voice wavered slightly, betraying her not-quite-steady state. "That was highly inappropriate and completely out of line. I apologize for my lack of control."

He rubbed the back of his neck, a sheepish grimace twisting his handsome features. "You and me both, Everhart. I got a little carried away there. Damn lust potions, eh?"

But even as he said it, his gaze raked over her with unmistakable heat, making her insides clench and her skin prickle anew.

Oh Merlin...what had that bedeviled brat awakened between us?

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The day had been one for the record books, and not in a good way. Minerva Everhart was exhausted, frazzled, and more than a little disturbed by the unexpected turn her detention session with Jezebel Nightshade had taken. The memory of Archie Hawthorne's lips on hers, his hands gripping her hips with barely restrained hunger, kept intruding on her thoughts despite her best efforts to banish it. It was like all her high school longings had come true. Minerva had a feeling it would be very easy to fall back in love with Meathead.

All she wanted was a large glass of merlot, a steaming bubble bath, and to forget this whole cursed day had ever happened. Maybe she'd even indulge in a pint of rocky road ice cream and binge-watch that new trashy reality show about witches trying to make it in the big city. Anything to take her mind off a certain aggravating, unfairly attractive field hockey coach.

But the universe, it seemed, had other plans.

As Minerva trudged out to the faculty parking lot, her sensible heels clicking on the pavement, she caught sight of a familiar broad-shouldered figure leaning against the side of her battered navy hatchback.

Coach Archie Hawthorne, looking entirely too delectable, had his muscular arms crossed over his chest and a look of determination on his handsome face.

Minerva briefly considered turning tail and making a break for it, but she knew it was futile. The man was built like a linebacker and twice as persistent. With a sinking feeling in her stomach (that had absolutely nothing to do with anticipation or wayward butterflies), she squared her shoulders and marched up to him, head held

high.

"I'm not going to change my mind about Jezebel's full-term detention," said, fishing her keys out of her satchel.

Archie pushed off from the car, uncrossing his arms and running a hand through his artfully tousled chestnut hair. "I was hoping we could talk. About...well, about what happened back there."

Minerva felt her cheeks heat at the memory of their stolen kisses, the way his body had felt pressed against hers. She aimed for a nonchalant shrug, fiddling with her keys. "What's there to talk about? We had a momentary lapse in judgment brought on by an illicit potion. End of story."

He cocked an eyebrow, mouth quirking up at the corner. "Is that really all it was to you? A lapse in judgment?"

Yes , she wanted to snap. No , a traitorous little voice whispered in the back of her mind.

Archie sighed, scrubbing a hand over his jaw. "Look, I know things got a little heated back there. And I'm man enough to admit that lust potion or no, I wasn't exactly hating it."

Minerva's eyes widened at the frank admission, her heartbeat quickening. But before she could formulate a response, he pressed on.

"The thing is, Everhart, I like you. I always have, even back in our school days when you were the prickly potions prodigy and I was just the dumb jock."

She opened her mouth to protest that characterization, but he held up a hand,

forestalling her.

"No, let me finish. I know we haven't always seen eye to eye, especially when it comes to academics versus athletics. But I've always admired your passion, your dedication to your students. Even if you can be a stubborn pain in the ass sometimes."

The last was said with a teasing grin, taking any sting out of the words. Minerva huffed, crossing her arms defensively over her chest. "Is this your idea of flattery, Coach? Because I've got to say, it needs some work."

Archie chuckled, the rich, warm sound sending tingles down her spine. "I'm getting to the flattery, hold your hippogriffs. What I'm trying to say is, I think we got off on the wrong foot this year. And I'd like a chance to start over, maybe get to know each other better outside of school."

Minerva's eyebrows nearly hit her hairline. "Are you asking me out, Meathead?" Her inner sixteen-year-old did cartwheels. How many times had she fantasized this happening?

He shrugged, a boyish grin spreading across his face. "I guess I am, yeah. What do you say, Ever-lame? Dinner, tonight, at that new troll-run gastropub in town? I promise not to spike your drink with any illicit brews."

She hesitated, torn between caution and curiosity. The sensible thing would be to turn him down gently but firmly, to nip this attraction in the bud before it could grow into something unmanageable. They were colleagues, after all, with a contentious history and wildly different priorities.

But then again, when was the last time she'd done something impulsive, something just for herself? When had she last let herself get swept up in the thrill of possibility, the giddy rush of new romance?

Besides, it was just dinner. What harm could it do?

Minerva took a deep breath, meeting Archie's hopeful gaze head-on. "All right, Coach. You've got yourself a date. I'll meet you there at seven."

The brilliant grin that split his face was almost worth the flutter of nerves in her belly.

Almost.

The Grumble and Brew was a charming little spot, all exposed brick and gleaming copper accents. The lighting was cozy and intimate. The delicious smells wafting from the open kitchen was enough to make Minerva's stomach rumble in anticipation.

Archie had even pulled out her chair at their table. She'd tried not to dwell on the shiver of awareness that raced through her when his fingers brushed her shoulder as he helped her out of her light spring jacket.

They'd ordered drinks (a robust cabernet sauvignon for her, a hoppy IPA for him) while they perused the menu, making small talk about their respective days. It was surprisingly easy, the conversation flowing without any of the barbed antagonism that typically characterized their interactions.

Minerva learned that Archie had a younger sister who was a magizoologist, specializing in the rehabilitation of magical creatures. He spoke of her with clear pride and affection, eyes lighting up as he recounted some of her more daring rescues.

In turn, she found herself opening up about her own family - her starchy, straitlaced father who'd never quite understood her passion for potion-making, her free-spirited mother who'd taught her to embrace her magical gifts with joy and creativity.

They swapped stories of their own time at Grimm Mawr Academy, marveling at how

little had changed in the intervening years. Minerva had been studious, more interested in acing her exams than attending pep rallies or bonfires. Archie had been a star athlete, coasting by on his charm and raw talent.

"I had such a crush on you back then," he admitted with a rueful grin, taking a sip of his beer. "But I was too much of a chicken to ever do anything about it. I figured a girl as brilliant as you wouldn't give a meathead like me the time of day."

Minerva nearly choked on her wine, eyes widening. "You had a crush on me? But you never said anything! You barely even acknowledged my existence outside of the occasional 'nerd' comment." If she had only known then?

He ducked his head, rubbing the back of his neck sheepishly. "Yeah, I know. I was an idiot. I thought the only way to get your attention was to tease you, rile you up. Obviously, my flirting game needed work."

She snorted indelicately. "Obviously. I seem to recall hexing you with uncontrollable hiccups for a week in our sixth year after a particularly obnoxious comment about my study habits."

Archie winced at the memory, though his eyes sparkled with mirth. "Not my finest moment, I'll admit. But in my defense, I was a teenage boy hopped up on hormones and repressed emotions. Cut me a little slack, eh?"

Minerva rolled her eyes, but her lips twitched with the beginnings of a smile. "I suppose I can find it in my heart to forgive your past transgressions. Provided, of course, you've matured beyond such puerile antics."

"Oh, I've matured all right," he said with an exaggerated waggle of his eyebrows. "In all the ways that count."

She kicked him lightly under the table, biting back a laugh. "Down, boy. This is a classy establishment, not the locker room at Grimm Mawr Academy."

Their food arrived then, steaming plates of artfully arranged delicacies courtesy of the pub's troll chef. Minerva had ordered the dragon-braised short ribs with an elderberry reduction, while Archie had opted for the cockatrice schnitzel with crushed moonstone potatoes.

They dug in with gusto, appreciative noises and contented silences interspersing the flow of conversation. The food was divine, complex flavors bursting on the tongue and leaving them both pleasantly satiated. Minerva wanted to sing and dance, her high school crush had liked her back! And now that they were adults, nothing could stand in their way of being together.

As they lingered over coffee and a shared slice of decadent pixy-dusted chocolate cake, the talk naturally turned back to the events of the day - specifically, the incident with Jezebel.

"I meant what I said earlier," Archie said, setting down his beer and fixing Minerva with an earnest look. "I really do admire your dedication to your students, your unwavering belief in the importance of magical education. But I have to ask - is there any way you might consider easing up on Nightshade, just a tad? She's under a lot of pressure. With the state championship coming up, the team really can't afford to lose her."

Minerva set down her glass with a bit more force than necessary, the warm glow of the evening rapidly cooling. "I'm sorry, Coach, but are you seriously asking me to compromise my academic standards for the sake of a sporting event? Surely even you can see how absurd that is." She should have known this was too good to be true.

Archie held up his hands in a placating gesture, but there was a stubborn set to his

jaw that told Minerva he wasn't about to back down. "It's not just a sporting event, Everhart. This is the Grimms' shot at making history, at proving that Grimm Mawr Academy is more than just a punchline. Surely even you can understand what that means to the kids, to the whole damn town."

She scoffed. "Oh, I understand perfectly. You want me to coddle your star player, to overlook her blatant disregard for the rules and her own education, all so you can have your moment of glory on the field. Well, I'm sorry, but I won't do it. Jezebel needs to learn that actions have consequences, and that her magical studies are just as important as her precious field hockey."

Archie's eyes narrowed, a muscle ticking in his jaw. "Don't act like you're some bastion of academic integrity, Everhart. We both know you've bent the rules for your precious potions prodigies in the past. Or have you forgotten the incident with Alabaster Thicknesse and the mandrake smuggling ring?"

Minerva gasped, color flooding her cheeks. "That was completely different and you know it. Alabaster was a troubled student in need of guidance, not a blatant rule-breaker with an overinflated ego."

"Right, because Jezebel's just a dumb jock not worth your time or effort," he shot back, voice dripping with sarcasm. "Merlin forbid you actually try to understand where she's coming from, the kind of pressure she's under—"

"Oh, spare me the sob story, Meathead," Minerva snapped, temper flaring. "I know exactly where she's coming from - a place of entitlement and arrogance, just like every other cocky athlete who thinks the rules don't apply to them!"

Archie recoiled as if she'd slapped him, hurt and anger flashing in his russet eyes. "Wow. Tell me how you really feel, Ever-lame. I guess some things never change. You're still the same stuck-up, holier-than-thou priss you were in school, always

looking down your nose at anyone who dared to have interests outside of books and broomstick polish."

Minerva sucked in a sharp breath, refusing to let his words hurt her. "And you're still the same arrogant, bullheaded Neanderthal, looking for an easy way out."

They glared at each other.

This was a disaster. What had she been thinking, agreeing to this dinner? She'd let herself be swayed by a handsome face and a sly smile, had almost believed there could be something real between them.

But at the end of the day, Archie Hawthorne only cared about one thing - winning. And if that meant steamrolling over her principles and objections, so be it.

Abruptly, Minerva pushed back from the table, snatching up her handbag. "You know what? I think we're done here. Thank you for dinner, Coach, but I'll be taking my leave now. And you can rest assured that my stance on Miss Nightshade's academic performance remains unchanged."

Archie's expression shuttered, lips thinning into a hard line. "Fine. But this isn't over. I'll do whatever it takes to make sure my team has a shot at that trophy, with or without your cooperation."

Minerva stalked out of the restaurant, head held high even as tears of frustration and disappointment burned her eyes. She should've known better than to trust the charming words of a snake-oil salesman like Archie Hawthorne. All he'd wanted was to get back in her good graces long enough to secure a free pass for his precious star player. He could take his insufferable smirk and unnervingly firm ass and go stuff them in a vanishing cabinet for all she cared.

As Minerva drove home, she couldn't help but feel a pang of regret for what might have been. But then she remembered the steely glint in Archie's eyes as he'd issued his little ultimatum, and her resolve hardened. If Meathead wanted a war, he'd get one. Grimm Mawr Academy was about to become a battleground, and Minerva Everhart had no intention of losing.

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The sun beat down on the emerald expanse of the Grimm Mawr Academy field hockey field, glinting off the sleek carbon fiber sticks and the sheen of sweat on the players' brows. Coach Archie Hawthorne stood on the sidelines, whistle clenched between his teeth and a furrow of concentration creasing his brow as he watched his team run drills.

It was a balmy Saturday morning, the kind that seemed tailor-made for grueling training sessions and pre-game pep talks. With the state championship looming on the horizon, Archie was determined to whip his squad into fighting form. They had to be faster, stronger, more agile than ever before if they hoped to trounce those smug bastards from Why and Because.

And at the center of it all was Jezebel Nightshade, his star forward striker and the key to the Grimms' victory. The girl was a force of nature on the field, all lightning-quick reflexes and ruthless precision as she wove through the defense and sent shot after shot rocketing into the goal.

Archie felt swell of pride as he watched her play, even as a niggling sense of unease churned in his gut. He knew he was pushing Jezebel harder than ever, piling on extra practices and drilling her in complex offensive maneuvers until they both collapsed from exhaustion. But what choice did he have? The team needed her at the top of her game, needed her laser focus and raw talent if they hoped to make Grimm Mawr history.

And if that meant running afoul of a certain prickly potions professor with an overinflated sense of academic superiority, well...so be it.

Archie gritted his teeth as memories of his disastrous dinner with Minerva Everhart flooded his mind unbidden. Merlin's toenails, he'd really put his foot in it with that one. He'd gone into the evening hoping to smooth things over, to convince the stubborn witch to ease up on Jezebel's detentions in the name of school spirit and sporting glory.

But somewhere between the wine and the charged banter, he'd lost sight of his objective. Found himself getting swept up in the intoxicating push and pull of their dynamic, the thrill of verbally sparring with a woman who gave as good as she got. And remembering how he felt the first time he laid eyes on her back in high school. He had fallen head over heels in love with her then.

He couldn't help it. There was just something about Minerva that got under his skin in the best and worst ways. The way her eyes flashed behind those prim glasses when she was gearing up for a lecture, the quick wit and cutting intellect that left him tongue-tied and reeling. She was a challenge, a puzzle he longed to solve even as she infuriated him with her inflexible adherence to the rules.

And if he was being honest with himself, the physical attraction between them was undeniable. That bloody lust potion may have lowered their inhibitions, but the searing heat of her kisses, the perfect way her curves molded to his angles, that was all them. No magical interference necessary.

Archie groaned low in his throat, scrubbing a hand over his face as he recalled the hurt and betrayal in Minerva's eyes when she'd realized his ulterior motives. The accusation in her voice as she called him out for trying to manipulate her, for putting his own agenda above her principles.

She wasn't wrong. He had been trying to sway her, to use their budding connection as leverage in his campaign to keep Jezebel out of detention. But that didn't mean his feelings for Minerva were any less genuine, any less consuming.

He'd meant what he said about harboring a crush on her back in their school days. Minerva Everhart had always been an enigma to him, a fiery force of nature wrapped up in a prim and proper package. He'd longed to ruffle her feathers, to see what lay beneath that composed exterior.

And now that he finally had a chance to find out, he'd gone and mucked it all up with his own pigheadedness and poor timing. Typical Hawthorne, charging ahead without thinking things through.

He could practically hear his father's voice in his head, that gruff, disapproving baritone that had haunted him since childhood. "Too hotheaded for your own good, boy. Always letting your heart rule your head. You'll never amount to anything if you can't learn to control your impulses."

Archie shook off the phantoms of his past, focusing instead on the training session at hand. He couldn't afford to get lost in self-pity and regret, not when his team needed him focused and clear-headed.

He narrowed his eyes, watching as Jezebel streaked down the field towards the goal, deftly maneuvering around the defenders. She had a clear shot, the goalie out of position and off balance. It was the kind of setup she normally drilled straight into the back of the net without breaking a sweat.

But to Archie's shock and dismay, Jezebel fumbled the pass, her normally dexterous hands clumsy and uncoordinated. She took a wild, off-center swipe at the ball, sending it careening wide of the goal posts by a good ten feet.

The rest of the team skidded to a halt, exchanging worried looks as Jezebel stared at her stick in disbelief. This was the third such blunder in as many plays, each missed shot more egregious than the last.

Archie felt a cold trickle of dread down his spine. This wasn't like Jezebel at all. The girl was a machine, a prodigy who could score blindfolded and with one hand tied behind her back. To see her flailing like a first-year flying student was deeply unsettling.

Frowning, he blew his whistle sharply, signaling for a momentary halt in play. The team gathered around him, muttering amongst themselves and casting furtive glances at their star player. Jezebel, for her part, looked equal parts bewildered and furious, her mouth set in a hard line as she gripped her stick with white-knuckled intensity.

"All right, Nightshade, walk me through that last shot," Archie said, keeping his voice carefully neutral even as his mind raced with possibilities. Nerves? Overtraining? The yips? "What went wrong there?"

Jezebel huffed out a frustrated breath, blowing a strand of raven hair out of her face. "I don't know, Coach. It's like my hands just wouldn't cooperate. Like they were moving through molasses or something."

A murmur of unease rippled through the gathered players at her words. They all knew Jezebel's prowess on the pitch was unparalleled. For her to be struggling with basic motor control was unthinkable.

Archie chewed on the inside of his cheek, mind whirring as he tried to puzzle out this new development. Suddenly, a faint whiff of something acrid and sulphuric tickled his nostrils, making him wrinkle his nose in distaste.

Brimstone. The unmistakable calling card of dark magic.

His blood ran cold as realization slammed into him. This was no ordinary slump or case of nerves. Jezebel had been cursed. Someone had targeted his star player with magic meant to hamper her athletic abilities, to sabotage the Grimms' chance at

victory.

But who would do such a thing? Who had the motive and the magical means to pull off a stunt like this?

“Does anyone else smell that?” Catalina Talisman asked, raising her hand timidly.

The team took deep sniffs and they all came to the same conclusion at once.

“It’s a curse!”

“Jezzie’s been cursed!”

“We’re doomed!”

"It was Everhart," Jezebel spat, her eyes flashing with barely contained rage. “She’s had it out for me since day one. She's always going on about how sports are a waste of time and energy, how we should be focusing on our studies instead.”

A ripple of angry agreement spread through the team as they latched onto Jezebel's theory. It made a twisted sort of sense. Minerva had made no secret of her disdain for the sports program, of her belief that the school placed too much emphasis on sports at the expense of academics. What better way to prove her point than by sabotaging their chances at the cup?

But even as the seeds of suspicion and resentment took root, Archie found himself hesitating. Would Minerva really resort to such underhanded tactics, to outright cheating in order to get her way? The woman was as stubborn as a hippogriff and twice as prickly, but she had a strict moral code. Cursing a student, even one she despised, seemed beneath her.

And yet, she had been awfully angry after their dinner, humiliated and lashing out like a wounded animal. Could her hurt feelings have driven her to seek revenge, to strike back at Archie in the most painful way possible?

He shook his head, trying to clear the doubts and recriminations swirling through his mind. He couldn't afford to jump to conclusions, not without hard evidence. He needed to approach this situation with a level head and an open mind.

"Listen up," he said, pitching his voice to be heard over the growing buzz of speculation. "I know tensions are running high right now, but we can't go throwing around accusations without proof. Jezebel, I want you to head to the infirmary, get checked out by Nurse Maelstorm. See if she can detect any traces of dark magic or hexes."

Jezebel opened her mouth to argue, but Archie cut her off with a stern look. "That's an order, Nightshade. The rest of you, hit the showers. We'll reconvene tomorrow to discuss our next steps."

The team dispersed, muttering darkly amongst themselves as they slouched off towards the locker rooms. Archie watched them go, a heavy weight settling in his chest. This was a nightmare scenario, the kind of scandal that could tear the school apart and ruin Minerva's reputation irreparably.

He refused to believe she was capable of something so vindictive and short-sighted. There had to be another explanation, another culprit waiting to be unmasked. And he was going to get to the bottom of it, even if it meant butting heads with a certain alluring and infuriating potions mistress.

Archie strode off the field. If dark magic was afoot at Grimm Mawr Academy, he'd be damned if he let it derail his team's shot at glory. Or his own chance at something real with Minerva Everhart.

As he made his way back to the academy, Archie couldn't shake the memory of her lips against his, the intoxicating softness of her hair beneath his fingers. The lust potion may have stripped away their inhibitions, but the attraction crackling between them was all too real.

He wanted her, both body and mind. Wanted to unravel the enigma of Minerva Everhart and see what lay beneath that prickly exterior. One way or another, he would get to the bottom of this curse business. And maybe, just maybe, he'd find a way to mend the rift between him and Minerva in the process.

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Minerva Everhart kept her chin held high and her shoulders squared, a picture of poise and professionalism even as the weight of countless stares bore into her back like hot pokers.

The whispers followed her everywhere she went, a susurrus of gossip and speculation that set her teeth on edge and made her want to hex someone's tongue to the roof of their mouth. She could practically feel the accusation in their gazes, the suspicion and mistrust that hung thick in the air like a noxious fog.

Jezebel Nightshade's mysterious curse had sent shockwaves through the school, sparking a flurry of rumors and finger-pointing that had quickly zeroed in on one prime suspect: Minerva herself. Never mind that Minerva was a respected member of the faculty, a dedicated educator with an unblemished record of service. Never mind that she had never, in all her years of teaching, resorted to underhanded tactics or magical sabotage to prove a point.

No, all anyone seemed to care about was that she had a known grudge against the star field hockey player, a history of butting heads with the jock contingent and their sports-obsessed priorities. It was the perfect motive, they whispered behind cupped hands and closed doors. Who else would want to take Jezebel down a peg, to knock the Grimms off their unprecedented success, and prove once and for all that academics trumped athletics?

Minerva gritted her teeth, her grip tightening around the strap of her leather satchel as she swept through the crowded corridors. It was ludicrous, this campaign to paint her as some kind of vindictive harpy hell-bent on destroying a student's future. She was strict, yes, and unapologetically demanding when it came to her pupils' magical

education. But she was not a cheat, and she certainly wasn't a curse-flinging maniac.

If only she could make the rest of the school see that.

Lost in her brooding thoughts, Minerva almost didn't notice the hand that shot out from a nearby alcove, dragging her unceremoniously into the shadowed recess. She let out an undignified yelp, her wand already in hand and a stunning spell on her lips before she registered the familiar face of her assailant.

"Juno!" Minerva exhaled sharply, lowering her wand and scowling at her fellow instructor. "What in Merlin's name do you think you're doing?"

Juno Runeheart, the school's Herbalist professor and Minerva's friend, had the grace to look sheepish. She released her grip on Minerva's arm, smoothing down the front of her midnight blue robes with a dainty cough.

"I didn't mean to startle you," Juno said, her musical voice laced with a hint of contrition. "But I needed to speak with you urgently, and I couldn't risk being overheard in the halls."

Minerva arched a brow, curiosity warring with trepidation in her gut. Juno was not one for cloak-and-dagger antics. For her to resort to such tactics meant that something serious was afoot.

"All right, I'll bite," she said, crossing her arms over her chest and leaning back against the cool stone wall. "What's so important that it couldn't wait until our usual Thursday night firewhiskey and commiseration session?"

Juno took a deep breath, her cornflower blue eyes darting furtively around the alcove before settling back on Minerva's face. "It's about the Brewfest."

Minerva blinked, momentarily thrown by the non-sequitur. Brewfest was the town's annual potions competition, a cutthroat battle of wits and cauldrons that pitted the most talented brewers against each other in a bid for glory and bragging rights.

But that wasn't for several months.

As if sensing her confusion, Juno barreled on, her words coming out in an excited rush. "There's been talk amongst the higher-ups, whispers of a potential opening for a new Herbalism department head next year. And rumor has it that the winner of Brewfest will have a decided edge in the selection process. I need your help to win it."

"Of course, I'll help you," Minerva said slowly, hating the way her voice sounded so brittle and defeated even to her own ears. "But in case you haven't noticed, I'm not exactly Teacher of the Month around here. The whole school thinks I'm some kind of mad woman who curses students for sport. I'll be lucky if they let me within ten feet of the competition."

Juno made a dismissive noise in the back of her throat, waving away Minerva's concerns with an impatient flick of her wrist. "Oh, pish tosh. Anyone with half a brain cell knows you're innocent. You're far too principled to resort to such underhanded tactics."

Minerva felt a surge of gratitude towards her friend, a warmth that helped chase away some of the chill that had settled in her bones. It was heartening to know that at least one person in this thrice-damned school had her back.

"Besides, you don't have any black magic tainting your aura. Any idiot can see that."

"Don't underestimate the idiots," Minerva grumbled.

As if on cue, a shrill scream pierced the air, followed by a thunderous crashing and the unmistakable sound of shattering glass. Minerva and Juno exchanged alarmed looks before sprinting out of the alcove, wands at the ready.

The scene that greeted them in the main corridor was one of utter pandemonium. Students ran helter-skelter, their robes flapping behind them like panicked bats as they ducked and wove around the debris littering the floor. Shards of stained glass crunched underfoot, the remnants of the once-majestic windows that had lined the halls now reduced to glittering confetti.

And in the center of it all, rearing up on its hind legs with an ear-splitting whinny, was a unicorn.

But not just any unicorn. This one was easily twice the size of a normal specimen, its coat a blinding white that seemed to pulse with an otherworldly luminescence. Its horn, easily as long as Minerva's arm, crackled with arcane energy, sparks of red and gold leaping from its razor-sharp tip like miniature fireworks.

Minerva gaped at the beast, her mind struggling to process the sheer absurdity of the sight before her. What in the seven hells was a giant, magical unicorn doing rampaging through the halls of Grimm Mawr Academy? And more importantly, how were they going to stop it before someone got hurt?

As if in answer to her unspoken question, the unicorn let out another earth-shattering bellow, its hooves slamming down onto the flagstones with enough force to send tremors rippling through the floor. Students screamed and scattered, ducking into classrooms and behind suits of armor as the creature charged forward, its eyes wild and rolling in its skull.

"Merlin's balls," Juno breathed from beside her, her face pale and pinched with fear. "What do we do now?"

But Minerva was already moving, her wand slashing through the air as she fired off a barrage of stunning spells at the enraged beast. Red jets of light slammed into the unicorn's flank, but it shrugged them off like bothersome gnats, its hide seemingly impervious to magic.

Gritting her teeth, Minerva changed tactics, summoning a massive shield charm to block the unicorn's path. The translucent barrier shimmered into existence just as the creature reached it, its horn slamming against the magical wall with a bone-jarring clang.

For a moment, the unicorn looked almost comically surprised, its eyes crossing as it tried to focus on the unexpected obstacle. But then, with a snort of rage, it reared back and charged again, its horn glowing brighter and brighter with each thundering step.

Minerva poured every ounce of power she had into the shield charm, her arm trembling with the effort of maintaining such a massive spell. But it was no use. With a sickening crack, the unicorn's horn pierced straight through the barrier, shattering it like sugar glass and sending Minerva flying backwards with the force of the backlash.

She hit the ground hard, the air whooshing out of her lungs in a painful rush as she skidded across the stone floor. Stars danced before her eyes, her head throbbing from where it had cracked against the unforgiving flagstones.

Dimly, she heard Juno screaming her name, the high, thready sound almost lost beneath the ringing in her ears. She tried to push herself up, to force her battered body back into the fray, but her limbs felt like lead weights, her vision swimming in and out of focus.

This was it, then. This was how Minerva Everhart, potions mistress extraordinaire, met her ignominious end, trampled to death by an overgrown magical pony with

anger management issues. Somehow, she had always pictured her demise being a bit more dignified, a bit more heroic.

But then, just as the unicorn's hooves were about to come crashing down on her prone form, a blur of movement shot out from the periphery of her vision. A tall, broad-shouldered figure leapt in front of her, his wand held aloft like a knight's sword as he shouted an incantation in a deep, achingly familiar voice.

"Get 'em!"

The suits of armor lining the hallway shuddered to life, their empty helms swiveling towards the sound of the newcomer's voice. With a creaking groan of metal on metal, they stepped off their plinths, their swords and shields held at the ready as they formed a wall of steel between Minerva and the rampaging unicorn.

The creature let out a confused whinny, rearing back on its hind legs as it tried to process this new threat. But the armor knights pressed forward, their weapons slicing through the air with deadly precision as they drove the unicorn back, step by clanging step.

Minerva watched in mute amazement as her rescuer knelt down beside her, his strong hands gripping her shoulders as he helped her sit up. She blinked up at him, her vision still fuzzy around the edges, but there was no mistaking the chiseled jawline and worried amber eyes of Archie Hawthorne.

"Minerva," he breathed, his voice rough with emotion as he brushed a strand of hair away from her temple. "Merlin's toenails, are you all right? I saw that bloody beast fling you halfway across the hall."

She opened her mouth to answer, to reassure him that she was fine, just a bit rattled, but the words wouldn't come. Because suddenly, with his face so close to hers, with

the adrenaline of their near-death experience still pumping through her veins, all she could think about was how badly she wanted to kiss him.

And so, before she could second-guess herself, before the rational part of her brain could catch up and scream at her to stop, Minerva surged forward and pressed her lips to his in a bruising, desperate kiss.

Archie made a surprised sound in the back of his throat, his hands tightening reflexively on her shoulders. But then he was kissing her back, his mouth slanting over hers with an urgency that stole the breath from her lungs and set her blood on fire. Archie backed her up into the alcove where she had been talking with Juno just before the unicorn attacked.

This was nothing like their kiss under the influence of the lust potion. That had been all hazy, drugged passion, a mindless tangle of lips and teeth and tongue. This was something else entirely - a meeting of equals, a dance of wills as they poured out all their pent-up frustration and longing into the press of their mouths.

Minerva fisted her hands into the front of Archie's robes, dragging him closer as she nipped at his bottom lip, soothing the sting with a swipe of her tongue. He groaned, low and guttural, one hand sliding up to cup the back of her neck as he deepened the kiss, his fingers tangling in the loose strands of her hair.

She could feel the heat of him through their layers of clothing, the solid weight of his body pressing her back against the cool stone wall. Every nerve ending in her body felt alive, electrified, like she had been struck by lightning and left crackling with residual energy.

This was madness. They were in the middle of a crisis, with a cursed student and a rampaging magical creature on the loose. They should be focusing on finding a solution, on restoring order to the chaos that had engulfed their school.

But Merlin help her, she couldn't bring herself to care. Not when Archie's tongue was stroking against hers just so, not when his hands were mapping the curves of her body like he wanted to memorize every dip and swell. She wanted to drown in this feeling, to lose herself in the heat and the hunger of his touch.

And so she did. Minerva surrendered to the rush of sensations, her mind going blissfully blank as she wrapped her arms around Archie's neck and pulled him even closer, until there was no space left between them, no room for anything but the slide of their mouths and the ragged sounds of their breathing. Archie pushed up her robes, grabbed her leg and hooked it around his hip. His hand slid into the top of her robe, pulling up her bra so he could cup her breast and play with her nipple.

As Archie's touch ignited a fierce wildfire of desire in Minerva's veins, she arched into him, a low moan escaping her lips. The passion between them crackled like magic, each caress fueling the flames burning hot and wild. His fingers continued their exploration, sending shivers of pleasure cascading through her body.

Minerva's hands found their way inside his robe, her fingers tracing the hard planes of his abdomen. She felt the flex of muscle beneath her questing fingertips. It was intoxicating, this dance they were caught up in, a symphony of need and yearning that resonated deep within their souls.

The world around them faded into oblivion, the chaos and danger outside their alcove nothing but a distant memory. There was only Archie and Minerva, two souls drawn together by an undeniable force, their connection sparking brighter with each passing moment.

His erection poked into her, hard and hot through their clothes. Rocking against her, Archie continued his blistering kisses while the friction drove her insane. She was going to come fully dressed clinging to him.

“This is all Everheart’s fault.” A loud, obnoxious student yelled from the hallway.

Archie and Minerva sprung apart, gasping for breath. Archie scowled and peered out through the alcove’s curtains while Minerva fixed her robe and tried not to die of embarrassment. At least, they had been hidden from prying eyes.

“The unicorn’s gone,” Archie said, frowning. “But what a mess.”

“I didn’t curse Jezebel,” Minerva said. It was important that he knew that.

Archie turned back to Minerva, his expression softening as he took her hands in his. “I know that.”

Minerva bit back a sob. She hadn’t known how much that would mean to her, that he didn’t think she was capable of cursing a student.

Despite the chaos that had unfolded around them, she felt strangely content, knowing that Archie saw beyond the rumors and misunderstandings that had shadowed her.

“We have some unfinished business to discuss later,” he said, tucking a curl behind her ear.

Minerva nodded, her heart pounding with a heady mix of desire and relief. The connection between them felt like an invisible thread that pulled them together despite the chaos swirling around them. She tried to ignore the lingering ache of need that throbbed within her as Archie’s gaze was heavy with unspoken promises.

They emerged from their alcove sanctuary and found the school slowly returning to normal. Students and staff were using magic to repair the pieces of shattered windows and overturned bookshelves, while others were tending to those who had been hurt in the unicorn’s rampage.

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After school was over that day, Archie Hawthorne couldn't keep the grin off his face as he walked through the hallways of Grimm Mawr Academy, his mind still reeling from the explosive encounter with Minerva in the alcove. The memory of the breathy little moans she made as he explored her body was enough to make his blood sing and his heart race.

He knew they had a lot to talk about, a lot to figure out in the wake of Jezebel's curse and the ensuing chaos that had engulfed the school. But for now, all he could think about was getting Minerva alone, and finishing what they had started.

As if the universe itself had heard his thoughts, Archie rounded a corner and nearly collided with the object of his desire herself. Minerva looked up at him, her eyes widening behind her glasses as a faint blush stained her cheeks.

"Coach Hawthorne," she said, her voice a little breathless. "I was just coming to find you."

Archie's grin widened, his hands itching to reach out and pull her back into his arms. "Is that so, Professor? And what, pray tell, did you have in mind?"

Minerva glanced around, making sure they were alone before stepping closer, her voice dropping to a low, intimate murmur. "I was thinking we could continue our...discussion from earlier. Somewhere a bit more private, perhaps?"

Heat flared in Archie's gut at the suggestion, his body already responding to the promise in her words. "I like the way you think, Everhart. My place around seven? I'll cook you dinner, we can crack open a bottle of wine, see where the evening takes us."

His voice trailed off suggestively, his eyes raking over her figure with undisguised hunger.

Minerva shivered, her own gaze darkening with answering desire.

"It's a date," she whispered, before slipping past him and disappearing down the hall, leaving Archie to stare after her with a mixture of anticipation and awe.

The rest of the day passed in a blur, Archie's mind consumed with thoughts of Minerva and their impending rendezvous. He barely registered the curious looks and whispered speculations of his athletes as they practiced for the big game, albeit without their star player.

When at last practice ended, Archie practically sprinted to his house, his heart hammering in his chest as he set about preparing for Minerva's arrival. He tidied up the living room, lit a few candles, and put on some soft, jazzy music to set the mood.

In the kitchen, he bustled about, chopping vegetables and searing meat for a simple but elegant pasta dish. He had just finished setting the table with his best dishes and uncorking a bottle of rich, red wine when a soft knock sounded at the door.

Archie's pulse leapt, his palms suddenly damp with nerves as he crossed the room to answer it. He took a deep breath, smoothing down his hair and straightening his shirt before pulling open the door to reveal Minerva, looking absolutely stunning in a form-fitting black dress that hugged her curves in all the right places.

"Wow," he breathed, his eyes drinking her in from head to toe. "You look incredible."

Minerva ducked her head, a pleased smile tugging at the corners of her mouth. "Thank you. You clean up pretty well yourself, Coach."

Archie grinned, stepping aside to usher her into the apartment. "I try. Can I get you a glass of wine?"

"Please," Minerva said, settling herself on the couch while Archie poured them each a generous measure of the fragrant vintage.

He handed her a glass, his fingers brushing against hers and sending a jolt of electricity racing up his arm. Their eyes met, the air between them suddenly thick with tension and unspoken desire.

"To new beginnings," Archie said, raising his glass in a toast. "And unexpected connections."

"To new beginnings," Minerva echoed, clinking her glass against his before taking a sip, her eyes never leaving his face.

Dinner was a leisurely affair, the conversation flowing as easily as the wine. They talked about their childhoods, their families, their dreams and aspirations beyond the walls of Grimm Mawr Academy. Archie found himself opening up to Minerva in ways he never had with anyone else, sharing stories and secrets he had long kept hidden away.

And she in turn revealed new depths to him, a wicked sense of humor and a vulnerability that made his heart ache with tenderness. He couldn't remember the last time he had felt so connected to another person, so seen and understood on every level.

As the evening wore on and the wine bottle emptied, the tension between them grew more electric, the air crackling with a mixture of laughter and longing. Archie found his gaze drawn to Minerva's lips as she talked, his mind conjuring up vivid memories of how they had felt moving against his own.

Almost without realizing it, he reached out and tucked a stray curl behind her ear, his fingers lingering against her cheek. Minerva stilled, her eyes fluttering closed at his touch as a soft sigh escaped her.

"Archie," she breathed, his name a plea and a prayer on her lips.

That was all the invitation he needed. With a low growl, Archie surged forward and captured her mouth in a searing kiss, pouring all the pent-up passion and desire of the past few hours into the press of his lips.

Minerva responded with equal fervor, her hands coming up to tangle in his hair as she opened to him, their tongues tangling in a heated dance. They kissed like they were starving for each other, like they couldn't get enough, the rest of the world falling away until there was only the two of them, lost in a haze of lust and longing.

Somehow, they made it to the bedroom, shedding clothes as they went until they tumbled onto the bed in a tangle of naked limbs. Minerva let out a soft whimper as Archie's lips found her sensitive skin, her hips bucking against his hand as he teased her into submission. Her breaths grew heavier, her body responding to his touch in ways she had never imagined. It was as if they were two halves of the same soul, fit perfectly together in this moment of passion, defying all the rules they had once abided by.

Archie was relentless, his fingers finding her core and sinking deep within her, his thumb rubbing rhythmically against her clit. Minerva cried out, her back arching off the bed as she came undone beneath his skilled touch. Archie caught her, his mouth closing over hers in a passionate kiss as he felt her shuddering beneath him.

Archie took his time worshipping Minerva's body, trailing hot, open-mouthed kisses along the column of her throat, the swell of her breasts, pausing to suck on each of her turgid pink nipples. He licked and tugged as she writhed and moaned. Kissing

down the soft swell of her belly, he parted her luscious thighs. He reveled in the little gasps and moans he drew from her, the way she arched into his touch like a cat seeking warmth. And when at last he settled between her thighs, his mouth and fingers driving her to the brink of madness, he thought he might die from the sheer beauty of her coming undone beneath him.

Archie worshipped her with his tongue, laving her folds before dipping his tongue deep within her, savoring the taste of her essence. Minerva moaned his name, her fingers threading through his hair as she tugged him closer. He licked her, fast. Her hips rubbed wantonly against his face as his tongue danced in a frenzied rhythm, driving her higher and higher.

Her moans became a wail, her body shaking as she came again. Archie could feel it too, deep within his core, the energy of their connection surging between them. When Minerva's climax finally subsided, she lay panting, her eyes locked with his.

Archie's cock was throbbing. He needed to be inside her now before he exploded all over her stomach. Lifting her legs over her head, Archie said, "Hold on to your ankles."

With shaking fingers, Minerva did as he asked.

Archie positioned himself at her entrance, rubbing himself through her drenched folds. She quivered. It felt like heaven.

He watched as Minerva bit her lip, her eyes wide with apprehension and desire.

With a deep breath, Archie thrust forward, sinking into her tight warmth. Minerva cried out, her hands tightening on her ankles as she adjusted to his size. Archie paused, his eyes locked with hers, his breath coming in short pants.

"Are you okay?" he asked, concern lacing his voice.

Minerva nodded. "Don't stop."

Archie pushed deeper, burying himself to the hilt. Minerva let out a gasp, her eyes widening as she felt the full length of him inside her.

"Mmm, that's it," Archie growled, pulling out almost all the way before thrusting back in. He rocked against her, watching her breasts bounce as he fucked her.

"Archie," Minerva whimpered, her voice high-pitched with arousal. "Faster, harder."

Their lovemaking was rough and passionate, their bodies moving in perfect synchronicity.

Archie leaned down, his breath hot on her ear as he whispered, "I've always wanted you, Minerva. From the moment I saw you in that wild hair and those quirky clothes, I knew I had to have you."

Minerva's eyes widened, and she gasped, her body trembling with desire. She looked up at him, her eyes filled with a mix of surprise, lust, and something more.

Archie knew he had to tread lightly. He had to show her that he wasn't just some jock who wanted to bed her. He was a man who wanted to love her, to cherish her, to make her his.

He slowed his rhythm, pulling out almost all the way before thrusting back in. He watched as her eyes fluttered shut, her lips parting in pleasure.

"Minerva," he groaned, his voice ragged with desire. "Look into my eyes."

Minerva did as he asked, her eyes locking with his.

"I want you, Minerva. I want you in a way that I have never wanted anyone before. And I want to be with you, not just in the bedroom, but in life. I want to be your partner, your confidante, your friend. I want to stand by you and support you in everything you do."

Minerva swallowed hard, her breaths coming in short, sharp gasps.

"Archie," she whispered, her voice barely audible. "I... I don't know what to say."

Archie smiled, his eyes never leaving hers. "Say yes."

Minerva nodded, her heart pounding in her chest. "Yes."

With a deep, rumbling growl, Archie drove himself deeper into her. Minerva's moans filled the room. Her legs trembled as she met him move for move.

He watched as Minerva's expression softened, her eyes turning dreamy and unfocused. She clamped down around him and it was his turn to cry out her name.

They made love with a passion that bordered on frenzy, their bodies moving together in a rhythm as old as time itself. Archie lost himself in the silken heat of her, the way she clenched around him, urging him deeper, harder, faster. He muffled his cries against her shoulder, his release shattering through him like a lightning bolt as Minerva shuddered and clenched around him, her own climax overtaking her in a rush of liquid heat.

Archie's control slipped away as he watched Minerva's face contort with pleasure, her blue eyes filled with desire, her lips glistening with a sheen of sweat.

"I need you to come for me, Minerva," Archie grunted, his own body shaking with need. "I need to feel you around me."

Minerva's eyes widened at his words, but she nodded eagerly, her hands tightening around her ankles, her breath coming in short gasps.

Archie began to move faster, harder, his hips slamming into her with an animalistic intensity. Minerva let out a series of gasps and moans, her body arching off the bed as she flew closer and closer to the edge.

"Archie, I'm there," Minerva cried out, her voice high-pitched with arousal. "Don't stop. Don't stop. Don't you dare stop."

Archie grunted, his own body trembling with need, but he kept up the pace, pumping hard and deep within her. Minerva's body trembled with the force of her climax.

Archie surged forward, burying himself deep inside her one last time as he released his seed into her. When he collapsed on top of her, they lay there, their bodies slick with sweat, their hearts pounding in time with one another.

Finally, Archie lifted his head and gazed down at Minerva, his eyes filled with wonder and gratitude. "

You're so wild and so beautiful. I love you."

Minerva smiled, brushing the hair back from Archie's forehead with gentle fingers. "I love you too."

Afterwards, they lay tangled together, their hearts gradually slowing, their breathing evening out. Archie traced idle patterns on Minerva's sweat-dampened skin, marveling at the softness, the perfect imperfections that made her so uniquely her.

"That was..." he murmured, pressing a kiss to her temple.

"Incredible," Minerva finished, her lips curving in a sated smile. "Mind-blowing. Life-altering."

Archie chuckled, pulling her closer and nuzzling into her hair. "You'll get no argument from me, Ever-lame. I think you may have ruined me for all other women."

Minerva propped herself up on one elbow, her expression turning serious even as her eyes sparkled with mischief. "Good. Because I have no intention of sharing you, Meathead. You're mine now, for better or worse."

Archie's heart swelled at the possessive note in her voice, the unspoken promise of a future together. He had never been one for commitments, for long-term entanglements, but with Minerva everything felt different. Right. Like he had finally found the missing piece he hadn't even known he was searching for.

"I'm yours," he agreed, sealing the vow with a kiss. "Always."

They drifted off to sleep like that, wrapped in each other's arms, their hearts full and their souls at peace. For one perfect moment, the troubles of the day, the uncertainty of the future, faded away, replaced by a bone-deep contentment that seeped into Archie's very marrow.

Of course, the blissful bubble couldn't last forever. Archie was jolted out of a dead sleep mere hours later by the insistent buzz of his cell phone, the screen lighting up with an unknown number.

Groaning, he disentangled himself from Minerva's sleeping form and stumbled out of bed, snatching up the phone with fumbling fingers.

"H'lo?" he mumbled, his voice thick with sleep.

"Coach Hawthorne? This is Headmistress Raven." The crisp, no-nonsense tone of the school's enigmatic leader had Archie snapping to attention, a trickle of unease running down his spine. "I'm afraid I have some rather disturbing news."

Archie frowned, rubbing a hand over his face as he tried to clear the cobwebs from his brain. "What kind of news?"

There was a pause on the other end of the line, heavy with unspoken implications. "It appears that the curse affecting Miss Nightshade may have originated a bit closer to home than we previously thought. Specifically, in your office."

Archie felt his blood run cold, a sick sense of dread settling in the pit of his stomach. "What are you talking about?"

The Raven sighed, the sound crackling down the line like static. "One of our curse-breakers did a thorough sweep of the school after yesterday's incident. They found traces of dark magic clinging to Jezebel's locker, her field hockey gear. And when they searched your office, they discovered a cache of ingredients commonly used in performance-enhancing spells. Spells that, if improperly cast, could have the exact opposite effect."

Archie's mind reeled, trying to make sense of the headmistress's words. "You think I had something to do with this? That I would risk my career, my reputation, to give one of my players an unfair advantage?"

"I don't know what to think, Coach Hawthorne," the Raven replied, her voice heavy with exhaustion. "But the evidence is damning. And until we get to the bottom of this, I have no choice but to place you on administrative leave, effective immediately."

The phone slipped from Archie's numb fingers, clattering to the floor as the weight of the Raven's pronouncement crashed over him like a tidal wave. Administrative leave. He was being benched, sidelined, cast out like a pariah while the rest of the school whispered and speculated behind his back.

A gentle hand on his shoulder startled him out of his spiraling thoughts, and he turned to see Minerva standing behind him, her eyes wide with concern.

"Archie, what's wrong? What's happened?"

He shook his head, a bitter laugh bubbling up in his throat. "Someone's trying to frame me. They planted evidence in my office, made it look like I was the one who cursed Jezebel."

Minerva gasped, her hand flying to her mouth. "But that's absurd! Anyone who knows you would realize you would never do something like that. You're not even capable of that level of dark magic."

Despite the direness of the situation, Archie couldn't help but feel a flicker of annoyance at that remark, but then he realized Minerva was just stating the truth. "Try telling that to the Raven. She's convinced I'm guilty, that I risked everything for the sake of a stupid game."

Minerva's eyes flashed with determination, her jaw setting in that stubborn way Archie had come to know and love. "Then we'll just have to prove her wrong. We'll find out who's really behind this, clear your name and mine in the process."

Archie stared at her, a mix of awe and gratitude swelling in his chest. "You believe me? Just like that?"

She reached up and cupped his face, her thumb brushing over his cheekbone with

infinite tenderness. "Of course I believe you, Archie. I know the kind of man you are, the integrity and honor you bring to everything you do. You're no cheat, and you're certainly no dark wizard."

Archie turned his head and pressed a kiss to her palm. "I don't deserve you."

Minerva smiled, leaning in to brush her lips against his in a soft, sweet kiss. "No you don't. But you can try." She led him back to bed and proceeded to take his mind off his problems for a little while longer.

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Minerva snuck Archie into her office after school the next day. Her office looked like it had been hit by a tornado made of books and potion ingredients. Shelves sagged under the weight of ancient tomes, jars filled with murky liquids bubbled ominously, and scrolls were strewn across her desk. Archie stood at the other end of the room, flipping through a book titled, "Curses and How to Break Them" while Minerva meticulously pored over the scattered evidence before her, trying to piece together the twisted puzzle of Jezebel's curse and Archie's alleged involvement.

None of it made sense - the clandestine ingredients, the dark magic residue, the evidence suddenly appearing in Archie's office. It was all too neat, too perfectly calculated to point the finger at the one man she knew in her bones would never stoop to such underhanded tactics.

But if Archie wasn't responsible, then who was? And more importantly, why go to such lengths to frame him, to tarnish his reputation and jeopardize his career?

"Maybe the curse will run its course and go away by itself?" Archie said as he skimmed the text.

"Considering Jezebel's hair turned into snakes during detention today, I doubt it," Minerva replied.

"The entire faculty is trying to find a way to break the curse," he said. "The most they've been able to do is contain it so it's stopped spreading to the other students."

"It's only been a day," Minerva pointed out.

"Fair point," he muttered, putting the book down and picking up another one. "But if we don't break this curse soon, she'll miss the championship game."

"Can the Grimms win without you coaching them?"

"Yes."

"Can they win without her?"

"No."

Minerva chewed on her bottom lip, her brow furrowed in concentration as she shuffled through a stack of student files, looking for any hint of motive or opportunity. It had to be someone with access to the locker rooms, someone with a grudge against Jezebel or the field hockey team in general. But who would be so consumed by jealousy, so blinded by ambition, that they would resort to such dangerous black magic?

"Who have you pissed off lately?" Minerva asked.

"The list is long and distinguished."

She blew out a sigh and started a list of potential suspects.

They spent the next several hours combing through every scrap of evidence, every whispered rumor and half-remembered detail. They looked for any inconsistencies, any hint of motive or opportunity that might point them in the right direction.

Just as she was about to give in to the urge to transfigure the useless papers into a flock of origami cranes and set them loose on the unsuspecting populace, Archie waved a scroll at her. "I think I found something." He walked over to her and leaned

in close. His shoulder brushed against hers, sending a shiver down her spine.

"A recipe for dragon repellent?"

"Seriously, it mentions a counter-curse that could work."

"Great. What do we need?"

"Eye of newt, wing of bat, and...a willing participant to channel the energy. Sounds dangerous."

"Only if done incorrectly."

"Well, that's reassuring," he said, his sarcasm evident.

"Relax, Coach. I've can make this potion."

"Famous last words."

"Let's head to the potions classroom," Minerva suggested, gathering a few essential items and stuffing them into her bag. "And we can get started. Once Jezebel is back to normal, we can concentrate our full attention on finding out who cursed her."

"Lead the way," Archie responded, following her out of the cluttered office.

As they walked through the dimly lit corridors of the school Minerva noticed a figure lurking near the entrance to the potions classroom. Naomi Bitterbridge. The girl was hovering around the door, her eyes darting suspiciously.

"Isn't Naomi on our long list of suspects?" Minerva asked.

“Yeah, she was pissed not to make Varsity.” Archie shrugged. “She just wasn’t good enough.”

“She’s an excellent potion brewer.”

“You don’t say.”

"Do you think she could be involved in the curse?" she asked.

"Wouldn't surprise me," he said. "She’s a dirty fighter on the field. Stands to reason she’d be one off it as well.”

"Should we confront her?"

"Not yet. Let's see what she's up to first."

"All right."

They kept to the shadows as Naomi glanced around nervously before hurrying off down the hallway, her footsteps echoing in the silence.

"I wonder what that was all about?"

"I put a mage lock on the potions lab," Minerva said. "She might have been trying to break in."

"We should question her tomorrow," Archie said.

“I’ll question her. You’re not even supposed to be here. Come on," she urged, turning towards the potions classroom. "We have work to do."

"Right behind you," Archie replied, following her inside.

The air was thick with the scent of various magical ingredients, and the shelves were lined with jars and vials of every size and color. Minerva set her bag down on the nearest table and began searching for the necessary components. She surveyed the scattered ingredients on the workbench, her brow furrowed in concentration. Eye of newt, wing of bat, essence of belladonna...all powerful components, but without the proper catalyst, they were little more than a recipe for disaster. Minerva set to work, chopping and grinding the components with practiced precision.

As the potion began to simmer, she turned to Archie with a mischievous glint in her eye. "Now comes the fun part," she said, holding up the knife. "I need a willing participant to channel the energy of the counter-curse. And since you're the only other person here..."

Archie's reaction was predictable, and Minerva had to suppress a smile as he blanched and stepped back. She rolled her eyes, amused by his trepidation. "Relax, you big baby. It's not going to hurt...much."

"Fine." He stoically held out his hand.

Minerva steeled herself and drew the knife across his palm, wincing as blood welled up. She let a few drops fall into the cauldron, and instantly, the potion began to froth and hiss, turning a deep, vibrant purple.

As she chanted the incantation, Minerva felt the energy of the counter-curse surging through her, a powerful, almost painful force that made her body go rigid. Her eyes rolled back, and her hair whipped around her face as if caught in an invisible wind.

Dimly, she was aware of Archie catching her, holding her close as the sphere of light grew and burst above them. And then, as suddenly as it had begun, it was over.

Minerva went limp, her breathing shallow and ragged.

"Did it work?" she croaked, her voice hoarse. "Is the counter-curse ready?"

"Looks good to me." Archie stared into the cauldron. "But you're the expert."

Minerva managed a weak smile and stirred the potion counterclockwise. "I think we did it. I couldn't have done it without you."

But their moment of triumph was short-lived. A sudden movement caught Minerva's eye, and she frowned, peering into the shadows. "Archie," she whispered. "I think there's someone else here."

Archie had his wand out in an instant. Minerva strained her eyes, trying to see the ripple in reality again.

Suddenly, Archie whirled and fired off a reveal beam from his wand. "Gotcha."

The dim shade was flung against the wall and came visible upon impact. A boy, about the age of a seventh year stood before them. She didn't recognize him.

"Who are you?" Minerva demanded, her hand drifting to her own wand. "What are you doing here?"

"He's a thief," Archie said, twirling his wand. Ropes appeared and tied up the boy's wrists and ankles.

"I'm not a thief," the boy said nervously. "I'm a spy."

"A spy?" Minerva and Archie exchanged looks.

The boy sighed. "I'm the water boy from Because's field hockey team. We heard that there were some weird things going on and I was sent to find out what."

Minerva opened her mouth to demand more answers, but before she could utter a word, a sudden crash echoed through the potions lab. Minerva whirled around, her wand at the ready, just in time to see a shadowy figure darting towards the bubbling cauldron containing the counter-curse potion.

"Oh no, you don't." Minerva flicked her wand with a flourish. A jet of shimmering purple light shot from the tip, hitting the would-be thief square in the chest. The figure froze mid-step, then toppled over like a felled tree, their invisibility spell shattering like a pane of glass.

Archie let out a low whistle, his eyebrows climbing towards his hairline as he took in the prone form sprawled on the stone floor. "Well, well, well," he drawled, a note of recognition in his voice. "If it isn't the star goalie from Why High. Fancy meeting you here, Miss Pepper Bogsworth."

"You have exactly ten seconds to explain yourself before I turn you into a toadstool and use you as potion ingredients," Minerva said, her voice dripping with disdain as she leveled her wand at the girl's nose.

Pepper's eyes widened, her freckled face paling beneath the mop of fiery red curls. "W-wait," she stammered, holding up her hands in a gesture of supplication. "I can explain. It's not what it looks like."

"Oh, this should be good," Archie muttered, crossing his arms over his chest and fixing Pepper with a look of deep skepticism.

Pepper's face crumpled, tears welling up in her bright green eyes. "I didn't mean for it to go this far," she wailed, her words spilling out in a jumbled rush. "I just wanted to

be the best, to prove that I was better than that smug, stuck-up Jezebel. But the potion, it backfired, and then the curse started spreading, and I didn't know what to do."

Minerva felt a cold, sinking sensation in the pit of her stomach, a dawning realization that this was a simple case of athletic rivalry gone too far. "Archie," she said, her voice strained. "I think it's time we called in the big wands. We need The Raven down here, now."

Archie nodded, his expression grim as he waved his wand in a complex pattern. A silvery wisp of smoke shot from the tip, coalescing into the shape of a sleek, ghostly raven before soaring out the door and disappearing down the corridor.

"Message sent," he said, tucking his wand back into his robes. "She should be here any minute."

And indeed, barely a moment had passed before the door to the potions lab burst open, revealing the imposing figure of Headmistress Raven herself. She swept into the room, her midnight-black robes billowing behind her like a pair of great, shadowy wings. Her raven familiar Edgar was perched on her shoulder.

"Professors Everhart and Hawthorne," she said, her voice a low, melodious purr. "I received your summons. What seems to be the problem?"

Minerva stepped forward, gesturing to the two captive students with a jerk of her chin. "We have a situation, Headmistress," she said, her tone clipped and businesslike. "These two were caught sneaking around and trying to steal the counter-curse potion we've been working on. And from what we've gathered, Pepper over here may have had a hand in cursing Jezebel Nightshade in the first place."

The Raven's eyes narrowed, her gaze sharpening to laser-like intensity as she fixed

the trembling students with a look that could have melted stone. "Is that so?" she murmured, her voice deceptively soft. "Well then, I think it's time we had a little chat, don't you?"

What followed was a spectacle that Minerva would never forget, a masterclass in intimidation and psychological manipulation that left her both awed and slightly terrified. The Raven circled the two miscreants like a shark scenting blood in the water, her questions sharp and probing, her eyes glittering with a kind of feral intensity that seemed to strip away all pretense and leave only the raw, unvarnished truth.

Under her relentless interrogation, the story came spilling out in fits and starts, a sordid tale of jealousy, ambition, and magical misdeeds. Pepper, it seemed, had been consumed with the desire to outshine Jezebel on the field, to prove herself the superior athlete once and for all. She had brewed a potion meant to enhance her own performance, but in her haste and inexperience, had botched the recipe.

The resulting concoction had not only failed to give her the boost she craved but had actually cursed her with a string of humiliating mishaps and blunders that had cost her team game after game. Desperate to undo the damage and save face, Pepper had sought out a source for more potent, illicit ingredients - a source that had led her straight to Jezebel.

For as it turned out, Jezebel had her own secrets, her own clandestine dealings in the shadowy world of black-market potion supplies. She and Pepper had struck a deal, trading rare herbs and forbidden tinctures in a dangerous game of magical one-upmanship.

But Pepper, ever the opportunist, had seen her chance for revenge. Using the very ingredients Jezebel had procured for her own nefarious purposes, she had cursed Jezebel, dosing her with a twisted variant of her own failed potion during one of their

illicit exchanges.

The curse had taken hold quickly, ravaging Jezebel's body and mind, turning her from a feared and formidable opponent to a laughingstock overnight. But Pepper's triumph had been short-lived, for the curse, it seemed, was not content to claim just one victim.

It had backfired and Pepper was cursed again as well. Pepper had grown desperate, resorting to theft and subterfuge in a last-ditch attempt to secure the counter-curse and save her own skin.

As for the hapless water boy, he was little more than a pawn, a patsy sent to do the dirty work of those too clever to risk exposure themselves. He had been promised glory, wealth, the chance to rise above his station and join the ranks of the elite. But in the end, they were going to disavow any knowledge about him.

By the time the sordid tale was told, Minerva was shaking her head. She had known that the world of competitive sports could be cutthroat, that the drive to win could push people to the brink of madness. But this was beyond anything she could have imagined.

The Raven, for her part, seemed grimly unsurprised by the revelations, her expression one of weary resignation rather than shock or outrage. With a wave of her wand, she conjured a set of glowing, ethereal shackles that snapped around the wrists and ankles of the two miscreants, binding them in place.

"Pepper Bogsworth and...what was your name again, boy?" she asked, her voice dripping with disdain.

"E-Erasmus Dankworth, ma'am," the water boy stammered, his face pale and sweaty.

"Pepper Bogsworth and Erasmus Dankworth," the Raven intoned, her voice ringing with a kind of grim finality. "You stand accused of conspiracy, sabotage, and the use of dark magic against a fellow student. These are grave charges, and ones that will not be taken lightly."

She turned to Minerva and Archie, her expression softening almost imperceptibly. "Professors, I thank you for bringing this matter to my attention. Rest assured, these two will be dealt with in accordance with the full extent of Magical Law. All of the towns magical academies do not tolerate cheaters or curse-throwers."

"And the counter-curse?" Archie asked.

The Raven's lips quirked in a small, enigmatic smile. "You can use it on Jezebel, but whether it works or not, she's off the field hockey team."

Archie sputtered and would have argued, but Minerva reached down and gripped his hand in warning. Jezebel had fucked around and was now about to find out. Archie seemed to realize that and nodded unhappily.

With that, The Raven turned on her heel and swept out of the room, the two prisoners floating along behind her like macabre marionettes.

"That was... intense," Archie said. He reached for her hand, their fingers intertwining.

"Just another day at Grimm Mawr School of Magical Arts," Minerva said. "You know, for a jock, you did pretty well back there."

"Don't sell yourself short, Professor," Archie replied, pulling her closer. "For a nerd, you handled that chaos like a pro."

"Is that your way of saying thank you?" she teased, leaning into him.

"Maybe," he said, his voice dropping to a whisper. "Or maybe it's my way of saying I couldn't have done it without you."

"Flattery will get you everywhere, Coach," Minerva smiled, squeezing his hand.

"Good, because I've got nowhere else I'd rather be," Archie admitted, feeling her warmth seep into him.

"Same here," she said softly, looking up at him through her lashes. Minerva took a deep, steadying breath, squaring her shoulders as she turned back to the bubbling cauldron. "Right then. Let's get this cursed cure brewed and bottled. We've got a student to save, and you have a trophy to win."

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Archie watched with a mixture of trepidation and barely contained amusement as Jezebel Nightshade eyed the vial of shimmering, iridescent potion with a look of deep mistrust. She sat perched on the edge of the infirmary bed, her posture tense and her hair still a coiling mass of snakes.

"You're sure this will work?" she asked, her voice rough and skeptical as she swirled the viscous liquid around in its glass prison. "Because I swear to Merlin, if I sprout tentacles or start belting out show tunes, I'm gonna hex both your bits off and feed them to the Giant Squid."

Minerva, who stood beside Archie with her arms crossed and her expression one of long-suffering patience, merely raised one elegant eyebrow in response. "Miss Nightshade," she said, her tone as dry as parchment, "I assure you that Professor Hawthorne and I have thoroughly tested this counter-curse. It is perfectly safe, and will restore you to your former self in no time." She paused, her lips twitching with the ghost of a smirk. "Though I make no promises about the show tunes. You may want to avoid any impromptu karaoke for a few days, just to be safe."

Jezebel scowled, her eyes flashing with annoyance. But beneath the bravado, Archie could see the flicker of fear, the desperate hope that this potion would indeed be the key to her salvation.

He felt a pang of sympathy for the girl. She didn't know yet that with or without the curse, she wouldn't be playing in the all-star game. Lost in his thoughts, Archie almost missed the moment when Jezebel finally tipped the vial to her lips and downed the potion in one swift, determined gulp. But the effect was immediate and unmistakable.

A blinding flash of light exploded from the girl's body, a dazzling burst of color and energy that sent both Archie and Minerva staggering back, shielding their eyes against the glare. The air crackled with magic, the very fabric of reality seeming to warp and twist around them as the counter-curse took hold.

And then, just as suddenly as it had begun, it was over. The light faded, the energy dissipated, and Jezebel Nightshade was left sitting on the bed, blinking owlishly in the sudden dimness.

"Did it work?" she croaked, her voice hoarse and uncertain. "Am I...am I back to normal?"

Archie and Minerva exchanged a glance, their eyes wide with a mix of relief and trepidation. For while the curse had indeed been lifted, there was one small, slightly hilarious side effect.

The good news was the snakes on her head were gone. The bad news? She was bald as a newborn babe. Her head as smooth and shiny as a freshly polished field hockey ball. For a moment, there was silence, but then Jezebel tentatively touched her head, and all hell broke loose.

"Merlin's saggy left buttock!" the girl shrieked, her hands flying to her naked head in horror. "I'm bald! What the bloody hell did you two do to me?"

Archie couldn't help it. He let out a guffaw of laughter, earning himself a glare from both Jezebel and Minerva that could have peeled paint off a hippogriff. But he was too relieved, too giddy with the knowledge that their potion had worked, that Jezebel was safe and sound and curse-free, to care.

"Relax, Nightshade," he said, forcing a sober expression on his face. "It's just a little side effect. Your hair will grow back in no time. And in the meantime, think of it as a

badge of honor. A testament to your strength and resilience in the face of adversity."

Jezebel looked at him like he had just suggested she wear a tutu and dance the Macarena in front of the entire school. "Easy for you to say," she snarled, crossing her arms over her chest. "You're not the one who looks like a demented house elf on steroids."

Minerva stepped forward and laid a comforting hand on Jezebel's shoulder. "Oh, don't be so dramatic, Miss Nightshade," she said, her voice gentle but firm. "You've just been through a harrowing ordeal. A little temporary hair loss is a small price to pay for your health and wellbeing."

Jezebel looked like she wanted to argue, to keep wallowing in her misery and self-pity. But something in Minerva's words, in the warmth and sincerity of her tone, seemed to penetrate the girl's defenses.

Her shoulders slumped, the fight draining out of her as she let out a long, shuddering sigh. "You're right, Professor," she said, her voice small but determined. "I'm being a total drama queen. The important thing is that I'm back to normal, and I can finally get back on the field and help my team win that championship."

"Yeah...about that," Archie started. And Minerva ducked out of the room to give them some privacy.

THE NEXT TWO DAYS PASSED in a blur of intense practices, last-minute strategy sessions, and buzz of nervous anticipation. The Grimms were focused, determined, their energy high and their resolve unshakable as they prepared for the match that would define their season.

The field hockey team had been through a lot in the past few weeks, their morale and their confidence shaken by the curse that had struck at the heart of their team. But

they were fighters, every last one of them. And even with Jezebel kicked off the team for her black market stunts, Archie knew rest of the team would give it their all, would leave everything they had on that field come game day.

Win or lose, they would do their school proud. And that was all that mattered.

Archie watched from the sidelines, his heart in his throat and his fists clenched at his sides, as his team battled their way towards victory. They were playing their hearts out, giving it everything they had, the sweat pouring down their faces and their muscles straining with effort.

But their opponents were formidable, their own skills and determination matching the Grimms' own. It was a nail-biter of a game, the score seesawing back and forth as the minutes ticked down and the tension mounted.

In the end, it came down to one final play, one last desperate push towards the goal. Catalina Talisman had the ball, her eyes narrowed and her jaw set as she charged down the field, weaving through a gauntlet of defenders like a woman possessed.

Archie held his breath, his heart pounding in his chest as he watched her close in on the net, the crowd on their feet and screaming themselves hoarse. This was it. This was their moment, their chance to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat and cement their place in Grimm Mawr Academy history.

But it was not to be.

At the last second, just as Catalina was winding up for the shot that would win them the game, a member of the opposing team came out of nowhere, their stick flashing out and catching Catalina's in a vicious, bone-jarring check. The ball went flying, bouncing off the goalpost and rolling harmlessly away as the final whistle blew.

There was a moment of stunned silence, broken only by the ragged gasps of the players and the distant sound of the other team's fans erupting into cheers. And then, like a wave crashing over a levee, the reality of their defeat hit the Grimms with devastating force.

They had lost. After all their hard work, all their sacrifice and determination, they had come up short at the final hurdle. The championship trophy would not be coming home to Grimm Mawr Academy this year.

Archie felt a crushing sense of disappointment wash over him, mingled with a fierce surge of pride and love for his team. They had given it their all, had fought with every ounce of strength and courage they possessed. And in the end, that was all anyone could ask of them.

As he watched his players slump off the field, their heads bowed and their shoulders hunched with exhaustion and defeat, Archie felt a hand slip into his, warm and strong and comforting. He looked down to see Minerva beside him, her eyes shining with sympathy and understanding.

"I'm sorry, love," she murmured, squeezing his fingers gently. "I know how much this meant to you, to all of us."

Archie nodded, swallowing past the lump in his throat. "It's all right," he said, his voice hoarse with emotion. "We gave it our best shot. And that's all that matters in the end."

He turned to face her, his expression softening as he took in the love and support shining in her eyes. "Besides," he said, a small, crooked smile tugging at his lips, "I've already won the greatest victory of all. I have you, and that's worth more than any trophy or title."

Minerva's face lit up, her smile so bright and beautiful it took his breath away. "Oh, you great big sap," she said, laughing even as she blinked back tears. "I love you too, you know. More than anything."

And then she was kissing him, her arms winding around his neck as she poured all her love and passion and joy into the press of her lips against his. Archie kissed her back with equal fervor, his heart soaring as he lost himself in the warmth and sweetness of her embrace.

They were so lost in each other, so caught up in their own little bubble of happiness, that they didn't even notice the gaggle of grinning, sweat-soaked Grimms sneaking up behind them until it was too late.

With a loud whoop of laughter and a great sloshing splash, the players dumped a massive cooler of Gatorade over the kissing couple's heads, drenching them from head to toe in sticky, neon-green liquid.

Minerva shrieked in surprise, breaking away from Archie and sputtering as she tried to wipe the Gatorade from her face. Archie, for his part, just threw back his head and roared with laughter, his heart so full of love and pride and sheer, unadulterated joy that he thought it might burst.

"You little monsters!" Minerva gasped, glaring at the cackling players with mock outrage. "Just you wait until I get my wand, I'll turn you all into toads and use you for potions ingredients!"

But there was no real heat to her words, only a fond exasperation that belied the twinkle in her eye and the twitching of her lips as she fought back a smile. The Grimms, for their part, just grinned and hooted and slapped each other on the back, their spirits lifted by the sight of their coach and their favorite professor so happy and in love.

"All right, all right, you menaces," Archie chuckled, wiping the Gatorade from his brow with the sleeve of his robes. "Go hit the showers and get changed. We've got a feast waiting for us back at the castle, and I don't know about you lot, but I'm starving."

With a final round of cheers and catcalls, the team dispersed, leaving Archie and Minerva standing alone on the field, dripping and sticky but grinning like fools.

"Well, that was bracing," Minerva said wryly, plucking at her soaked robes with a rueful smile. "I don't think I've ever been so thoroughly doused in my life."

"Ah, it builds character," Archie teased, slinging an arm around her shoulders and pulling her close. "Besides, green is definitely your color. Brings out your eyes."

Minerva snorted, swatting him on the chest even as she leaned into his embrace. "Flatterer," she accused, her voice warm with affection. "You're just trying to butter me up so I'll go easy on you in detention later."

Archie's eyebrows shot up, his grin turning wicked as he leaned in close, his breath hot against her ear. "Detention, you say?" he murmured, his voice low and suggestive. "Why Professor Everhart, I had no idea you were into that sort of thing. Naughty, naughty."

Minerva let out a choked laugh, her cheeks flushing pink as she pulled back to glare at him in mock outrage. "Oh, you are in so much trouble, mister," she growled, her eyes sparkling with mirth and desire. "Just you wait until I get you alone. I'll show you naughty."

Archie grinned, his heart racing at the promise in her words. "Can't wait, love," he said, pressing a quick, searing kiss to her smirking lips. "But first, we have a feast to attend and a team to celebrate. After all, they may not have won the championship,

but they played their hearts out and did us proud. And that's worth commemorating, don't you think?"

Minerva's expression softened, her eyes shining with pride and affection as she nodded. "You're right, of course," she said, taking his hand and twining their fingers together. "Lead the way, Coach."

And as they stepped into the Great Hall, greeted by the cheers and applause of their fellow students and staff, Archie knew that he had found something far more precious than any trophy or title. He had found his soulmate, his partner in all things, the woman who made his life complete and his heart sing with joy.

He pulled Minerva close, pressing a tender kiss to her temple as they took their seats at the head table. "I love you, Min," he murmured, his voice rough with emotion. "More than anything in this world or any other."

Minerva turned to him, her eyes shining with unshed tears and her smile so bright it could have lit up the entire hall. "I love you too, Archie," she whispered back, her hand finding his under the table and squeezing tightly. "Always and forever, no matter what."

And as the feast began, as laughter and chatter and the clinking of goblets filled the air, Archie felt a sense of peace and contentment settle over him like a warm, comforting blanket.

This was where he belonged, here at Grimm Mawr Academy, surrounded by the people he loved and the magic that flowed through every stone and beam. This was his home, his heart, his everything.

And come what may, curse or championship, victory or defeat, he knew that as long as he had Minerva by his side, as long as they faced the future together...

He would always be a winner, in the game of life and love.

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As the feast wound down and the last of the desserts vanished from the gleaming golden plates, Minerva couldn't help but notice the tension building in the air of the Great Hall. Whispers and speculative glances darted between the staff table and the House tables, all centered around two figures sitting at opposite ends of the high table.

Juno Runeheart, resplendent in robes of deep, shimmering blue, sat with her back straight and her chin lifted, her cornflower eyes fixed on some distant point beyond the enchanted ceiling. Minerva knew her friend well enough to see the faint tightness around her mouth, the barely perceptible twitch of her fingers as they toyed with the stem of her goblet. Juno was the very picture of serene composure, but beneath the surface, Minerva sensed a maelstrom of emotions.

At the other end of the table, Thaddeus Shadowspire lounged in his chair like a great black panther, his robes the color of midnight and his dark, inscrutable eyes glittering with some unspoken challenge. He had an air of languid grace about him, a coiled power that hinted at depths of knowledge and ambition that few could match. Minerva had always found him to be an enigma, a puzzle she couldn't quite solve.

Archie leaned in close, his brow furrowed as he murmured, "What's going on with those two? They look like they're about to start hexing each other into next week."

Minerva sighed, a mix of exasperation and resignation washing over her. "It's the old rivalry," she said, keeping her voice low so as not to be overheard. "Juno and Thaddeus have been at each other's throats for years, ever since they were students here themselves. They're both brilliant, both incredibly talented in their fields...but they can't stand each other."

Archie's eyebrows shot up, curiosity etched on his handsome face. "Really? What's the story there?"

Minerva hesitated, glancing around to make sure no one was eavesdropping before leaning in closer. "Well, rumor has it that they were once involved romantically. But something happened, something that drove them apart and turned their passion into bitterness and resentment."

She shook her head, memories of whispered speculations and knowing looks dancing through her mind. "No one knows the details, but ever since then, they've been locked in this endless cycle of one-upmanship and petty sniping. Always trying to outdo each other, always striving to prove who's the better wizard."

Archie let out a low whistle, his gaze flicking back to the two professors. Minerva could see the understanding dawning in his eyes, the way he was piecing together the crackling energy between Juno and Thaddeus. It was like watching two storm fronts colliding, all thunder and lightning and raw, primal power.

"And now, with the new department head position up for grabs..." he said slowly.

Minerva nodded, a sense of foreboding settling in her chest. "Exactly. It's the ultimate prize, the chance to finally prove once and for all who's the superior spellcaster. Whoever gets that job will have the power to shape the curriculum, to influence the next generation of witches and wizards. It's a huge responsibility...and an even bigger opportunity for bragging rights."

Archie let out a breath, and Minerva could practically see the gears turning in his head. "Merlin's toenails," he muttered, shaking his head. "And I thought our little curse debacle was dramatic. This is like something out of a bloody soap opera."

Minerva couldn't help but snort with laughter, the sound startling in the tense hush of the hall. "Oh, you have no idea," she said, her eyes sparkling with mirth. "Those two

have been dancing around each other for years, all heated glances and loaded words and barely repressed sexual tension. It's enough to drive a person mad."

Archie grinned, waggling his eyebrows suggestively. "Sexual tension, you say? Maybe we should lock them in a broom cupboard together, see if they can't work out their differences the old-fashioned way."

Minerva swatted him on the arm, her cheeks flushing pink even as she fought back a smile. "Oh, hush, you," she scolded, her heart swelling with affection for this impossible man. "This is serious. The fate of the entire Herbalism department hangs in the balance. Whoever gets that job will have a huge impact on the future of Grimm Mawr Academy."

Archie sobered, nodding in agreement. "You're right, of course," he said, his gaze drifting back to Juno and Thaddeus. They were still studiously ignoring each other, but Minerva could feel the tension between them, the unspoken words and long-buried emotions crackling in the air.

"I just hope they can find a way to put aside their differences and work together, for the good of the school," he said softly, his brow creased with worry. "Merlin knows we've had enough conflict and drama to last a lifetime."

Minerva reached out and took his hand, twining their fingers together in a gesture of comfort and solidarity. "They'll find a way," she said, her voice ringing with quiet confidence. "They're both too stubborn and too dedicated to let personal grudges get in the way of their duties. And who knows? Maybe this competition will be just the thing they need to finally confront their feelings and move forward."

Archie raised an eyebrow, a sly grin tugging at his lips. "Why, Professor Everhart," he drawled, his tone teasing. "Are you suggesting that our esteemed colleagues might be harboring secret feelings for each other, despite all their bickering and sniping?"

Minerva shrugged, a thrill of mischief dancing through her veins. "Stranger things have happened," she said, her voice low and conspiratorial. "After all, look at us. Who would have thought that a jock and a nerd could find true love in the midst of a curse-breaking adventure?"

Archie's eyes softened, his grip on her hand tightening as he leaned in close. "I did," he said softly, his voice thick with emotion. "I always knew, deep down, that you were the one for me. Even when we were driving each other crazy with our bickering and our stubborn pride...I knew."

Minerva felt tears prickling at the corners of her eyes, her heart so full of love and gratitude that it threatened to burst. "Me too," she whispered, leaning in to press a gentle kiss to his lips. "Me too."

And as they sat there, lost in each other's eyes and the warm glow of their love, the world around them faded away. The tension between Juno and Thaddeus, the whispers and speculations of the students, the looming challenges of the future...all of it seemed distant and unimportant in the face of what they had found in each other.

But even as Minerva basked in their happiness, she couldn't shake the feeling that this was only the beginning. That there were more adventures waiting for them just around the corner, more mysteries to unravel and more love to discover.

And as she looked out over the sea of faces in the Great Hall, at the bright young witches and wizards who held the future of Grimm Mawr Academy in their hands...she knew that whatever lay ahead, they would face it together.

Because that's what love was, in the end. A partnership, a bond that could weather any storm and conquer any curse. And with Archie by her side, Minerva felt like she could take on the world.

Even if that world was full of bickering professors, meddling students, and more

magical mayhem than you could shake a wand at.

But then again, that was all just part of the charm of Grimm Mawr Academy. The place where anything was possible, where love and laughter and learning all went hand in hand.

And Minerva wouldn't have it any other way.