

Choice and Conclusion

by loves23rules

How is love kindled? What would break through the defenses of a man protected by his sarcastic wit? From pupil to woman, how is such a change of view made possible? Perhaps like this.

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Chapter 1 of 1

How is love kindled? What would break through the defenses of a man protected by his sarcastic wit? From pupil to woman, how is such a change of view made possible? Perhaps like this.

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In addition to borrowing the Harry Potter universe from JK Rowling, I have been inspired by other fanfiction stories, most notably Lunalelle's "Truth and Dare". The idea of the punishment for not complying with a dare was taken from "Objects of Desire" by Azrael Geffen.

Severus Snape headed for the dungeons after a relatively pleasant breakfast. The Great Hall had been reasonably quiet this morning, and no one had tried to engage him in conversation. He was grateful for any respite before giving his Monday double lesson with the seventh years. From a professional point of view, it was his most rewarding lesson. From a personal point of view, it was anything but. Teaching the Boy Who Lived and his admiring entourage while at the same time having to ensure that Malfoy didn't succeed in his very understandable efforts to poison Potter was one of the worst chores in a teaching week that consisted of very little but chores.

Turning the last corner before arriving at the classroom door, Severus Snape was struck by a highly unusual sight. In fact, one he hadn't seen for well over ten years now and most definitely never in the corridor outside his classroom, namely the sight of a stark naked woman.

Hermione heard him coming and braced herself for the coming onslaught. She had prepared her defence all night and only hoped that the much-talked-of Gryffindor courage wouldn't fail her now.

"Professor Snape," she said reverently, trying hard to pretend that she was fully clad and only a little early for her first lesson.

Snape stared at her almost lost for words.

"Miss Granger?" he said with incredulity. "Exactly what do you think you're doing?"

"I am waiting to attend Potions class, Professor Snape," she said, her voice shaking a bit.

"In that... attire?"

Severus Snape finally averted his eyes. It wasn't seemly for him to stand there staring at a naked student. Suddenly he heard the clatter of footsteps and the sound of two voices approaching.

The high-pitched voice of Pansy Parkinson rang out, "I wonder if she did it?"

"Well, if she didn't, she will be standing naked in the Potions classroom within minutes," Draco Malfoy drawled. "Poor little Mudblood," he said, sounding quite amused. "She won't be able to play little Miss Prudish anymore. Such a loss!" He let out a theatrical sigh.

Snape quickly moved to stand between Hermione and the stairs.

"Miss Granger, get into my office, now!" he hissed.

Hermione readily obeyed his order, wishing nothing more than to get out of the corridor. After closing and warding the door behind them, Snape swept straight past her to a big cupboard in the back of the room. There he produced a worn black robe which he tossed in her direction, without looking at her.

"Dress!"

"I'm sorry, sir, but I can't."

"What?"

Snape turned around slowly and looked her straight into the eye, thoroughly avoiding to even glance anywhere but at her face. He suddenly realised that he was in his own office, alone with a very naked student. A rather pretty one at that, he thought, but immediately checked himself. His momentary lapse made him angry.

"Miss Granger," he said maliciously, "Hogwarts has a policy of school uniform. If you do not agree to this policy, you may look for another educational centre because I will not tolerate any acts of wanton exhibitionism disrupting my lessons."

Hermione paled. So this was what people would think. They would believe that she had chosen to go about her activities naked for an entire day rather than doing the dare because she took some sort of sexual pleasure in being seen this way? That thought had never entered her calculations. However, she quickly concluded, it did not make any difference. She was doing the responsible thing, the only possible thing. Hermione put her chin up.

"I am not a wanton exhibitionist. If I was I would have attended breakfast, wouldn't I?"

She would show him. She lifted the robe over her head. It slid off, refusing to come down. She pointed her wand at it and pronounced the customary dressing spell, but the robe still refused to stay on. She put the robe on the floor, stepped into it and tried to pull it up. That didn't work either.

"I am sorry, Professor Snape," Hermione said, gesturing at the robe. "It is not that I don't want to get dressed. I really can't."

"And would you care to enlighten me as to exactly what act of misused magic has brought on this condition?" Snape asked surly.

He took a seat behind his desk and quickly arranged a pile of books so that they shielded most of her body from his view. Hermione took a deep breath. Here we go, she thought.

"I entered a game of Truth and Dare yesterday evening. I was given a dare that I chose not to fulfil, and the punishment is to go about my usual activities naked for one full day."

She fell silent and ventured a look at Professor Snape. Please don't ask, she thought, but her prayers were in vain.

"And what could possibly be so revolting to you that you prefer this option?"

He knows, Hermione thought, panic-stricken for a moment before exerting herself. This called for keeping a straight face. He might know but then again, he might not. She would have to stick to the truth. It wouldn't do to lie. Snape would know if she tried, and she had nothing to be ashamed of, at least nothing worse than having had the monumental stupidity to join in a game of Wizard's Truth or Dare without checking out the rules first. She knew she ought to try and tell him as little as she possibly could, but she would have him know one thing.

"It is not revolting to me," she said icily, "but the dare involved another person who did not ask to be involved."

"And have you consulted with this innocent bystander, or have you arrogantly presumed to make decisions for others?"

"I have not consulted with him, but with good reason," Hermione said, her face stern. "I would appreciate if you asked no more questions. I am beyond help and," her voice faltered for a second, "some things are better left unspoken," she finished lamely.

He was looking at her face with a scornful air.

"It's Potter again, isn't it?"

Hermione remained silent. She did not want to enter into any guessing games.

"Miss Granger, I will hear the truth of this escapade. Would you prefer some Veritaserum, or should I just pick your brain the usual way?"

Hermione had her shield up before he could pronounce the first syllables of the Legilimens Spell. He had to give her that, Snape thought. She was a quick learner. Their private Occlumency lessons earlier this year had given him some added appreciation of her talents as a student. She had been quite the opposite of Potter: hard-working and respectful.

"So, Veritaserum it is then," he said, as he rose from his chair.

"No!" Hermione almost screamed. "I'll tell you all you need to know, but please don't make me say a name."

Snape considered for a moment.

"Very well. Let's hear it then."

"I was asked to seduce someone," Hermione said, her face quite pink. "I doubt I would have succeeded if I had tried openly, and I refuse to stoop to deception or force. He has earned no such dubious thanks for the favours he has done for me and my friends."

Snape moved the pile of books and looked at her, taking in her entire figure this time. Feeling even more naked than before, Hermione clutched her Potions book tighter, wishing it had been a folio volume rather than just an ordinary size book.

"And why would you be so sure of failure?" he said, allowing a stray thought that she looked quite nice: proportionate, neither too thin nor overweight.

She squirmed under his gaze, and he immediately averted his eyes. What on earth was he doing looking at one of his pupils with such thoughts on his mind? This had to stop now.

"Answer me," he barked. "Why did a Gryffindor, a member of the house famed for courage to the point of foolhardiness, accept defeat without even trying?"

"Because success would be even worse," Hermione said defiantly.

"Oh, I understand," Snape said in his most silken voice. "And so you nobly decided not to compromise this angel of a man, should he not be able to withstand your enticements and throw himself into misery."

Hermione felt all blood drain from her face at Snape's snide words. She would not stand his mocking. This choice had been hers to make and she bloody well had. Forgetful of her nakedness she stopped her futile attempts at shielding herself with the sorely inadequate book and stared at him in rage.

"I doubt that angel is a description anyone would use for him, but apart from that you are exactly right. It just so happens that this man has earned my respect, and I will not do anything to jeopardize his already difficult position. Not if there is another way." Hermione felt tears filling her eyes. "And I thought there was," she added miserably.

Snape snorted derisively. This was about Potter, of course. Who else would Hermione Granger be so loyal to that she was prepared to expose herself in this way? Snape knew about Potter's newly formed relationship with Luna Lovegood. It was discussed everywhere, as though the pathetic love life of the Boy Who Lived was of any consequence to anyone but himself and the unfortunate twit of his choice. So, Hermione Granger did not want to cause the break-up of Potter and Lovegood. How sickeningly foolish, he thought bitterly. How utterly repulsive teenagers could be. There was a way in which he could spare Hermione Granger from being seen naked by the entire student body at Hogwarts. It would be unpleasant for her, but right now Snape felt that he would be most gratified to relieve her sufferings in this fashion. If nothing else, it would serve to vent some of the inexplicable rage he felt at this silly situation.

"Well, Miss Granger. Now that you have managed to turn your act of petty stupidity into a truly Gryffindor feat of unselfish bravery, I am sure that you will not want me to help you. That would after all defeat the object, mark you a coward even. No, I guess, you will have to bear the consequences."

He watched as she paled and slumped forward slightly, as if all air had suddenly escaped her.

"There is a way to break this?" she whispered.

He didn't answer her question, but instead produced his wand.

"Fifty points from Gryffindor for indecent behaviour and public nudity," he barked. "However, I will not have you running around undressed, disturbing lessons all day, and will therefore see to it that your daily activities are performed in more private surroundings." Snape gave a sardonic smile and lifted his wand. *Stupefy*.

The seventh years were standing in the corridor, talking to each other. As always, they fell quiet upon Snape's arrival, and he let them into the classroom.

"The instructions for the potion you are going to make today are written on the blackboard. I trust that I can leave my most advanced class alone for fifteen minutes without any of you either blowing up the room or melting your cauldrons."

He surveyed the room haughtily, catching the eye first of Draco Malfoy and then of Harry Potter. Both boys seemed to study him intensely. Impudent little bastards, he thought as he glared back at them, causing them in turn to look down.

"I have a small matter to attend to." He walked towards the door, but turned halfway. "I almost forgot, Potter. Miss Granger will not attend any classes today. She is a bit... indisposed."

He looked at Harry with a self-satisfied smile, hoping that the bastard would find out what the Granger girl had done for him. Not that it would matter, Snape thought grimly. Potter probably expected no less from his women. If there was one thing he did envy Potter for, Snape thought, it was his remarkable luck in attracting strong, brave women willing to sacrifice their lives and reputations to save his neck as he stumbled along his path of fame.

Chaos broke out the same moment that the sound of Professor Snape's feet had died away.

"I am surprised." The voice was Malfoy's. "Granger must have been hotter than we thought, dying to get into the pants of the handsome Head of Slytherin. Perhaps you should lend her your glasses, Potter. Did you see that smile, Weasley? Looks like someone else got your prize virgin."

"I'm going to kill him," Harry said to the world in general while staring at the door through which Professor Snape had left.

Ron didn't talk at all but simply threw himself straight at Malfoy, aiming for his throat. It took the combined efforts of all the other students to separate them.

"Damn it, Weasley," Malfoy sputtered, feeling his sore jaw. "Why are you taking it out on me? I did the poor girl a favour for heaven's sake. You heard her response to the Truth question."

Snape went into his office and knelt next to Hermione's seemingly lifeless body. She was a diminutive woman, but he would still need to make her a bit lighter. The Hospital Wing was quite a walk from here. That taken care of, he looked at her and said, "I am going to pick you up and carry you. That way you will be at least partly protected by my cloak."

He hoped that would seem rational to her, too. And so he lifted her up, praying fervently that they wouldn't meet anyone in the corridors. He was lucky; he didn't see anyone on his way to the Hospital Wing.

"Severus, what on earth are you doing?" Poppy Pomfrey looked shocked.

"I am bringing you a patient, Poppy," he snarled. "Miss Granger has been Stupefied, and I suggest that she stays here until she is fully recovered. I will talk to Minerva, and she can arrange for the rest."

Poppy glared at him. "Don't think you will get away that easily, Severus. Why is she naked? Why didn't you call for me?"

Snape winced. Of course, he should have called for Poppy right away. What had he been thinking? A little voice in his head said that he had been a bit occupied with not thinking about having a naked, seventeen year-old Hermione Granger in his private office.

"As much as I would like to give you the entire story, Poppy, I have classes to attend. And though teaching them seems futile at best, it is how I earn my salary. I will be back at lunchtime. You may pose any questions you feel necessary then."

He swept out of the room and returned to the dungeons as quickly as he could. As he entered the classroom, he could see the remaining signs of the battle, but wilfully ignored them. What had started out as a good day had soon become something entirely different.

Helena Bones sat down next to her sister at lunch. "What happened to Hermione Granger, Susan?"

Susan looked warily at her younger sister. "Why do you ask?"

"I thought she must have had an accident because I saw Professor Snape carrying her towards the Hospital Wing. I was late for class and I don't think he saw me." Helena took another bite of her sandwich before continuing. "She seemed unconscious, and she was all naked, and she had blood trickling down her thigh. I thought she'd had an

accident and ..." Her voice died away as she saw the expression on her big sister's face.

"Are you sure, Helena, absolutely sure?"

"Yes, of course I'm sure, why would I make anything like that up?"

"Have you told anyone?"

"No, just you."

"Good. Please don't tell anyone until I say so." Susan's voice held a sense of urgency, making her younger sister wonder if there was more to this than a mere magical accident. "I need to think. OK?"

"I can keep my mouth shut," Helena said a bit miffed. She had looked forward to sharing this piece of extravagant news with her friends, but if Susan said to can it, she would. "Is she in trouble?"

"She may be," Susan said grimly, glaring towards the High Table. "But if she is, someone else certainly is, too."

Severus Snape leaned back against the pillow of the generous armchair in front of the fire in the staff room and closed his eyes. It had been a taxing day, filled with oddities. The third-year Ravenclaws and Hufflepuffs had been as usual, but his sixth-year Ravenclaws and Gryffindors had been distinctly odd. Ginny Weasley had jumped every time he got within ten feet of her desk and Luna Lovegood had stared at him to the point where he had taken points from Ravenclaw for goggling. His seventh-year Slytherins had been in high dudgeon all day, picking fights and getting into trouble all over the place, even the usually quiet girls. On his way back from lunch, he had caught Morag MacDougal and Pansy Parkinson in a row that could be heard a mile away.

"I am not interested in your petty excuses, Parkinson," MacDougal had yelled. "Tell Draco that the next time I arrange something, he can take the opportunity to have a romantic dinner for two with you. Because neither of you will be welcome. But, then again, he might still be hoping for Granger because that's what this is all about, isn't it, Pansy?"

"You bloody cow," Pansy had been screaming at the top of her voice. "You're just envious of me, you're just..."

"You know what, Pansy," Morag had yelled back. "I would rather fuck Professor Snape in the Great Hall during dinner hour than touch that slimy little pimp of yours."

That comment had made him decide to intervene. His entrance had its intended effect, as both girls paled and curtsied, their eyes darting to scout possible routes of escape.

"Parkinson, I would have thought you had more taste than to engage in public rows."

He had waved his hand dismissively, and Pansy had made her escape at breakneck speed. With deliberate slowness he turned to MacDougal.

"The next time you decide to air your more advanced ideas of dinner entertainment, Miss MacDougal," he had whispered silkily, "I suggest you do it in a less public space."

He had hovered over her, close enough to invade her private space, but careful not to actually touch her. He'd felt her tremble. Good, he'd thought. That would cure her of any illusions of him being a pleasant man.

"Twenty points off from Ravenclaw for shouting and using indecent language. Also, I would be most gratified if you left me out of any such plans. Teacher-student relationships are not encouraged at this school. They are in fact, strictly forbidden."

Morag had run like a rabbit from the fox.

Snape sank further down into the chair, closed his eyes and felt himself relax in the heat emanating from the fire. He couldn't help but compare the frightened faces of Parkinson and MacDougal with the determination of Hermione Granger this morning. She hadn't fled. Instead she had stood, completely exposed, explaining her mistake losing neither her nerve nor her dignity. Potter didn't deserve her. Snape had little faith that Harry Potter would be intelligent enough to see someone like Hermione Granger for the gem she was. He would probably be scared by her intellect and think her less than a woman instead of more, as a sensible man would. Pathetic twit! She deserved something better, someone intellectual, more mature.

His musings were interrupted by Professors Sprout and McGonagall entering the staff room.

"Are you sure?" Minerva said, sounding very surprised indeed.

"At least that is what the Slytherins say," Sprout confided to her colleague. "I caught them trying to compose a song on the subject. Poor lyrics and hopeless meter, I'm afraid. I confiscated it of course. Not that it will stop them for long, but just on principle."

"Well, I must say that she has been very good at concealing her crush. I would never have suspected it, but then I don't think I would have believed it even if I had seen her swoon in front of him."

"Interesting choice," Sprout said in an amused tone. "She obviously doesn't have a mainstream taste in men."

Both women laughed heartily, and Snape tried to sink lower into his chair. With a little luck they wouldn't see him. He desperately wanted to be alone. They spotted him at once, of course. The world was conspiring against him, he concluded. Peace was obviously nowhere to be had today.

"Well, if it isn't Prince Charming of Slytherin himself," Professor Sprout cooed.

Snape glared at her.

"I have long regarded this school a madhouse second only to the closed ward at St Mungo's," he growled, "but today seems worse than ever. What is it, Sprout, do you require a new pair of glasses, or have you simply decided to embrace lunacy as the natural extension of your chosen profession?"

"Very funny, Severus. I am sure it was that sarcastic wit of yours that made her heart melt like a cauldron in the hands of a first year." Sprout smiled wickedly.

Obviously he wasn't the only one who had overheard MacDougal's shouting. Damned gossiping hags, he thought angrily. He wasn't going to stand for this. Without bothering to retort he rose and hurriedly left the room, intent on going to his own quarters. Minerva McGonagall caught him in the corridor.

"No more witty remarks about student crushes if you please, Minerva," he said frostily.

"I won't offer any, but really, you had it coming," Minerva said with a sly smile. "After all, you were very eloquent on the subject of Neville Longbottom giving dear old Sprout flowers on her birthday last month, weren't you?"

"That was an entirely different matter," Snape said haughtily, smiling at the memory. "Did you wish to talk about something in particular or just detain me from my much longed for solitude in general?"

"I won't detain you for long. I simply wanted you to know that Miss Granger has recovered from your treatment this morning, which was admittedly effective but far from gentle. It was a pity you didn't call me instead. It would have been a splendid opportunity to teach Miss Granger some of the finer points of transformation of self." Minerva smiled cunningly and continued, "She enlightened me as to the general cause of her affliction, but gave no details. May I ask, and do stop me if I'm being too personal, if your decision to Stupefy her was an attempt to discourage her?"

"I much doubt that Miss Granger can be discouraged by anything short of total annihilation of her being, Minerva," he said snidely.

He wondered a little at what exactly Professor McGonagall meant he should be trying to discourage Granger from. For a moment he was tempted to ask, but then decided against it.

"I rather think she proved that this morning," he added thoughtfully, more to himself.

McGonagall's face split into a large, leering grin.

"Why, Severus, perhaps I have been mistaken about your feelings? Allow an older colleague to give you a little bit of advice: if you do not wish to fuel more rumours about student crushes, then I suggest you refrain from playing the romantic hero. Carrying Miss Granger's lifeless body in your arms all the way from the dungeons, Severus? Think of the poor girl's heart."

Her tone was humorous, but her words hit him like a ton of bricks on a sore toe.

"Don't worry, Minerva," Snape said bitterly. "No student has ever had a crush on me, nor are they likely to start now. I know my looks and my reputation quite well. Miss Granger's heart may be generous enough that she would rather go naked for a full day than seduce Potter against his will, but I much doubt it would even skip a beat for the 'greasy git'. That is what they call me. You know that, don't you? Doesn't everyone? "

He realised he was shouting at her, and embarrassed by his own outburst, he turned on his heel and left McGonagall alone in the corridor.

Minerva McGonagall watched him walk away. She felt thoroughly ashamed. For his sake, and for Miss Granger's, she should have kept her mouth shut. He could not afford to lose his calm, and she knew well that his position in the Order made it too dangerous for him to form any sort of emotional attachments. She hoped fervently that Snape would never find out that Harry Potter had nothing to do with the present afflictions of Hermione Granger.

Snape was just about to enter his rooms when Dobby the house-elf popped into existence in a cloud of greenish smoke.

"Professor Snape, sir. Headmaster wants you, at once," he said and then promptly disappeared in another puff of smoke.

Dumbledore stood in the middle of the room next to Madam Pomfrey, both of them facing two girls whom Snape recognised as the Bones sisters.

"There you are, Severus. I will deal with you in a minute. Poppy and I will just finish this little matter first," Dumbledore said, turning his back to Snape.

"She is still intact," Madam Pomfrey smiled reassuringly at the two girls. "It was only her period coming. No need to worry. You can talk to her yourself tomorrow. She will remain at the Hospital Wing tonight."

"I am thankful," Dumbledore said solemnly, "that you brought your concerns in this matter directly to my attention. Had your suspicions been verified, Professor Snape would indeed have lost his position as a teacher here at Hogwarts. And had you not called on me, but discussed it with your friends instead, rumour might have made it impossible for him to clear his name from these allegations."

Madam Pomfrey followed the two girls to the door, and Snape was left alone with Dumbledore.

"What was that all about?" Snape asked.

He was getting distinctly worried about what he had heard. Had his spell actually harmed Miss Granger? When would this nightmare of a Monday ever stop?

"Have a seat, Severus," Dumbledore offered without his usual friendly demeanour. "I can tell you have had quite a day, and I do not intend to put this mildly. What on earth were you thinking this morning?" He waved his hand to silence the protests Snape was about to voice. "I am sure, Severus, that your intentions were absolutely honourable, but you should have thought about it. A naked female student alone in your office! It should have been brought to the attention of our female staff immediately. And you really should keep a closer eye on your own house, Severus. Two Slytherin students got very close to costing you your job today and with it your chances of my protection as well as your position in the Order."

Snape felt cold sweat break out on his forehead, he could not afford to lose his position at Hogwarts.

"Who? What happened? How does this relate to the accusations of harming Miss Granger?"

"Are you really sure you want to know this, Severus?"

There was no twinkling in Albus Dumbledore's eyes, and Severus knew he shouldn't ask, but a thought dawned on him.

"This isn't about Potter, is it?" he said a bit illogically.

As so often before, Albus seemed to know exactly what he meant.

"No, Harry has nothing to do with this."

"Please tell me. If I am to defend myself, I will need to know."

"You will not be required to defend yourself. The charges laid at your door were refuted in full by Miss Granger herself. She has told me everything."

Severus Snape leaned back in the chair, closing his eyes. His head was in turmoil. Something was trying to surface in his mind, but he shoved it away. He wanted to hear the truth, not some sordid fantasy from his own imagination.

"Tell me," he croaked.

The Headmaster sat down behind his desk.

"I suppose I might as well since you are sure to find out sooner or later." Dumbledore sighed and rubbed the bridge of his nose before finally opening his mouth. "It seems that young Mr Malfoy was a bit upset by Miss Granger's failure to name him when asked which resident Slytherin she would prefer to take to her bed. I have been told that Hermione's answer to that question caused considerable surprise. When Miss Parkinson got the chance to give Miss Granger a dare, Malfoy made her charge Hermione with seducing the man in question."

Snape stared at Dumbledore.

"What? Which of my boys can command such loyalty from...?" He fell silent as Dumbledore interrupted his ramblings.

"I said man, Severus, not boy."

"Who?"

"Do you really have to ask?"

"Tell me!" Snape whispered hoarsely. He needed to hear it from Albus Dumbledore himself. Then, and only then, would he believe it.

"You, Professor Severus Snape."

Snape stumbled out of the Headmaster's office. It was clear to him now that Sprout and McGonagall had been talking about him and Hermione. But they were wrong. She had been asked what Slytherin, not what man, she preferred. Of course she was not in love with him. That was not possible. Yet, what was it she had said to him this morning?

"It is not revolting to me... I doubt that angel is a description anyone would use for him... This man has earned my respect... He has earned no such dubious thanks for the favours he has done for me..."

The girl was deranged! He ought to give her a good scare, he ought to... Snape leaned against the stone wall. He ought to fall at her feet and thank her. Hermione Granger had rather faced exposure to the entire school than to endanger him. It was possible that she could have had her way with him, if she had resorted to trickery. There were potions and spells enough for such uses. Given her resourcefulness, combined with his ignorance of the threat at hand, it was even likely. But she had not done it and she had not asked for gratitude when sparing him. She hadn't even wanted him to know. But now he did.

Snape found himself standing at the door of the Hospital Wing.

"Severus, here to see Hermione?" Madam Pomfrey said kindly as she opened the door. "Dumbledore said you might drop by. I've given her a Dreamless Sleep Potion, so you will not be able to speak to her, but I'll give you a minute alone anyway, shall I?" He nodded and she let him in. "She really is a very nice girl, Severus."

Severus Snape stood next to the bed looking down at the calm sleeping face of Hermione Granger. The white moonlight shone through the window, lighting up the mass of bushy hair covering the cushion. He didn't touch her. She and Albus had both been right, he shouldn't have asked because he could not afford to know. Not until the battle against Voldemort was either won or entirely lost. His chances of survival were slim at best. Emotion was not for him, and never had he believed that such devotion could be for him either. He had dreamt of it and hoped for it, but never believed.

Madam Pomfrey looked up as Professor Snape came out of the room where Hermione slept. His manners were as always, she thought, haughty to the point of derogatory.

"I do not know why Albus insisted that I see her myself," he snorted. "I have every faith in you picking up the sorry remains of our pupils and sending them back to my classes. Usually long before I have had a chance to thoroughly enjoy their absence. You may tell Miss Granger that I expect an essay on the brewing of strength potions on my desk by Friday to make up for her missed lesson."

Snape swept out of the Hospital Wing, striding purposefully towards the dungeons. Not yet, he thought, not just yet.

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