

Winter Gifts

by Squibstress

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Chapter 1 of 1

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What she hates, what she *really* hates about the place is the absence of odour. Her feline senses are accustomed to picking up every hint of scent in the air...normally a bothersome affliction, to be sure...but here there is nothing. It unnerves her every time, although she's been coming here for more than a decade. A charm, she supposes, or a series of them.

Her heels mark crisp staccato time into the tiled floor as she walks down the bleak corridor, carrying her to ward 49, fourth floor, a.k.a. the Janus Thickey Ward, of St Mungo's. The bored, pug-faced attendant unlocks the heavy door with an off-hand flick of his wand, and Minerva sweeps through, heels alerting the ward's inhabitants to her approach. Assuming any of them...other than Severus...still has enough mind left to notice.

She draws the curtain from around his bed. He is propped up against several pillows. There is a stack of books on the bedside table. They sport a very fine coating of dust, suggesting they have not been opened recently. She frowns.

She doesn't waste her breath asking how he is, or on or other pointless pleasantries; they are long past it.

"You haven't been up." She can't quite keep the note of accusation from her voice.

"No," he answers.

"When was the last time?" she asks.

"Last week, sometime," he says vaguely.

"You should, you know," she asserts.

"Why?"

What possible reason could she give for him to move from the bed he has occupied for nearly twelve years?

"Because it's good for you to move about," she tells him.

"Being Levitated from bed to wheelchair just so that I can join the rest of the flora and fauna drooling in the dayroom hardly constitutes 'moving about', Minerva."

Her lips thin to a slash of mauve, as they always do when he says things like this. She knows he's right.

"I brought some new books. Although I can see I needn't have bothered," she says, quirking her chin at the volumes lying fallow on the table. "If you don't like the selection, please say so. I'll be happy to bring anything you like."

"Your selections have been fine," he says. As an afterthought, he adds, "Thank you."

She looks intently at his eyes, and he knows she is checking for signs of potions. She believes they drug him excessively to keep him docile. He doubts she would believe him if he told her he hasn't taken a Calming Draught or sleeping potion in months. He's docile enough by now.

"Shall we?" she asks.

"If you wish."

She sighs inwardly. She comes every week whenever she can manage it...at least every two...and their conversation never seems to get any easier. She wonders if any of his few and occasional other visitors...Potter, Granger perhaps...has any more success in maintaining an actual dialogue with him. She doubts it.

She moves the floating table to hover just between them and summons a chair for herself. Out of her bag, she takes a portable chess set and opens it on the table. The pieces magically set themselves up at either end of the board, black snarling at white in the prescribed fashion.

"I believe it's my turn for the first move," says Minerva. She begins, predictably, with the Queen's Gambit, and he, predictably, declines her pawn. They play for the next hour, the only sounds their voices calling the moves and the clattery shuffle of the pieces as they shift themselves across the board.

When Minerva's white king removes his crown and kneels down in resignation to Severus' black, who ungallantly (Minerva thinks) draws his sword and hacks the loser's head from his ivory shoulders, she emits only a tiny grunt of dismay.

"Checkmate," he says, stating the painfully obvious. The grumbling pieces gather their dismembered parts and leap or hobble back into the case. Minerva folds the board and slides it in with the pieces, then moves the table out of the way.

"Would you like your bath now?" she asks.

"That would be pleasant," he answers.

She smiles at him briefly, then summons a basin, flannel, and several towels from the cupboard in the corner of the room and sets them on the hovering table. She has long since stopped feeling as if she has to ask the matron for permission to raid the supply cabinet.

She stands and draws the privacy curtain around the bed, although truthfully, none of the room's other occupants would notice if she were to get up and dance a jig while juggling a couple of Jarveys singing "Jerusalem" at the top of their lungs. The more *compos mentis* of the ward's residents are either in treatment or in the dayroom. Nobody else is likely to come in unless there is a disturbance of some kind; even the staff find the long-term spell damage ward depressing, and Minerva has only ever seen one other visitor.

She fills the basin with warm water, courtesy of an Aguamenti, and uses a warming charm to bring it to what she hopes is a comfortable temperature. She takes a phial of soap and adds a few drops to the water. The fragrance of sweet woodruff begins to permeate the air around the basin.

She draws the bedclothes down to Severus' hips and leans over to unbutton his pyjama shirt. She pushes it gently from his shoulders, and lifts one, then the other away from the pillows to draw the shirt from his arms. She could, of course, simply Banish the garment, but she likes to tend to him this way, and she knows he likes it, too. She knows it is the only human touch he is likely to enjoy; the staff who see to his daily needs use magic exclusively. She can't blame them for preferring it that way, and neither can he. It wouldn't do to get too intimate with a man whose arse you were going to be wiping every day until your pension kicks in.

She dips the flannel in the basin and starts with his scarred, pitted neck.

"How is the water?" she enquires.

"Fine."

Severus suppresses a smile. She always asks, and his answer is always the same. She is a woman of routines and habits, which is the chief reason he was surprised the afternoon she changed the routine of their weekly visits with her matter-of-fact enquiry as to the state of his libido, about five years into what he thought of as his sentence.

"Severus, do you miss sex?"

"You cannot miss what you barely remember."

"I do, I find."

Thus, with few words...and none inessential to the mechanics of the thing...they had felt their way, literally and figuratively, to a new routine, one that did not require words.

His eyes close as she gently but thoroughly washes the back of his neck, drawing the flannel around to the front, tracing it down the column of his throat and around the waxy scar tissue. He opens them as he hears her dip the flannel back in the basin and wring it out. As she brings it to his chest, she uses her free hand to unfasten the first two buttons of her robe's bodice.

Severus watches as she runs the moistened flannel over the spare tundra of his chest, making wide arcs from his shoulders to below his nipples. As she does this, her breasts brush his skin, and he can feel her nipples harden, even under the heavy fabric of her winter robes. She wears no chemise under them, and he sees the tiny peaks when she moves to re-wet the flannel. The cloth of her robes is wet where she has grazed him, and it clings to her as Severus would do, if only he could move.

She moves lower, wetting the narrow expanse of his abdomen, and as she does so, she undoes another two buttons of her bodice so that it falls open to reveal the valley between her breasts as well as the slopes that neighbour it on either side. His view of this landscape is temporarily obstructed by her head as she washes him, but he is granted an easement when she straightens to re-wet the flannel.

She finishes with his belly, stopping just above where the bedclothes sit low on his hips, and Vanishes the soapy water, refilling the basin with clean. He watches her as she traces the same route while she rinses him with the flannel, undoing the final two buttons of her bodice as she rubs him. It hangs open, granting him fleeting glimpses of her coral-tipped breasts as she moves over him, intent on her task. She pats him dry with a towel.

"I'm going to turn you now," she says, and uses her wand to lower the head of the bed and raise him slightly, rotating him under the bedclothes. Even in his depreciated state, he is too heavy for her to move without magic.

His view of her is cut off, of course, but he is compensated by the feel of her bare breasts on his back as she tends to his dorsal area. He feels her nipples graze his flanks as she gently scrubs his upper back. She doesn't break the contact as she wrings out the flannel in the basin.

After she has rinsed his back with the flannel and with her breasts, she dries him, then shifts the bedclothes so that his torso is covered and his legs exposed. She reaches under the bedclothes to find the waistband of his pyjama bottoms and works them carefully down and off, draping them on the back of her abandoned chair with his shirt.

She refreshes the soapy water in the basin and starts with his feet, threading the flannel carefully between his toes, so as not to tickle; he cannot, after all, move them away. She massages his feet and the atrophied muscles of his legs as she washes, running bony fingers up his calves and thighs, careful not to scrape with her short nails. She wrings the flannel out...not too thoroughly...and rinses him in the same manner. A few stray droplets of water coalesce and run down the sides of his legs, threatening to wet the sheet upon which he lies. She prevents this by catching them with her tongue, re-tracing the routes taken by the rivulets, up and over the backs of his knees and thighs, sealing each point of origin with a kiss.

After she pats his legs and feet dry, she moves the bedclothes up above his pelvis to expose his buttocks. He feels the warm, wet flannel ride over the cheeks of his arse, followed by her hands, kneading the muscles with long, deep strokes. He sighs. Then he moans when he feels the tips of her fingers descend to lightly brush the whisper-sensitive skin of his perineum. She rinses his buttocks with clean, warm water from the flannel, and uses her lips and tongue to lick the excess water from the smooth skin, grazing it lightly with her sharp teeth for good measure.

When he is dry, she draws the bedclothes back down over his pelvis and legs.

"Face next, hmm?" she asks. He grunts his assent, and she once again uses her wand to turn him over. He sees that she has completely removed her bodice, and she sees that his erection is distorting the bedclothes. Neither of these facts bears mention by either party.

She re-wets the flannel with the freshly changed water and leans over him to begin washing his forehead. As she does so, her breasts come within reach of his mouth, and he makes a reptilian flick of his tongue to taste one, then the other, of her nipples. She leans closer, focusing her attentions on his forehead and the backs of his ears, and he sucks as much of one small breast into his mouth as he can manage. He changes sides when she does, and when both ears and breasts are well moistened, she straightens up to dip the flannel in clean water. She rinses the sallow planes of his face, then wrings the flannel out over her breasts. The warm water runs over her pale flesh and forms pink-hued droplets at the tips of her nipples. She leans forward again, and he opens his mouth as the beads of water hang then fall to his waiting tongue. She bends still lower, and he laps the water from each breast, then sucks at the cleft between them.

She straightens, then moves lower, bending her head to allow her lips to brush against his. His tongue emerges, and she lowers her mouth again to allow him to lick first the outside then the inside of each lip. She presses her mouth harder to his and their tongues find each other, dancing from his mouth to hers, then back again. As she withdraws, she sucks his tongue between her lips one last time before standing up.

She moves to the centre of the bed and draws off the bedclothes covering his pelvis and legs, then hitches up her skirt and climbs onto the end of the bed, straddling his lower legs. Her hands come to rest on his thighs, and she runs her palms slowly up them and over his jagged hipbones. Following her hands with her tongue and lips, she makes an arc from one thigh to the other. She leans over his jutting cock and breathes a puff of warm, moist air over the head, making it jump in response. Her head moves down between his legs as she licks his heavy sac, then runs her tongue slowly up his long shaft, pausing to flick lightly against the ridge, before licking the head with the flat of her tongue, applying more pressure.

His breath hisses between his clenched teeth when she slides her lips over the crown of his cock then moves them all the way down to the base to take him entirely into her mouth. He can almost feel his hips come off the bed to buck and push his cock further down her throat, but he knows, of course, that it is just an illusion. His hips are pressed as firmly to the mattress as they ever were; the only movements he makes are his breathing and the involuntary twitching and throbbing of his member as she sucks him.

He longs, he aches, to rise up and flip her under him, to pin her to the bed and drive his cock deep into her waiting cunt, to hear her moan and scream his name as he fucks her, as he never did before Nagini's bite left him alive but trapped within a body that can feel but not move of his own volition below the neck. He would like to master her, as he never did in anything, either in the time before or after the final battle. He files the fact that he never fucked Minerva McGonagall under his long list of useless regrets.

"Minerva," he croaks, "up here . . . I want to . . ."

She doesn't withdraw her mouth from him, but reaches around and unfastens her skirt with one hand. She pauses in her ministrations only long enough to draw it up and over her head, then shifts her body so that she is straddling his face. She wears no knickers, and he imagines lifting his head off the pillow to lap at the dark curls hovering so intoxicatingly close above him.

She lowers herself to his anxious mouth at the same moment she envelops his penis in hers once again. He is surprised, as he always is, at how wet she is. None of the youthful women he fucked in the time before had ever gotten this wet for him, no matter how attentive he had tried to be before getting down to business.

His tongue slides between her folds and quickly finds her clitoris. As he licks it in long, firm strokes from bottom to top, she moans, and the vibrations resonate from his straining cock all the way to the pit of his belly. As he continues, alternately licking and sucking, he can feel her rhythm start to become erratic, as she stops her mouth and tongue momentarily. He starts to move his tongue in a circuit, from slit to clit and back, before thrusting it in and out of her at a rapid pace.

She redoubles her own efforts, and within moments, both are moaning and shuddering in yet one more contest to see who will yield first. She wins this time, as he comes with a barked "Ah!" shooting his ejaculate into the back of her mouth in bursts that she coaxes along and milks with swipes of her tongue along his slit, until she feels him soften in her mouth.

She waits patiently while he recovers before bringing herself down to meet his lips and tongue once more. He takes up his former gambit, licking, sucking, thrusting, until he feels her thighs shaking uncontrollably on either side of his head and the walls of her vagina contracting around his probing tongue. She cries out his name once as she sags briefly, burying his mouth and nose in her wet sex, before carefully climbing off his face and his bed.

Neither of them speaks as she returns things to their right and proper states, first her clothes, then his, then his face with a few businesslike swipes of the now-cold flannel.

She pulls the visitor chair close to the bed once more, and asks, "It's your birthday next week. Is there anything special you would like me to bring?"

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She pauses as she writes the date at the top of the parchment. A year after the fact, she still asks herself if she made the right choice. That peppermint twist of an Albus was fond of saying that it is our choices that define us; what would a dictionary entry on Minerva McGonagall...Mistress of Transfiguration, veteran of three wars, heroine of the last, Order of Merlin, First Class, former leader of the Order of the Phoenix and, until recently, Headmistress of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry...say today, 9 January, 2011?

When Severus had made his birthday wish, his very specific, quietly spoken birthday request, it had made sense. It had hurt, she couldn't deny it, but even as the shock plucked at her heart, her ever-rational head had agreed with him, and approved of his choice. Problem was, in making his, he required one of her.

He had asked her because he knew that she could do it...she was not inept at Potions, after all, and this was not a complex one...and because she was the only one of his three visitors who would.

Granger could have brewed the potion, no question, but the war had not broken her of her unfortunate fondness for The Rules. The silly girl wouldn't even Summon a chair when she came to see him, citing Mungo's regulations against visitors using magic on the wards.

Potter...quite aside from the fact that he would most likely have fucked up even the simplest of Eternal Sleep potions and rendered Snape as potty as his bed-neighbour, Lockhart...could have been counted on to try to Save Severus Snape as he had once Saved the Wizarding World. The boy was a walking hero complex in search of a cause, and you can thank Bloody-Albus-Almighty-Effing-Dumbledore for that.

Minerva suffered from none of those defects.

She had considered her choice logically, as he had known she would, tallying up the pros and cons in an efficient mental reckoning as she used to tally revenues and expenses in the Hogwarts ledger at the end of each fiscal year. But in the end, she had chosen with her heart as well as her head, and for that, there was no precedent in Minerva McGonagall's experience. So still, she tallies up the ramifications of her decision, plusses in this column, minuses in that.

She didn't miss St Mungo's. No, by God, that she did not. But she did miss the weekly punctuation mark to her task list: Visit Severus. That surprised her.

Since her resignation from Hogwarts, her weekly to-do list had not gotten smaller, but it had certainly changed. The cottage needed tending, the marketing needed doing, the garden needed weeding, the meals needed cooking . . . There was a house-elf to help, of course (Minerva was no martyr to housekeeping), but her days were full and tended to blend together in much the same way they had in her last months at the school. But there was no longer a weekly trip to London to methodically tick off on the Sunday calendar. She had not realised that she depended upon those trips to frame her time as much as she suspected Severus had.

But there was freedom, too, in the decision she had made, and not just for him. She could resign in good conscience from a post for which she had no stomach at this late date. She could avoid Ministry functions, and interviews, and perfunctory visits with people she could only pretend to like.

She did not know into which column she should place Severus himself. He had greeted her decision with his typical stoicism, expressing his opinions only on the specifics of the plan. Had he been surprised? Grateful? Angry? He had never said, nor had she expected him to.

So, yes. She still asks herself if she has chosen well. She thinks about it as she ices the cake, and again as she decants the Tokay. She wonders if his birthday wish would be the same in this Year of-No-More-Our-Lord, 13... or 2011, by the Gregorian.

She will ask him, she thinks, after they've had the wine, after she has taken him upstairs, cleaned his teeth, held his bedpan, removed his clothes and her own, and taken him into her bed and herself.

It has been a year for new habits and routines, after all. Maybe he will tell her.

~FIN~