

What a Lovely Way to Burn

by *kellychambliss*

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Author's Notes: My everlasting thanks to my wonderful beta reader The Real Snape, who makes everything I write so much better. Any errors, bdsm or otherwise, are mine, all mine.

The title comes from the song "Fever," sung by Peggy Lee and just about every other blues and pop artist of the last fifty years, or so it seems.

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You levitate the body in front of you as you fly, skimming high over the debris-scattered lawns. It...he...is the fifth casualty you've ferried to the makeshift morgue that used to be the Great Hall of Hogwarts. You concentrate on holding him steady and level, because that's all you can do for him now: offer his remains the dignity of careful handling.

Roddy Willingham, seventh-year, Hufflepuff. Cheerful kid, always up for a laugh. Goofy. Good-natured. Dead.

Not many people could keep him as perfectly-balanced in the air as you do and stay straight on their own broom at the same time, but you're the flying instructor. There ought to be *some* damn thing you can do for the students, since you haven't been much of a protector.

You almost didn't even manage to be part of the final Battle at all. You had to pick last night of all nights to head off on some fool errand to Glasgow, looking for broom stabilizers that you could have easily Owl-ordered. But you'd wanted to get away from the hell that Hogwarts had become, just for a few hours . . .

So you floo'd to the city from the Hog's Head, and then while you were gone, a fresh hell began...and it would have ended with no bloody help from you, if Aberforth hadn't owled you a terse heads-up. Curmudgeonly, smelly old man. You always knew he was your kind of barkeep.

You came back, back to a chaos of death and destruction, the grounds ablaze with curses, red and green fires flaring like a perverse Christmas celebration. You didn't even try to get into the castle; you just joined the air bombardment from outside.

You've always been nearly untouchable on a broom, and you found, ironically, that a battle can be almost a game if you think of the hexes as Quaffles and the AKs as just a peculiar green form of Bludger. You brought down your share of enemies, and you carefully didn't think about how many of them you yourself had taught to fly.

You stayed in the air as long as you could; you didn't even land when that eerie procession emerged from the Forbidden Forest...that long parade of Death Eaters and Dark Lord and the Boy Who Didn't Live, his body cradled in Hagrid's arms. You watched from above, as if the physical distance could make it all less real, and you didn't see the Boy's miraculous resurrection.

You didn't see the final confrontation between Harry Potter and Lord Voldemort at all; there was no way you could have forced your way through the madness in the entry hall, and anyway, by then you were too busy looking for wounded.

And now the Battle is over. Voldemort is vanquished, and the sun is blazing, and the dead are waiting for you to fly them to what you hope is their rest.

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You leave Roddy in Poppy's sympathetic hands and start out to search the grounds once more.

Except that you can't go without seeing her again. Without assuring yourself that yes, she really is alive after all. Because even though you've already seen her twice, seen her walk and breathe, you still can't quite believe that she's made it, that she's safe, that the world hasn't worked the way it usually does and taken from you the thing you want most.

You skirt the edge of the Great Hall, walking quickly past the laughing groups of celebrators and the silent groups of mourners. You know where you'll find her.

You step around the last House table, and there she is. Minerva, straight-backed as always, even after a night like this night has been. She'll soon be swamped by people demanding decisions and answers and plans, but for the moment, she's alone, unnoticed by anyone but you.

She's with the bodies, standing vigil. She walks slowly along the shrouded rows, pausing to uncover each face briefly. Her hand is steady, her eyes dry.

You stop, not speaking. You doubt that she'd hear you, for you know that just now, she's not quite in your world of the living. So you stay silent and watch her.

Of all the details you could focus on, you find yourself concentrating on her hair. It's come loose from its bun to hang about her shoulders, tangled and heavy and black; the years have left only the slightest dusting of grey to gleam in the incongruous sunlight as it splashes both Minerva and the dead.

You search your memories, but you cannot recall any other time that her hair has been down in public, not even just among the staff, not even in summer. Somehow the fact that it's down now...and that she either doesn't realise or doesn't care...makes you feel anew the insanity and cost of the Battle.

Minerva folds back another shroud and lightly touches the revealed face. You're reminded of the victims who still lay scattered outside, needing you, so you turn away to find your broom and get on with it. There's work to be done.

You say nothing to Minerva; you don't need to. Words of comfort would be empty right now, and you both have better ways of ministering to each other. She'll come to you when she's able.

And you'll be waiting.

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It's on the third day after the Battle that she finally finds her way to your rooms.

Of course you've seen her in the interim, told her with truth that you know she'll be a fine Headmistress, watched her deal with endless Ministry officials, grieving parents, anxious students, townfolk, Aurors, builders, reporters, centaurs, house-elves, staffers...sometimes you think the entire British wizarding population has found its way to Hogwarts. There have been meetings and more meetings, decisions, crises, and she has handled them all, spine straight, chin up, hair now tightly-pinned. And this afternoon, or so you've heard, she and Kingsley have begun planning Severus's funeral.

Her knock, when it comes, is not tentative; Minerva never is. But the fact that she knocks at all, and then does not knock again despite the two full minutes you allow to elapse before you open the door, lets you know that she's not here for professional reasons. She needs you, but not for anything to do with running Hogwarts.

You have needs, too, and you spend the two minutes thinking of just how they're about to be met.

You smile for what feels like the first time since Dumbledore's long fall.

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You sense the tension begin to drain away from her at the first slap of the paddle. Her skin reddens a lovely bit, and she stiffens, expecting the second blow, but she makes no sound, for you have enjoined silence.

You know how much she wants to feel the weight of the paddle again, but you withhold it for now. Of course you will give her the escape she craves (the dampness of your thighs would tell you...if you needed to be told...just how much you're looking forward to doing that). But it will happen your way, at your pace.

Still, you know where she wants to go, and you will take her there, to that place she so rarely gets to inhabit. That place where nothing is required of her, not even thought.

You think about how you've built this trust, the two of you, how it started years ago, when there'd been so much less at stake. You remember that long-ago autumn, when the world looked different because you were young and because you had no idea that anyone named Tom Riddle even existed.

Minerva had been the most junior of staff members at Hogwarts, and you'd been merely the temporary Quidditch mistress, enduring one more in the string of dead-end jobs you'd held since injuries prematurely ended your career with the Harpies. You were a has-been, and she was a nobody, and you decided there was no one to care if you took the prim Transfiguration professor to your bed.

You're ashamed to recall it now, but you went after her at first just for a lark, because you were bored, because you resented being stuck here in the back of beyond. Because you thought it would be amusing if you could be the one to breach that towering wall of stern McGonagall reserve. You were certain she was a virgin despite being over thirty, and you thought she might not even realise that women could fuck other women.

You wove a little fantasy about how she'd respond to your advances, picturing her turning away from you in stiff, pureblood disgust, her chest heaving with the outrage of it, but then, when you grabbed her shoulders and pushed her against the rough stone wall, she wouldn't fight you, she'd just run a nervous tongue over those thin, enticing lips, and let you take her.

Of course, the reality had been something else entirely. Minerva hadn't been shocked at all. Or virginal. What she'd been was what she always is: a teacher. Over the long months of that freezing Scottish winter, she'd taught you about desires that you'd never known you had, but that heated you better than any warming charm.

Minerva had been sure, even then, of what she wanted, and you gradually learnt not only how to give it to her, but also how to get what you needed from her.

As the term and your nights together went on, being the Quidditch and flying instructor at Hogwarts began to seem less like a life sentence and more like simply a life. So when, at the end of the school year, Dumbledore asked if you'd consider a permanent position, you accepted with what was probably unprofessional haste, congratulating yourself on the fact that you and Minerva had apparently been successful at keeping your liaison a secret from him. For if the Headmaster had known that two of his female teachers were engaging in the "carnal acts" prohibited in the Hogwarts contract, surely he would not have hired you.

It was only later, after you knew Albus better, that you'd realised he'd undoubtedly known all about it. Your relationship with Minerva would have suited him to the ground. Two women together...women of your sort...were unlikely to leave their jobs for husbands and homes of their own. They'd be happy to stay right where they were, and probably wouldn't be too demanding, either.

In your more cynical moments, you wondered if Albus didn't press his advantage even further, indulging in a spot of subtle blackmail...there had to be some explanation for Minerva's uncomplaining willingness to take on so many of his duties. Then again, Minerva has always been more inclined to revere Albus the Great than you have; to you, he's always seemed more like Albus the Great.

Still, if your relationship suited the GG, it suited you and Minerva, too.

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You have made her wait long enough. She has not so much as sighed while you've stood there, holding your paddle and gauging your moment. She's put herself in your hands, and this thought arouses you as much as the heft of the wood that you finally bring down on her, lightly, then harder, then again.

You don't rush, though; you want to take her on the journey slowly, letting her own desires and responses carry her to another level of sensation, another world away from this one, the way your broom carries you.

It's all about discipline and control; for all your differences in temperament, you and Minerva share this: an appreciation of self-command, a recognition of the rewards that delay can bring. That's the hallmark of a good Quidditch player, which you are (well, were), and a good administrator, which she is, and good fighters, which you both are.

The marks of the paddle stand out starkly on her pale skin, and you see again how impossibly thin she's become. This last year hasn't been easy for anyone, but it's been worse for her than for you. You could get out on the field or up in the air, away from the Carrows and the curses and unhealthy isolation of the castle. As Deputy and a Head of House, though, Minerva was trapped, and as the year of hell wore on, you watched the strain gradually pare away every bit of softness, leaving only the bone and sinew of her resistance.

You bring the paddle down the hardest yet and watch her hands pull against the restraints as the blow falls. The bonds have left light marks; you made Minerva tighten them herself with wandless magic as she lay prone on the bed before you.

You've always liked the way these cuffs look on her, wide bands of soft dark leather with no Muggle-style fastenings to suggest the possibility of opening or release. Just endless circles, magically closed and linked, to remind her that she no longer has any responsibilities beyond obeying you.

And now the cuffs seem to swamp her narrow wrists, and her shoulder blades look sharp enough to cut their way out of her body, and you can't remember the last time you've seen her eat.

You lay the paddle aside and step in front of her, lifting her chin until her dreamy gaze sharpens, and you know she's focused on you.

"I'm going to release the locking spell on your bonds," you tell her. "You're free to disengage yourself, but you won't do it unless there's an emergency. I want to find you as you are when I return."

You take yourself quickly to the kitchens. The cavernous space is dim and undamaged, and for a moment, it seems almost as if the Battle never happened. You have to remind yourself, as you step back into the corridor with your basket, that the war is over. You don't need to fear being spied upon; no one will ask what you're doing or why.

In fact, for the moment, the stairs are deserted, and you reach your rooms without meeting a soul.

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Minerva has not moved, nor does she look round as you enter.

"That's good, love," you say, and run your hand over her still-sensitive skin, then along her thighs. Your fingers enter her easily, and her back arches briefly; she's ready for you. She'll be waiting for the crop now, longing for it, fearing it, but you want to play with some different sensations, keep her on edge. You both need the distraction.

"Close your eyes," you command, and she does so at once, not flinching when you tie her own Gryffindor-tartan sash over her eyes. If she's surprised when you release her restraints and levitate her to a sitting position, she conceals it.

You know her limbs must be tingling, but she makes no attempt to rub the circulation back into them; she'll wait for you to allow her to move. Her self-control isn't unexpected, of course. This is Minerva, after all; she sees rules as something to be subdued through submission. And she's had years of practice.

"Open your mouth; drink."

You lift your wand to Summon a flask of pumpkin juice and a straw. She's used to you offering her liquids, and she dutifully sips and swallows. Then you take a wedge of apple from the food basket and slide it between her lips.

"Eat."

This time, she waits...three seconds, five, ten...before she does as you bid.

It's her way of registering her disapproval of this innovation (you've never fed her like this before) and perhaps of forcing you to chastise her and thus use the crop now rather than later. It's a transgression, but it makes you smile all the same; you're glad she can't see you.

You know how hard it can be for her to let go of her authority, especially after great demands have been made on her, but rules are rules, as she well understands. Few better, in fact. So to remind her of one of the first rules...that you don't stand for bottom-topping...you remove the blindfold: her punishment will be that the burden of remaining sightless will be hers. You trust that the effort of keeping her eyes closed will help her remember who is in charge.

"Don't let it happen again," you say, and this time you Summon a bowl of trifle to hover next to you. With two fingers, you leave a smear of ivory-coloured custard along her lip. "Taste it," you say.

Slowly, she licks the cream away.

It's an intensely arousing sight, and you feel your breath quicken as you offer your fingers to be licked clean as well, one at a time.

You feed her just a bit more...another taste of trifle, a bite of chocolate, even a sliver of roast chicken. Not too much of anything, just enough to reawaken her desire for food and to give her yet another sort of pleasure at your hands. When you kiss her, she tastes both savoury and sweet.

"Lie down again now," you tell her, and after she does, you refasten the restraints slowly, giving her time to slide her mind back toward that place from which you'd summoned her.

Minerva asked you, once, what you get from the roles you both play. You don't remember exactly what you answered, since you get many things. But now, as you take a moment to drink in the sight of her...bound and waiting for you...you think that one of the main things you get is *this*: this knowledge that the woman you love is stronger even than the world thinks her, strong enough to give herself up to you.

You lift your wand. "*Frigius*," you whisper, and draw the now-frozen tip down her spine, from the nape of her neck to the delicious hollow in the small of her back. She gasps a little at the iciness of it, but you're sure she understands: you're moving her focus away from her mouth, back to the paddle, and, soon, to the crop.

Eventually, if she continues to be good, the thrust of the smooth leather handle inside her, and the pressure of your fingers outside, will be her reward.

You cast your best silencing charm and reach for your paddle.

"Make all the noise you want," you say.

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Much later, after the implements have done their work, after you both have come, hard, with the hip-bucking abandon that the excitement of the lash always brings you to, you lie on your side and watch Minerva as she sleeps next to you. Her face looks smooth and untroubled, though whether this is the result of your evening's discipline or a trick of the light, you can't be sure. You hope it's the former.

You aren't tired. You never are, after one of these sessions...you always feel energised, rested, as if you could play an eight-hour Quidditch match without fatigue.

One of your candles suddenly loses its stability charm, and the flame begins to flicker wildly, sending shadows dancing across the sheets and along the sweep of Minerva's hair. You lean over her in the shifting light, use a fingertip to trace a thin welt along her bare skin. It's the only mark you've left. You always leave just one, like a rune that only she can read. She murmurs and stretches in her sleep.

A flick of your wand extinguishes the candles, leaving just the moonlight spilling brightly through your windows. Beside you, Minerva breathes evenly, one hand outflung, and you close your fingers lightly around her wrist.

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