

Winterreise

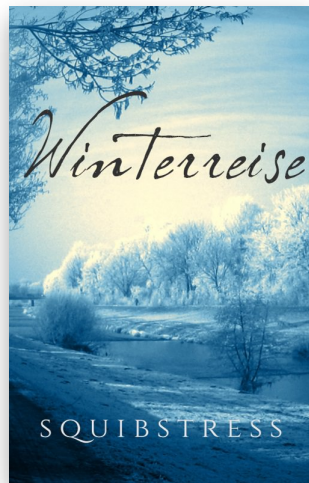
by Squibstress

As the war intensifies, tensions grow between Albus and Minerva. A surprising encounter at the Yule Ball leads Minerva to ponder the nature of their relationship.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 of 4

As the war intensifies, tensions grow between Albus and Minerva. A surprising encounter at the Yule Ball leads Minerva to ponder the nature of their relationship.



It had been a difficult summer, giving way to a tense autumn. Albus Dumbledore was worried and preoccupied with the increasing number of disappearances and open Death-Eater attacks. The brazen murder of the Prewett brothers had shaken everyone, especially Minerva, who was quite close to their sister, Molly Weasley.

The Ministry had been unceasing in their requests for Dumbledore to review this plan or that edict, and there was fierce division within the Wizengamot, with some Elders wanting to detain and interrogate family members and known associates of suspected Death Eaters. Albus had been vehement in his opposition to this idea, but with each new death, he and his supporters lost more ground.

He and Minerva had hardly seen one another that summer, sometimes encountering each other only during Order meetings at Moody's place for weeks at a time. The

running of the school had been left largely to her for the holidays, and despite the fact that it was a far easier task when the students and many of the faculty were away, she had been looking forward to the start of term in the knowledge it would bring her husband back to Hogwarts, if not to the full assumption of his administrative duties. He was far too busy for it, and as Deputy Headmistress, it was her role to take up the slack. She had had to abandon a promising research project when she realised there were not enough hours in the day to revise curriculum, tend to staff requests, supervise supplies, and plan budgets, in addition to her extra-curricular work for the Order. Something had to give, and her academic pursuits were the first casualty.

It was probably the combination of anxiety and exhaustion, but she and Albus had been at odds more often than usual, and it seemed to Minerva that whenever they saw one another that autumn, they quarrelled. They were not serious rows, but their depressing frequency placed a strain on their relationship to a degree that had not ever happened during their marriage.

Sex had always been an important part of their relationship, and they normally tried to steal a few discreet hours every week to be alone together, even during term. But by the time Minerva had discovered, after the fact, Sirius Black's attempt to lure Severus Snape to the Shrieking Shack during one of Remus Lupin's transformations, she and Albus had not made love in nearly six weeks. She had tried to shrug it off, but it was putting her on edge.

Black was far from her favourite Gryffindor, and when she found out that Albus had not told her of the incident and that he had merely set the boy a series of detentions in punishment for his dangerous prank, she was incredibly angry. Albus had left most serious disciplinary matters...those that could not be handled by the transgressor's Head of House...to her, as he had much else that term, and she had spent entirely too much of her time dealing with the antics of "the Marauders", as Black and his friends had come to be known. The fact that Albus had left her completely in the dark about this latest and most serious incident involving them made her feel insignificant and used.

"He deliberately endangered another student's life. Do you honestly think that a few detentions constitute an adequate punishment?" Minerva asked angrily after marching into the Headmaster's office to demand an explanation.

The witch and wizard were looking at one another across the enormous desk.

"Sirius is truly remorseful, and the Snape boy was not, after all, injured," replied Dumbledore.

"Rubbish," she replied. "Sirius Black has never felt a moment's remorse in his life. And as for Severus' narrow escape, that was entirely due to James, who at least seems to have a wee bit o' sense."

She was working up to quite a fury, Albus knew, when her accent became more pronounced. "Sense" sounded like "saince".

"Well, we may hope that some of that sense rubs off, then," the Headmaster replied, and his calm tone only infuriated her more.

"Are you being deliberately obtuse, Albus? Surely you've noticed that it is Black who influences the others. James and Remus take their cues from him, and little Peter follows him around like a Niffler looking for gold. The others have their share of mischief, no question, but Black is the one who is truly reckless. I think it's high time he was taught a real lesson," she said, her voice rising sharply.

"Minerva, you must take the boy's upbringing into account," Albus replied, a hint of irritation just beginning in his voice. He disliked it when she questioned him on matters of discipline. "He has not had the advantages that most children can take for granted."

"Not had the advantages? His family is one of the wealthiest in Britain, what could he possibly have wanted for?" she asked.

"Now it is you who are being obtuse," Dumbledore answered. "I meant love and affection, and the care of parents to teach him right from wrong."

She was chastened, but only slightly. She decided to take a new tack.

"And Severus? What advantages has he had? Those boys pick on him mercilessly, and I, for one, think it's time it stopped," she said.

"I don't think it would be doing him any favours to intervene too much. He is not a boy who accepts help willingly, and he will need to learn to fight his own battles if he is to overcome his background,"

"If he lives that long," she muttered.

Now it was Albus who adopted a new strategy. "I know you are fond of the boy, Slytherin though he is. I suspect it's because he's lonely and bookish, and very, very smart. Much like you were as a girl," he said.

She was unnerved. "You are daft, man; that boy is nothing like I was. I feel for him because of his appalling circumstances. In truth, he scares me a little. He's intelligent, yes, and immensely talented in some areas, but his interests and way of looking at the world are vastly different from mine."

Albus fixed her with a pointed stare. "Have you stopped to think that you might have developed a similar outlook if you had not had the ~~theadvantages~~ advantages of your father's wealth and position, and more importantly, his love and guidance?"

"That is rather beside the point," she said icily.

"I think not," he replied. "You take those advantages for granted, my dear, and you ignore the fact that, growing up without them, Severus and Sirius are cut from similar cloth, whether or not they see it. They're both desperate for love and attention; they just go about getting it differently."

"Be that as it may, Albus, it is no excuse to ignore Sirius' flagrant and persistent violation of school rules," she said.

"I'm aware of your feelings about rule-breaking, but I recall that there were one or two rather significant ones you were quite willing to shatter during your...seventh year, wasn't it?" he said.

The days he could make her blush with the mention of her brazenness during the months of their clandestine affair were long past.

"Albus Dumbledore, the safety of the students is not a joking matter; I'm serious about this," she said.

"So am I," he said, his voice suddenly low and dangerous. "And *never* imply that I take the safety of the students of this school lightly."

She was silent for a moment. She had crossed the line, and she knew it.

"I apologise, Albus. But I still think Black needs..."

"Leave it, Minerva," he said, warning in his voice.

The battle was lost, she thought. She was not a good loser. "As you wish, Headmaster," she said..

He sighed, and tried to salvage the evening. They had planned to steal a few hours together that night for the first time in weeks. But he was very, very tired, and his attempt to quell her anger flew far wide of the mark. "Minerva, my dear, you've been working so hard lately, what with the preparations for the Yule Ball, your research proposal (*You mean the one I abandoned weeks ago?* she thought bitterly), and your normal teaching duties. Why don't you have a day off?"

This was too much. "Albus, I don't need..."

"I think we can manage to keep the castle standing without you for one afternoon," he said, ignoring her protest.

Gods, how she hated it when he was dismissive!

"I know, why don't you go into Hogsmeade and find yourself a new dress for the ball? Something nicer than the tartan thing you've been wearing for the last ten years. As fetching as you are in it, it is a bit schoolmarm-ish."

She couldn't believe he was shooing her off to go shopping like some idle Ministry wife with nothing but frocks and frivols on her mind. He rarely patronised her like this, but, Circe! it made her white with fury when he did.

"Fine," she answered. She had nothing more to say to this man.

"Good," he said smiling and rising from his desk. "Have fun, my sweet."

As she left his office quietly seething, she had an idea.

Be careful what you wish for, Albus Dumbledore

He was not surprised when she didn't appear in his chambers at the appointed hour for their private time. He simply Vanished her half of the dinner the house-elves had prepared, and continued with his reading.

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Several hours later, Minerva was back in her quarters, setting down a package bearing the label *Gladrags, Fine Apparel for the Discerning Witch and Wizard* with a look of smug satisfaction on her face.

She hated shopping of any kind, and found shopping for clothes particularly odious, but she had outdone herself today, she thought. The gown she had finally selected was perfect for her purpose, and it gave her an extra measure of satisfaction that it had cost her more than one month's worth of her wages and Albus' combined.

Her husband and superior would be shocked at how obediently she had followed his suggestion.

"Squee, Minerva, you didn't!" squealed Poppy Pomfrey with delight when Minerva showed her the result of her shopping trip, and its price tag, three days later.

"I'm very much afraid I did," Minerva said, grinning at her. Poppy could hardly contain her glee. Although she was exceptionally discreet, Poppy loved intrigue, particularly when it involved her best friend, and even more particularly when it involved her best friend getting the better of their mutual boss, who happened to be Minerva's husband.

"Well, go try it on," urged Pomona. "I want to see!"

Rolanda Hooch, who had joined their small circle of friends that fall, when she had retired from professional Quidditch to take the post of Hogwarts' flying instructor, rolled her eyes.

The compact, muscular witch was a connoisseur of the finer points of battle on the Quidditch pitch, but was notoriously unsubtle when it came to jousting in other arenas.

When Minerva emerged from her bedroom several minutes later, her three friends sat dumbstruck.

"Well?" Minerva asked nervously. "Is it too much?"

"I'd say it's just about enough," said Pomona, giggling.

"Yes, a few minor alterations, and it should just about cover your bum," said Poppy. "I'd say it's perfect."

Rolanda whistled. "Minerva, if you ever decide to switch teams, promise you'll call me first," she said looking at her friend appreciatively. "You look good enough to eat."

"Thanks, Ro. I just might do that if Albus doesn't appreciate my efforts tonight," said Minerva.

"Tease," said Rolanda, winking.

The four women broke into gales of laughter.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 of 4

The Yule Ball provides some unexpected relief from the growing tension between Albus and Minerva, leading her to ponder the nature of their relationship.

That evening, Minerva spent longer on *hertoilette* than she had before their wedding. Of course, she was nearly twenty years older now, and it took a little more skill and effort to create the desired effect.

She surveyed the results of her work in her bedroom mirror. The subtle makeup she almost never wore made her look more rested, and her hair was twisted into a slightly loose chignon rather than the usual tight bun, making her look younger than she normally cared to. She also wore the exquisite emerald earrings her father had given her on her wedding day but that she had only worn a handful of times. All in all, it would do nicely, she thought. She put on her old tartan dress cloak over the frock and set off toward the Great Hall.

When she got there, the ball was already in full swing, as she had planned. She was never late for anything, and she wanted to put Albus slightly on edge before she even arrived, so she had scheduled her arrival for precisely eight twenty. Students twisted and gyrated on the dance floor or milled around the refreshment tables, and staff members were standing about the room in groups strategically placed to ensure the students' exuberance didn't exceed the limits of propriety.

Players to the pitch, Minerva thought, as she walked to a corner of the hall, removed her tartan dress cloak and handed it to the house-elf that was waiting to take it. She felt the chill air on her bare shoulders and shivered imperceptibly. Her nipples hardened in response to the cold, and she realised that it showed through the thin silk of her gown. She felt self-conscious but plucked up her nerve, thinking, *in for a Knut, in for a Sickle*. Making a quick survey of the terrain, she crossed the room to where Horace Slughorn stood near the pastry table.

She was aware of the students nearest watching her in shock as she glided over to the Potions master.

"Good evening, Horace. All quiet on the Western Front?" she enquired.

"I beg your pardon?" Horace asked, turning from the table where he had been carefully selecting a few Pumpkin Pasties. When he saw Minerva, he dropped two of the confections, soiling the front of his voluminous, mustard-coloured dress-robos with whipped cream. The way his mouth hung open was most gratifying, if somewhat revolting.

"Minerva, how lovely you look," he stammered, once he had recovered his powers of speech. His eyes dropped to her breasts, then quickly darted away. "I'm sorry, I didn't quite hear your question," he said to cover his embarrassment. "Something about western something or other?"

"Never mind," she replied, not bothering to explain the reference to the classic Muggle novel. "You've got pastry on your robes," she said, taking a napkin from the table and brushing the white residue from his front. She was delighted to see his walrus-like face blush beet red. "If you'll excuse me, Horace," she said, "I must speak to Albus about something."

She had spied the Headmaster about twenty-five feet away. He was talking animatedly with Filius Flitwick. Neither man had seen her yet.

The game is afoot, she said to herself and began to make her way across the floor toward the two men.

Albus saw her when she was about ten feet away. She had indeed gotten a new frock for the ball. It was a pale, champagne-coloured silk that subtly set off her Celtic skin and green eyes. The neckline was not immodest: it draped in soft folds that hung from her collarbones to reveal the barest hint of the cleft between her breasts. Satin straps in a slightly darker, brownish shade held it on her otherwise bare shoulders. As she grew closer, he saw how the bias-cut silk didn't so much cling to her as gently kiss the curves of her breasts and hips. A few steps more, and he could see her nipples straining against the whisper-thin fabric, and he realised with a start that everyone else in the Great Hall could see them too. The thought sent electric shocks to his groin. His lungs forgot how to function for a moment.

He gave no sign that anything was amiss, however. When Minerva arrived at her destination, he merely finished what he was saying to Flitwick, then greeted his wife, straightening up to look over the head of his tiny colleague, who had his back to the newcomer.

"Ah, Minerva, we were wondering where you had got to. Filius was just telling me about the latest theory on the development of Freezing Charms. Apparently, a group in Albania has published research to suggest that their magical basis may spring from the same source as the Dementor Effect. But Filius thinks there are several holes in that hypothesis, isn't that right, Filius? . . . Filius?"

Flitwick had apparently been struck momentarily dumb when he turned and found himself staring directly at Minerva McGonagall's silk-draped thighs, then looked up to take in the rest of the witch who was towering over him.

"What was that, Albus, I . . . oh, yes, the Dementor Hypothesis," he said when he recovered his wits. "Very suspect, I'd say. There were a number of confounding factors that the paper failed to take into account. Sloppy work, in my estimation." He shifted over slightly, both to allow Minerva to stand next to the Headmaster and to put some space between himself and the woman's legs.

The three chatted amiably about this and that until Flitwick found his chance to escape. "Excuse me, Albus, Minerva . . . I think young Mr Black may be about to fortify the punch," he said, scurrying off to the drinks table where Sirius was standing and looking a bit too deliberately casual.

Minerva waited for Albus to say something about her appearance, but he just continued to natter on about Charms theory or whatever ridiculous subject he and Flitwick had been on about. She noticed that, while he occasionally glanced from the dance floor to her face, he never looked below her neck. After a few minutes of this, he said abruptly, "And now you'll need to excuse me, my dear. It's time for my appointed rounds," and walked off without a glance, leaving her to fume quietly and alone.

She was not alone for long, however. It was customary for each of the staff to dance one or two of the more staid numbers with one another and with the Head Boy or Girl, but tonight it seemed that every male staff member, with the exception of her husband and tiny Professor Flitwick, wanted to dance with her. She even endured a waltz with Hagrid...silently performing a precautionary Duro Charm on her toes as he took her by the waist...who enjoyed a direct view down the front of her gown from his vantage point on high. Hagrid tried not to look, or at least, not to be obvious about it, but subtlety was not one of his strong suits.

The students regarded this scene with annoying astonishment. In their youth and self-absorption, they had never considered that their teachers could be sexy, or...horror of horrors!...interested in sex. Professor McGonagall decided to consider it part of their essential education for the evening.

Among the students watching her most closely were James Potter and Sirius Black, and by extension, Peter Pettigrew, who did not see what the fuss was about. James and Sirius had a crude rivalry going over their...largely imaginary...conquests among the fair sex. Sirius had been riding James about his continuing failure to get Lily Evans to go out with him, and James was getting increasingly angry about his friend's insinuations about his lack of prowess. It irked him that, despite his status as a star Quidditch player and Head Boy, Sirius always seemed to be more popular and successful among the girls at Hogwarts. Sirius had an easy, bad-boy charm that James envied and tried to emulate, but when he did, it always seemed to come across as swaggering and puffery. Their eyes followed their professor as she danced, evidently hypnotised by the way her dress shimmered and rippled softly, reflecting the light with every sway of her hips.

When Hagrid had finally trodden his last on Professor McGonagall's toes, James saw his chance to shut his friend up. With a cocky grin, he said to Sirius, "I'm gonna go take advantage of one of the perks of being Head Boy. Watch and weep, dogbreath," and strutted out onto the dance floor.

Sirius watched as James spoke something to Professor McGonagall and made a quick bow. She took James' hand, and he put his arm around her waist and began to dance her, somewhat haltingly, around the floor. Sirius' amusement turned to disbelief when he saw James' hand creep down to the curve of McGonagall's lower back, then awe as he saw it inch further toward her arse. He smirked when he saw his professor's hand move from her student's shoulder to reach down and reattach James' errant palm firmly to her waist. When the dance was over, James walked, grinning and slightly pink about the cheeks, back to where Sirius was standing slack-jawed with amazement and, truth be told, a bit of envy.

"That was brilliant, Prongs!" Sirius exclaimed. "I can't believe you copped a feel from old McGonagall! Was she mad? I'm surprised she didn't hex you into next year."

"Nope. Matter of fact, she told me she never had better and could I meet her at the Astronomy Tower after the dance," said James.

"What did it feel like," Peter interjected breathlessly, not really interested, but anxious to be part of the boys' banter.

"Like she didn't have any knickers on," answered James with a sly smile.

"Merlin's balls, are you kidding?" asked Sirius.

"Nope," James said. "She's obviously got nothing on under the top of that dress, so I guess she decided to *gœu natural* tonight."

The three boys stood in silent contemplation of this intriguing possibility for a few moments before Peter asked, "What *sau natural*?"

The only other person to witness the incident between Potter and Professor McGonagall was Severus Snape. He had come to the ball grudgingly after Professor Slughorn

prodded him to "uphold the honour of the noble House of Slytherin." Severus stood alone in a corner trying to look aloof and unconcerned, only managing to appear as if he had just swallowed a vomit-flavoured Bertie's.

He had developed the habit of keeping his eye on Potter and Black. It was safer to know where they were in proximity to himself, he had found. His hatred for Potter had only increased since James had saved his life by sabotaging the little prank Black had tried to play on him that autumn. That git Potter was the last person Severus wanted to feel indebted to. And he was seething that Black had gotten off with a few detentions rather than the expulsion that would have been the fate of anyone else who had pulled such a potentially disastrous stunt.

He had seen Potter go up to dance with Professor McGonagall, and felt a tiny twinge of envy when the boy put his arm around her waist. That feeling turned to fury when he saw his nemesis actually put his hand fleetingly on the professor's left buttock. The fact that she didn't hex him, or even stop dancing with him, just showed the enormous favouritism Potter always got, Severus thought bitterly. His fury only grew when he realised he was the tiniest bit excited. There was no denying that Professor McGonagall looked stunning, and very, very different from the stern Transfiguration teacher everyone was accustomed to seeing. Severus realised with the self-loathing that only an unhappy seventeen-year-old can muster that he had been watching as her breasts moved hypnotically under the silk of her gown. He was no better than Potter, he thought with disgust. He loved Lily Evans with all his heart and soul, and here he was ogling another woman's body...and not just any other woman, either. His professor! Who had been one of the few people at Hogwarts to treat him with kindness and respect.

Severus looked over at Black as James swaggered back to join his cabal. He could stand it no more when he heard the three louts laughing uproariously, at some crude joke at Professor McGonagall's expense, no doubt. Severus stalked out of the Great Hall to find solace with his secret cache of Dark-Magic books.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 of 4

The Yule Ball provides some unexpected relief from the growing tension between Albus and Minerva, leading her to ponder the nature of their relationship.

By the end of the evening, Minerva was exhausted and irritable. Not only had her plan to get some of her own back from her husband...or at least make him notice her...failed spectacularly, but she had endured numerous dances with metaphorically slobbering colleagues, had her feet trodden upon by a half-giant, and had her arse fondled by a cocky teenaged boy.

All in all, not a wonderful night, she sighed to herself. Might as well pack it in

The ball was winding down in any case, with only a few intrepid couples swaying rapturously under the fading enchanted starlight. Minerva wandered over to where Rolanda and Pomona were surreptitiously checking the time.

"I'm going to bed," she said. "There's no sign of Albus, and I'm exhausted. I'm afraid this dress was a waste of Galleons."

"I don't know about that," said Pomona. "Looked to me like you were the belle of the ball. Even Rolanda here couldn't get a dance to save her life," she said, gesturing to the younger witch.

"Only because you don't know how to waltz properly," quipped Madam Hooch.

Minerva smiled at her dear friends' banter and said, "I'll do one more set of rounds before bed...try to roust the young lovers out of the corners before I head in. Are you certain you don't need my help tidying up?"

"No, go on, lovey," said Pomona. "You've had a busy night," she added with a sympathetic smile. "The house-elves'll get most of it anyway, then we'll head back too."

They exchanged goodnights. Minerva retrieved her tartan cloak from a sleepy house-elf and set off down the corridor to have a last check on the ground-floor classrooms before heading to Gryffindor Tower.

When she had reached the end of the classrooms corridor and was about to venture out into the cold December night, she heard a sound like breaking glass coming from the caretaker's office, followed by a low "Damn!" that was definitely not Argus Filch's voice.

When she had opened the door with a whispered "*Alohomora*", she was greeted by the sight of Sirius Black frantically waving his wand, trying to fix an ugly, cat-shaped ceramic lamp that lay in three pieces on the floor of the office beside the desk. He jumped up when he heard the door open.

"Mr Black," she said with irritation. "Why am I unsurprised to see you? You are aware, of course, that this corridor, and most especially this office, are out-of-bounds after five o'clock?" she asked the guilty-looking boy. She took her wand from its pocket and quickly repaired the fallen lamp, which placed itself back on the desk.

"Yes, P'fessor. Sorry, P'fessor," he said, sounding not a bit of it. In fact, he sounded a bit drunk.

"Mr Black, I believe that has to be the most frequently used word in your vocabulary. Now, are you going to tell me exactly what you are doing in Mr Filch's office at . . ." She glanced at the clock on the wall. " . . . five minutes to midnight?"

"Jus' looking for somethin' that belongs to me," Sirius said evasively, swaying slightly on his feet.

"Have you by any chance been drinking, Mr Black?" she asked, still annoyed, but also slightly amused. The students always thought they could hide it, and they were always wrong.

"Professor, no, Miss!" he answered in feigned horror.

She hoped he wasn't going to vomit on the way back to Gryffindor Tower. It had happened on more than one occasion over the years, and she remembered an especially unpleasant incident when a third-year Hufflepuff had managed to baptise both Poppy Pomfrey and her with the remainder of a Halloween dinner before they could get the girl to her bed in the infirmary to sleep it off. She didn't think Black would need the infirmary; this was almost certainly not his first experience with too much Firewhisky.

Sirius stood looking at his Transfiguration professor through slightly blurry eyes. He was thinking about James and his little stunt with McGonagall on the dance floor, and about all the boasting his friend was going to do about it. And about the way she looked in that dress. Then he got a wonderful idea.

"Come along, Mr Black. I'll just deliver you to Professor Lem..." Minerva was cut off mid-sentence when the young man lunged at her.

Sirius had intended to kiss her but missed his target, managing only to plaster his lips to the corner of her mouth and smear a short, coral slash of lipstick across her cheek. He was off balance, and she had to put her hands on his shoulders to steady him, or both of them would have tumbled to the floor. He grinned sheepishly when she straightened him up, telling him sharply, "That will be quite enough of *that*, Mr Black."

She was shocked at his actions but not especially concerned about her safety. As troublesome as Sirius Black was, he was unlikely to harm her; moreover, she had her wand in her cloak pocket, and he was definitely no match for her in a duel, even stone sober. She realised she had dropped the cloak when she had moved to steady him, and was about to pick it up when she saw his eyes suddenly gain focus and grow wide.

Minerva turned to see the tall figure of Albus Dumbledore standing in the open doorway. His face had thunder in it.

"Sirius Black," said the Headmaster, his voice low, but very dangerous. "It is now five minutes past curfew. Go to your dormitory *Now*."

Sirius didn't need a second invitation. He shot out of the caretaker's office, suddenly soberer than he had ever felt in his life.

Dumbledore stood looking at his wife without speaking. For the first time that night, Minerva saw him move his eyes from her face down her body. She was shivering, but she wasn't sure if it was due to the draft that had followed her into the room when she opened the door, or to something else. She saw fury in his sea-blue eyes, and how it made them cold and hard-looking. She began to feel a whisper of fear, mixed with something different that made her feel slightly ashamed. She wondered suddenly if he thought she had welcomed the boy's kiss...then she heard the door slam shut.

He was at her in two paces. He grabbed the front of her gown at the neckline and tore it down the middle to her waist. Taking her roughly by the upper arms, he pulled her to him and fastened his mouth on her neck where it met her shoulder. He sucked hard at the spot, then bit her briefly and sharply. She wondered if he had drawn blood.

She said nothing, even when he moved his hands to her breasts, kneading them bruisingly with his strong fingers. She didn't speak, even when he gathered the skirt of her dress up above her hips, then lifted her, dropping her hard to sit at the edge of the caretaker's desk. She was silent, even when he unfastened his robes and opened his shorts, then pushed her knees apart and thrust into her roughly. As he took her so hard that she later found bruises on her inner thighs, she made no sound.

After a minute, he put his arms around her back and lifted her off the desk. Still buried inside her, he sank to his knees with a sickening crack and let her crash back on the floor, falling on top of her. He moved his hands to her wrists and held them above her head, pinning her arms to the floor. She had just a moment to wonder if he would stop if she asked him to, before he was fucking her again, pounding her painfully into the cold wood.

She came before he did, when he bent to graze his teeth roughly across her left nipple. A minute later, she felt him buck and spasm inside her. They lay on the floor, Minerva still pinned under him, for several minutes. Then he rolled off her and got slowly to his feet. He looked down at his wife lying on the floor with her dress torn and her most secret parts exposed. The fury in his eyes was extinguished, replaced with tenderness and wonder. He leant down, offering her his hand, and helped her to her feet. He used his wand to repair her dress insofar as it was possible; it was clearly ruined for all time. He picked up her cloak and draped it gently around her shoulders, fastening the hook in the front. Releasing the door, he took her hand and led her back to his private quarters.

If someone had come looking for the Deputy Headmistress that night, they would have been surprised to find her rooms empty. She was with her husband, in the bed they had shared for an entire night only a few dozen times and never when the students were in residence. He touched her gently then, soothing with his hands and his mouth all the places he had made sore.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 of 4

The Yule Ball provides some unexpected relief from the growing tension between Albus and Minerva, leading her to ponder the nature of their relationship.

When Minerva awoke, it took a few moments before she remembered she was not in her own bedroom. She realised it was late when she saw the sunlight pooling in from behind the drapes. She moved to get up, then thought the better of it. Albus was still sleeping, snoring gently next to her, and besides, she thought, they had already missed breakfast in the Great Hall, an occurrence that was bound to be remarked upon for its rarity.

She settled back into her pillow and thought about what had happened the previous night. It had occurred to her, when Albus first looked at her with such violence, that he thought she was having a tryst with the boy in the caretaker's office, but she had quickly realised how ridiculous that was. Albus was not a jealous man certainly not an insecure one and he knew her very well. The notion that he could have believed, even for an instant, that she might invite a sexual relationship with anyone else specially a student as preposterous.

As he had besieged her and there was no other word for it, she thought he had understood that he was pouring into her all the rage and frustration and fear that had been building over the months the way he sometimes poured intense memories into the Pensieve so he could focus on whatever task was at hand.

And Albus Dumbledore always had an important task at hand. He was a man pulled in more directions than the unfortunate John Ballard. That had been a source of friction between them often enough. Not because she was resentful of the time he had to devote to the needs of the school and great, wide world (although at times she was; she couldn't help it), but because she was sometimes afraid for him, that he would break under the strain.

And so, when he had set upon her that way last night, she accepted it without protest because she was his wife, and it was the path she had chosen when she hitched her star to his. She would allow herself to be subsumed because she loved him and because his belief in the greater good demanded it.

There were compensations, she thought, looking at the greying man sleeping beside her. Whatever the challenges that came with being with this complicated, brilliant wizard, she would not have to suffer the troubles that plagued many women: boredom, insecurity, jealousy, nor the resentment of a husband who couldn't compete with his wife's achievements and talents; she had seen too many marriages founder on the rocks of unequal power.

Then there was the sex, of course. That had always been so right between them, and he could still touch her in ways that moved her more than any other man she had known. That much was evident from last night, she thought, feeling a quick warmth flood her face. After the storm had passed, he had been so tender and careful. Not apologetic just wanting to give her pleasure, knowing that her body had been hard-used already that night.

As she was considering this, he awoke. He smiled when his eyes had recovered from their sleepy languor and saw her already awake, looking at him.

"Good morning, my angel," he said. "How long have you been up?"

"Just a few minutes," she answered, kissing his lips in greeting. "I was enjoying watching you sleep."

"It would appear we've missed breakfast," he said, not sounding terribly concerned about it.

"I'll have a house-elf bring something," she said. "Although we'll need to come up with a good excuse for going missing this morning, I think." When he shrugged, she added, "Unless you'd like to explain to everyone that the Headmaster and Deputy Headmistress were too exhausted from their heavy shagging session to appear at breakfast."

"Shagging session?" he asked.

"That's what the children call it, I believe," she said. "Shall I see about getting us something to eat? I seem curiously in need of sustenance this morning."

"By all means. You do manage to surprise me every so often, my dear," he said, still chuckling at her novel turn of phrase.

"I should hope so," she answered, getting out of bed and beginning to gather the detritus of the previous evening to see what could be salvaged.

"You know, you did look rather pretty last night, Minerva," he said as she collected the remains of her ruined gown from the floor. "Pity about the dress."

~FIN~