

UnBound

by kellychambliss

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"What? No blood? No bruises? And you expect to be recognised?"

Wilhelmina Grubbly-Plank scowled when she heard these words, and of course her reflection scowled back. Damned cheeky mirror. Though she supposed she couldn't blame it for being feeling ill-used: she usually looked into it only when she'd sustained some sort of animal-related wound.

Like last month, for instance. A frightened Kneazle had managed to push a fierce claw through Wilhelmina's face-protector charm, and the mirror hadn't been pleased by the resulting gory scratches. Then there was that day a couple weeks ago, when an owl's injured wing smacked into Wilhelmina's face and pushed her diagnostic monocle into her eye socket. She'd been left with one hell of a keeker she'd barely been able to pry her eye open so she could heal the damage.

The mirror hadn't been pleased by that vision, either.

Still, normally Wilhelmina would have growled "shut it" to the mirror, because that's what happened when you lived alone: no matter how self-contained and self-controlled you were, you eventually started talking to your household furnishings.

(Not that it hadn't been pointed out to her dryly and more than once that a person who shared her house with numerous damaged and convalescent animals couldn't technically be said to "live alone." But that wasn't the same. For one thing, unlike the mirror, the animals didn't talk back. Yet. Wilhelmina was sure that quite a few of them could if they wanted to.)

But tonight she just smiled at the mirror, no doubt unhinging the poor thing further. For tonight was one of those rare occasions when Wilhelmina was actually consulting her reflection to make sure she looked nice. No, more than nice her very best.

Because tonight was her last night with Minerva.

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Minerva McGonagall stood in front of the old pier glass in her bedroom at Hogwarts, frowning as she stared at the robe she was holding up against herself. The robe wasn't

new far from it, in fact, but it was the one that Wilhelmina loved best.

Minerva had been wearing it the night they had first admitted their attraction to each other: Hogmanay, 1959.

It had only been the hope of seeing Wilhelmina, whom she'd met the previous summer, that had taken Minerva to the Crouches' Hogmanay party in the first place. She usually loathed those pureblood displays of excess, but Wilhelmina was a distant Crouch cousin, and wizard kin networks being what they were, there was a chance she'd be there . . .

She'd been there. She'd been taking with Dedalus Diggle, of all tedious people, when she'd seen Minerva enter the ballroom, and the memory of how Wilhelmina had put in her monocle and frankly stared could still bring heat to Minerva's cheeks. At the time, though, Minerva had contented herself with a nod and small smile of recognition and a mental promise to thank Poppy for having talked her into buying such a smart new robe.

The "new" robe was now nearly forty years old. Minerva plected it gently between her fingers as she looked at its reflection. It was the only thing she'd ever owned that was sapphire-blue "it brings out your eyes, and you don't have to dress in Gryffindor colours all the time," Poppy had said. "You're not going to a Quidditch match, you know." Then there was the low-cut neck how daring Minerva had considered it and the tartan bodice that she could still lace as tightly as she had thirty-eight years ago.

Not that this fact was really anything to boast about, not for someone who'd inherited the classic McGonagall physique: lanky, angular, spare of flesh, with no hips and no breasts to speak of. In her youth, Minerva had despaired, but her mother told her that she'd be glad of her body when she was older, for she would never "lose her figure" the way other women would.

"And when you're of age," she had astonished the fifteen-year-old Minerva by saying (for Mother had been a very proper sort), "you can always improve your shape by using a bit of a 'lift-me-up' charm. Not too much, mind. No real lady wants a large bosom."

The memory made Minerva smile at herself in the glass. Well, by that standard, Wilhelmina was a real lady indeed, for she was perfectly happy with the size of Minerva's bosom. And in any case, by the time Minerva had bought the blue robe with the tartan bodice, she was no longer quite the broomstick she'd been in her school days. There had been a sufficient swell of breast above the gown's scooped edge to satisfy everyone concerned, which was to say, to satisfy Minerva and Wilhelmina.

In fact, it was that very dip in the neckline that was giving Minerva pause now. She had enough of her mother's sense of old-fashioned propriety to wonder whether she ought to be showing quite so much skin at her age. She was taking Wilhelmina to a restaurant far from Hogwarts, run very discreetly by a witch of the Sapphic persuasion, but of course, as the (for now) Headmistress of Hogwarts, Minerva was bound to be known to some of the patrons . . . so perhaps she should transfigure the robe to a more decorous level, or at least use a lace tucker . . . ?

Suddenly she could hear Poppy Pomfrey in her head as clearly as if she stood in the room. "Minerva McGonagall!" Poppy would snap, just as she had in the robe shop all those years ago, "what in the name of Merlin's toenails is wrong with you? The last time you'll see Wilhelmina for who knows how long, and you're worried that some former student might realise that the headmistress has tits?"

Well. Put that way . . .

"You're quite right, Poppy," Minerva said aloud, "though you know I hate that word." Quickly, she removed her everyday robe and slipped the blue one over her head.

There was no point in hiding from the truth: Tonight would not only be the last time she'd see Wilhelmina in months or even years . . . but it might well be the last time she'd ever see her at all.

Tomorrow, Wilhelmina was going into hiding for the duration of the war. Of course she'd continue to work undercover, but her whereabouts would be secret, vouchsafed only to a Secret-Keeper whose identity Minerva took care not to know. Thus from tomorrow until whatever the war's end might be, Wilhelmina would be out of Minerva's life.

And if Minerva were as honest as she always tried to be, she'd have to admit that the war's end, at least for her, would most likely be death. She'd be a fool to think otherwise, and whatever else she'd been in her many years, she'd never been that.

Albus was already dead. So was Alastor. And Amelia. The Ministry had fallen; Potter, if he was lucky, was on the run and in any case, what did it say about their chances, the fact that their world's future depended on so young a boy?

Then there was Severus. If he really was a Death Eater after all, then her life any Order member's life wouldn't be worth an hour's purchase. Or if, as she suspected, he wasn't a Death Eater but was still Albus's spy in You-Know-Who's court, then his own position would be precarious in the extreme; he certainly wouldn't be able to help protect the school.

But no matter what the truth about Severus, it was highly unlikely that the new Voldemort-controlled Ministry would allow Minerva to continue as headmistress: far better for them, surely, that she be made to disappear quietly.

She'd already dealt with the tiny voice in her head that whispered to her that she could do just that on her own: disappear. She could go safely into hiding with Wilhelmina, fight from the sidelines, let others watch over the children.

She'd heard the voice, but she hadn't listened to it: she wasn't going to leave the school or the students, and that decision had nothing to do with stubbornness or nobility, no matter what Poppy thought. Right or wrong, a smart move or a stupid one she didn't know, and it didn't matter. She couldn't leave the school and still live comfortably with herself, and that was all there was to it. That was the fact of the matter, and Minerva never tried to gainsay the facts.

So. What all this meant was that tonight was, indeed, very probably her last night with Wilhelmina, at least in this life. And since the only other life of which she was certain was that of portraits and ghosts, she wasn't counting on any later resurrection.

All she had was now.

Minerva shook out the folds of the still-bright blue skirts and then *nacci'o'd* the bodice from where she'd laid it on the bed.

The tartan silk was cool in her hands as she pulled the fabric smooth around her waist. Then she tightened the laces carefully, bit by bit, and let herself think how, in a few hours, Wilhelmina would stand close behind her and loosen them, her lips warm on Minerva's throat.

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Ignoring what sounded suspiciously like a snicker from the mirror, Wilhelmina pulled a pair of boxer shorts from her bureau and shook them out. Red satin. A present from Minerva, of course, a Christmas joke-that-was-not-really-a-joke. Will had put them on the first time just to please her lover, but to her surprise, she'd found she liked the way the smooth material felt against her skin: cool at first, then warm and close, so that she felt encased in a little cocoon of heat and desire and anticipation.

She could feel her breath quicken already, and she laughed softly at herself, saying "down, girl" in the tone she'd use for a favorite Crup. No point in getting ahead of herself; there would be time later for that wonderfully slow build-up of expectation, tension, and exquisite release that was sex with Minerva.

They would have dinner first and talk about whatever struck their fancy. If either of them wanted to bring up Amelia or Albus or even the Dark Lord, they would; there was only one topic that Wilhelmina was sure that neither of them would mention tonight, and that was their own impending separation.

The red satin was growing warm under her stroking fingers, and Wilhelmina noted idly that the waistband of the shorts was fraying more and more; she'd had them for quite a few years now. Minerva had once asked her if she wanted a new pair, but she didn't. They just wouldn't feel the same.

Turning back to the mirror, Wilhelmina silently dared it to say anything as she climbed into the red boxers and lifted her arms so that she could watch her breast-binding charm at work. She didn't want any lumps or bumps to mar the sleek surface of her tailored dress robes.

In her young days, long before Minerva, and before she herself had felt comfortable pursuing her sexual preferences in the wizarding world, Wilhelmina had chummed with several like-minded Muggle girls. They'd taken her to a Muggle tailor for her first bespoke men's suit and had shown her how to flatten her breasts with an elasticised band.

The band had worked, but it had hurt, and that's when Wilhelmina had decided that if life with Muggles was this painful, she'd be better off with her own kind, magical warts and all. Not long afterward, she'd met Mathilda ("Call me Matt") Longbottom, and the rest, as they say, was history.

Matt had snorted at the tale of Muggle binding bands. "We have charms for that sort of thing in *our* world, my dear baby butch," she'd said.

"Aye, but the Muggles have the best words," Wilhelmina had retorted. "Baby butch" was a Muggle import, after all. As a rule, Wilhelmina felt too much the outsider herself to put up with the relentless Muggle-criticism she heard so much of. Still, Matt had been right about the charms. A flat chest with no pain in that way, at least, witches had it all over the Muggle girls.

The binding charm finished its work, and Wilhelmina was satisfied. Time for the crisp white shirt, then the fine black woollen trousers. Then the black waistcoat followed by the dress over-robe. Like her first suit, this set of dress-ropes was also bespoke, and Minerva had gone with her to Thea Malkin's to order them. That's why they were the most elegant articles of clothing Wilhelmina had ever owned.

The memory of that trip to Madam Malkin's prompted Wilhelmina to wonder whether Thea was protecting herself these days, too she might be as mum as a Muggle priest when it came to hiding clients' secrets, but she'd be no match for Death Eaters. Wilhelmina could only hope that the DEs wouldn't realise just what a mine of information a robe maker could be.

With a final flourish of her wand, Wilhelmina saw to the tying of her cravat and Banished a few pieces of lint from her over-robe. Almost ready now.

In just a few minutes, she would Floo to meet Minerva at their rendezvous point in Surrey, and then, eventually, they would find themselves back here, for they were going to spend this last night in Wilhelmina's bed. She'd insisted on it.

One last, long night in her own bed. With Minerva. Wilhelmina didn't try to stop the grin that spread over her face at the thought, because chances were good that Minerva would be in one of her voracious moods tonight. How amazed most of their friends would be if they ever learnt about this side of the Deputy Head . . . no, not "Deputy" any longer. Make that the *real* "Headmistress." At last.

Of course, Wilhelmina had long since ceased to be surprised by Minerva's sexual intensity.

But she had never ceased to be thrilled by it.

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The lacing-up finished to her satisfaction, Minerva turned her attention to her hair. Though it wasn't as thick as it had once been, she still had quite a goodly head of it, and, if it was just the two of them out in some unlikely place, Wilhelmina sometimes tried to persuade her to leave it long.

But there Minerva drew the line. A bit of public cleavage (well, what passed for cleavage with her, at any rate) she would offer to Wilhelmina, but her hair was going to be properly put up.

"Just out of curiosity, why does it matter so much to you?" Wilhelmina had asked once, and Minerva had responded, "Ah, with my hair down, I'd be someone else, and you might not want to know what that person would get up to."

"Then again, I just might," Wilhelmina had laughed, and rather to Minerva's relief, she'd dropped the subject.

Minerva had spoken in jest, but only slightly. She knew how foolish she would sound if she tried seriously to explain that keeping her hair tightly bound helped her keep herself in bounds because sometimes her fears for the children and her anger at the ways of the world threatened to break loose completely, and she didn't really want to know what she might become in defence of the things she loved.

Besides, no matter how hopelessly old-fashioned it made her, Minerva simply didn't feel decent with her hair loose. There was a proper order to things, she felt, and one's public life required a certain decorum and dignity. In private, with friends, one could be a bit more free, and in bed or its equivalent . . . well, that was a different matter entirely. One was supposed to be decadent in bed. Bed was the place for glorious abandon of hair pins, of garments, of self, of all order, proper or otherwise.

And Minerva *did* abandon herself. She had done so ever since her first sexual encounter, so many years ago, with a gentle young man she'd met on holiday in Rome. The experience had reduced the boy almost to tears, and he'd been so grateful. Poor dear, he'd kept thanking her, though she had been so dazed by the exhilaration of it all that she could scarcely attend to his words.

She'd been twenty-four years old and fearful of being thought what her mother called *that* sort of girl," but she'd reached a point at which virginity seemed a burden, and she'd come to realise that for her, waiting for marriage would mean waiting forever.

She hadn't quite understood, not then, how she felt about women (it had been more ignorant time, after all or in any events *she* had certainly been ignorant). So she had slept with the young man in Rome. She'd simply wanted to know what it felt like to *live*, and yet so powerful did sex turn out to be that she could see why the more melodramatic poets might liken it to death.

In that first time and ever after, sex was always the same for her: a rush of passion beyond speech, beyond thought, as if all flesh had burned away, leaving nothing but raw magic behind . . . a pleasure so sharp and so quickly lost that clothing became a comfort afterward. No, more than a comfort: the putting-on of shift, under-robe, top-robe, hairpins, spectacles, and hat marked a return to permanence, or at least the illusion of it a hedge against loss.

It didn't work, of course, not in forestalling loss. Still, it did work in bringing her back to herself, and sometimes such small personal victories were the most one could expect from the world.

So leaving her hair down was out of the question. But there were any number of ways to put it up, and the professorial bun was only one of them.

Minerva shook her head at the pier-glass and watched her hair swirl out around her. "All right, Wilhelmina, my dear," she said. "Let's give the professor the night off."

It took only a few moments with wand and brush to arrange her hair in a soft chignon and to coax a few strands loose. They lay poker-straight against her face and neck, for if she'd inherited the McGonagall lack of curves, she'd also inherited her mother's McLeod lack of curls.

But that problem was easily remedied. One of Minerva's earliest memories was of her mother winding locks of hair round her wand and saying, "Thank Merlin for curling charms." Mother had taught her the secret of a good one, too: "The way you twist the wand matters as much as the words, Minlet," she'd say.

It had been a lesson well-learnt, and Minerva knew that Wilhelmina would be pleased with the resulting soft tendrils. Nothing too girlish, of course, just a touch of . . . there. Perfect.

She was ready.

And it was time to go.

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Only one act remained to be done before Wilhelmina stepped into the Floo, and she gave the thing its due ceremony.

Taking up a short length of black cord from her bureau, Wilhelmina threaded it through the narrow space at the top of her monocle and hooked the end over the button of her waistcoat. There was a tiny monocle pocket built specially into the coat, and though Wilhelmina often dispensed with the cord altogether (Summoning the monocle wandlessly was a spot of magic she could do in her sleep), there were other times when a bit of ribbon was just what she needed.

Like now. A slight flick of her wand turned the black cord into a scarlet one, and its bright drape across the dark expanse of the waistcoat would serve to remind Minerva exactly what she could expect to find under the sharply-creased, well-pressed trousers. Red satin first, and then . . .

And then.

She was ready. Moving to her fireplace, Wilhelmina dipped her hand into the jar of Floo powder and affected not to hear when her mirror muttered, "not bad, old girl."

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In Scotland, two fireplaces flashed green at almost the same moment, and in Surrey, in a tucked-away nook of a small, softly-lit dining room, a bottle of red wine waited, uncorked, atop a table set for two.

The End