

Perpetual Kittens

by pookah

The 'Kittens' Challenge! Whose Kittens are the fairest of them all? Minerva's perpetually young kittens, that's whose. (No kittens are eaten in this story!)

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Disclaimer: Only the kittens are mine!

Author's Notes:

(EWE) Harry, Ron, and Hermione are back for their 7th year.

Thanks to my splendid beta, Sweetflag. Any particularly felicitous turn of phrase was probably suggested by her! She rocks!

No kittens or snakes were harmed in the making of this fan-fiction.

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Headmistress Minerva McGonagall was having a lovely day. Her only class, seventh years, was fascinated by the two-way and three-way Transfiguration Spells they were learning. They were happily elaborating on the ways they could use the spells to delight friends and loved ones.

"When you taught us two-way Transfiguration back in sixth year," Hermione Granger burst out excitedly, "I turned a present for my parents into an owl and sent it to them. When they got it, the owl turned back into the book I had bought them." She settled back into her chair with a satisfied smile.

"That's a great idea!" said Justin Finch-Fletchley. "I'm going to transfigure some owls into photographs of owls and give them to my parents. The trigger to change one back to an owl could be both of them picking it up at the same time. Then they can send me letters any time."

"I'm going to make my godson a toy that turns into a puppy for a short time, then a bird, and then back into a toy," declared Harry Potter enthusiastically.

Oh, how he loved to brag about his godson, Teddy Lupin! Minerva was amused by Harry, who refused to boast about fighting Voldemort, or even his Quidditch prowess, but who would rattle on to anyone who would listen about his pride at being chosen as godfather of little Teddy.

"I bet my little sister would like something like that!" Justin said. Minerva smiled at his eagerness to fit in with his new friends. It was good to see Justin taking interest in life again. Several of his friends had died in the Battle of Hogwarts. This school year Hermione had taken Justin and a few other brave souls from Dumbledore's Army under her ever-maternal wing.

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After dinner, Minerva noticed that all six of her magical kittens were missing from her classroom. The seventh year students had been using them in class, turning them from kittens into kites and back again. The tracking spells she had placed on each creature would easily reveal their whereabouts, but for now, she would let the young thieves enjoy a night with the adorable, perpetually young kittens. Theft of one or more of The Cutest Kittens in the World happened at least once every year, usually by first year students who didn't know about the tracking spells placed on the enchanted animals.

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Dolores Umbridge was working late at the Ministry when the first owl arrived at her office window with a basket.

"Oh! A present for me?" she said. She pulled out her wand, and after ascertaining that no dark or dangerous magic was at work, she opened it. Out popped a tiny, fluffy black and white kitten with a charming pink bow around its neck. Dolores had only once before seen such an exquisite feline. McGonagall's perpetually young kittens were known to be the most adorable in the world, and 'dear Minerva' would not share them!

But someone had sent her one! Perhaps Professor Snape, who had seemed to appreciate her efforts more than the other teachers, or that worthy Mr. Filch, who had been her staunchest supporter during her tenure at Hogwarts.

"Oh! Aren't you the sweetest little darling?" Dolores cooed. "And that old stick will never get you back. I'll take you home, and she'll never know what became of you." Another owl arrived with a larger basket. Two more kittens! Dolores was in heaven! As she played with her new pets, two more owls arrived bearing a total of three more kittens.

The owls were dismissed without so much as a thank you; Dolores had eyes only for her irresistible kitties. She didn't even notice when the first snake bit her ankle and hardly noticed the second one.

"What's that? A snake? How did a snake get in here, Snookums?" she asked the winsome tabby in her arms. She felt tired.

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"Come in, Kingsley," Minerva said, waving her wand at the door to open it. Phineas Nigellus had informed her that the Minister for Magic was coming through the castle bearing a box.

"Thank you for returning my kittens. You didn't have to bring them yourself!" she continued. "Although you are always welcome, of course. Put them there on the floor and we'll have a nice cuppa."

"Thank you, Minerva," Kingsley said, doing as instructed. Minerva stepped over to a tea table near the fireplace and tapped it with her wand, speaking only the word, "tea."

"Nice comfy chairs by the fire, kittens on the hearth rug, and a friendly visit. I'm glad you have the time to stay for a chat," she said. The tea table was suddenly covered with a large tea service, plates of various delicacies catering to all tastes (although it was perhaps a bit heavy on the side of sweet pastries, for the Headmistress had a sweet tooth she liked to indulge).

The two settled down into comfy chairs by the fire and Minerva poured out, urging Kingsley to eat plenty of the food provided, lest the house-elves' feelings be hurt.

"Thank you, Minerva, just the way I like it," Kingsley said. "Even if you hadn't invited me, I would have had to stay a few minutes for I need to discuss Dolores Umbridge."

"I admit I was surprised when I tracked the Kittens this morning and discovered they were in the Ministry. Had SHE taken them?" Minerva put her teacup down and eyed Kingsley with great interest.

"We don't know, Minerva, I found them in her office, but..."

"Aha! She's always wanted my kittens!"

"Well, Minerva, we found her, too. Only Dolores was dead."

"Dead!" Minerva was so shocked she dropped her shortbread. "Are my kitties alright?" Minerva instinctively snatched up her favourite, who had come to investigate the dropped shortbread. Clutching at the tabby (with small black markings around the eyes), she stared at Kingsley.

"I had the kittens checked over for any problems before I brought them here," Kingsley said.

"Thank you, Kingsley, that was very thoughtful." Minerva put the kitten down and picked up her cup of tea.

"How did she die?" she asked calmly.

Kingsley could see that Minerva was obviously more concerned about her kittens than that cow Umbridge. He felt the same way himself; he loved those kittens! He recalled them from Transfiguration class when he was a boy. Umbridge, on the other hand, he was glad to be rid of.

"The Healer said she was killed by a venomous snake," Kingsley said. "Of course we're searching the entire Ministry building in case it's inside there. But it isn't likely to be there."

"Of course not, after Arthur Weasley...."

"Yes," agreed Kingsley. "Since Arthur almost died from that snakebite, there have been magical wards in place to warn us of any venomous or dangerous animal or plant entering the building."

"The Healers are saying she must have been bitten before she came into the Ministry. Security records say she went out for dinner and came back in about seven p. m. Perhaps she thought such a small snake wouldn't be poisonous, or maybe, she just didn't notice the bites as they seem to be on her ankle, and one on her wrist."

"Well, I can't say I'm sorry that 'dear Dolores' is dead," said Minerva placidly. "Surprised, of course. I thought she'd outlive us all; that type usually does."

"Thank you for returning my kittens. I think the idea that she was bitten elsewhere is the right one. The snake that bit Umbridge would have attacked the kittens, too, had it been there in her office."

"I have Aurors giving her home a thorough search right now. And the restaurant she ate at last night," Kingsley said.

"I wonder how she got the kittens," he continued thoughtfully. "We've traced her movements yesterday; I am almost certain she wasn't here."

"You know how mad she is... was about kittens, Kingsley," Minerva said pointedly. "She tried to get some of them away from me when she was teaching here three years ago. Perhaps she stole them, though that's unlikely."

"To my knowledge, she hasn't returned since Peeves chased her out. I would know if she came in, the portraits would tell me, the house-elves would tell me, and I do have

wards set up against *certain* people, to warn me. The castle is enchanted to work with me."

"Could one of the house-elves have taken them for her?" Kingsley asked. "Many of them are free, even if they do not acknowledge it."

"I do not believe even one of the house-elves would have stolen them for her," Minerva said with a flash of temper. "They are loyal to Hogwarts."

She took a long soothing drink of tea to calm down and thought the problem through.

"I imagine some of the students wanted to play a trick on her," the Headmistress continued. "My guess is they sent her the kittens, knowing I would track them down and she'd have to give them up. They belong to Hogwarts, after all."

"I believe you're right," Kingsley said. "I'm not mentioning the kittens any more than I have to. It is an unrelated prank perpetrated by person or persons unknown. I'd prefer not to add to the difficulties facing the students. They've got enough to cope with, coming back to school after the tragedies of the past year. Just drop a word for them to lay off jokes to the Ministry. I don't want those youngsters in the papers again."

"Minerva!" came the familiar voice of the Deputy Headmaster from the spiral staircase leading to the Headmistress's office. Running footsteps spoke of his haste to mount the revolving stairs. Minerva's eyes opened in surprise to hear her usually reserved Deputy running up the stairs two at a time and shouting even before he opened the door.

"That vile toad, Umbridge, is dead!" Severus Snape threw the door open and actually grinned at his employer before spotting Kingsley in the office.

"Good to see you, Kingsley," he said. "A *lovely* day, isn't it?"

Kingsley looked out of the window in Minerva's office to see cold, autumn rain batter at the glass.

"Nature, herself, weeps at dear Dolores's death," Severus said dryly. Kingsley barked with laughter, and Minerva felt compelled to cover her mouth, trying to stifle her mirth.

"Aren't those *your* kittens, Minerva?" Severus asked, noticing the kittens playing on the hearth rug. "What are they doing with those hideous ribbons around their necks?"

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That afternoon, Hermione stayed after class as Professor Snape had requested. He waited solemnly until all the other students had left before he began to speak to her in an almost urgent voice.

"Miss Granger, I understand what was done, I understand how. I understand, probably better than most, *why*. But it must stop here!" he stated firmly, his eyes narrowing as he focused on her. "In a year, Potter and Weasley will be Aurors...yourself, if you wish it, although becoming an Unspeakable would make better use of your... qualities and talents," he added with a smirk. "You won't need to take the law into your own hands; you'll be instruments of the law."

"Indeed, Miss Granger, I expect someday you'll *be*making the law. So you and your Muggle-born Liberation Front need not be so... dedicated, at this time; lay low, for now. Stay 'under the radar,' as they say."

He gave her a formal little bow. "I look forward with great interest, Miss Granger, to watching your career. You may go."

Hermione looked straight at her professor. Severus could see that she realised that *he* knew what she had done. She suddenly relaxed, no longer looking like a prim-and-proper schoolgirl, but like a mischievous conspirator. She grinned at him before curtsying in return.

Severus could have sworn he saw a glimpse of newly cut fangs where her perfect teeth should be. No, a closer look assured him that it was merely a trick of the light, or of his imagination; her teeth were as perfect as they had ever been after Poppy had fixed them

"Thank you, sir. You're right, of course. It was a foolish risk to take," she said earnestly. "We will bide our time, now, and build our power base. I'll say some students are suspected of stealing the school kittens, and that should keep the Army in line. Most of them don't know anything, anyway."

The girl slipped silently out of the classroom, leaving Severus staring thoughtfully at the door. Miss Granger would bear watching. She could easily become a powerful leader with the Finch-Fletchley bankroll and Potter and Weasley as her lapdogs, telling the public whatever she told them. She could rule the world if she wished.

Severus had no doubt that her motives were good, but little snakes (as Dolores had discovered) can be dangerous, and need watching.

the end

The Prompt:

55. It begins with kittens. It ends with snakes. (There's an obvious SS/HG reference in there, but it really can be anything! As long as there are kittens. And snakes. I'd like for the kittens not to be fed to the snakes.)