

Burns

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She thought she knew love, but she was wrong. She'll find out how hard passion can burn. Because the heart is an organ of fire.

Chapter One: Legilimens

Chapter 1 of 2

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All characters belong to J.K.Rowling

Chapter One

Legilimens

All I remember is, it was a dark day. That kind of day you don't want to get up, get dressed, and be out running after your life that slips, slips through your fingers without control. No chance to hold it back. I had been dragging myself with nervous steps all over, breakfast, lessons, lunch; now double DADA and no more to think about. Not till I'd have to get back to the common room. And there, alone, face Ron. My first love. My greatest failure.

Viktor kept writing, but I hadn't been answering him for months now. How could I? Ron owned my mind entirely; all my so ordered thoughts were his. It was for him that I kept waking up at night, for him that I spent hours looking at the mirror, hoping what I saw might change and he could suddenly find out I was a girl after all. Worthy of being loved.

But no. He had other things to think about, like teasing Harry for his now patent relationship with Luna; not their fault if it seemed catching Potter and Lovegood kissing (and other) had become Hogwarts' Game of the Year. Only October, and they were on everybody's mouth. Giggling and gossiping. Harry walked one meter above earth, and Ron was too occupied to horse him about it to care about anything else. Moreover, this whole Quidditch thing was nothing short of ridiculous. He was obsessed. Talking about that, and nothing else.

Too bad already my love was unrequited; too bad I had to keep it secret instead of screaming it to world; but sometimes I had to face the fact Ron never lived up to my expectations. And yet. No matter how hard I tried to rationalise the whole thing, the whole thing kept escaping its proper bounds. It devoured me. Wake and sleep I was burning. And no one noticed. No one cared.

I was late, of course. I'd eaten something, hiding myself behind a book at the far end of the table. I'd pretended to chat with Luna. If I'd talked to her, maybe she would have understood. But it felt stupid, sharing my grief with someone so deeply in love as she was. She might have pitied me, consoled me; understood me, not. And my pride was still too strong to beg for a moment's pity and its bitter marks. Because she'd talk to Harry then. Sure as hell. And so no way. I hurried down the stairs and silently prayed today, this one day in my whole life, Snape was late too.

Of course Luck had other plans.

"Miss Granger."

That voice. I put down my books, drew out my wand. Head down. Not willing to meet those black spiteful eyes. Say what you will. I'm not going to answer.

"I hope you have a satisfying explanation for your delay."

"I don't."

"Good. Ten points off for Gryffindor."

The groan of my schoolmates, the evil giggling of the Slytherins. They were all used to me earning points, not losing them. It was like the small rubies cut into my stomach as they silently fell down the sandglass, somewhere under our feet. I said nothing and took out my parchment. But peace was not in sight.

"No notes today, Miss Granger."

I could imagine the dark sneer without checking.

"No, today," the bat was wandering around, his black robes floating mid-air after him as usual, "today we'll give another try to the matter of our first," pause, and his growling voice enhanced unpleasantly the next word "disappointing lesson. Non verbal spells."

Any other class, there would have been a general groan. Not in Severus Snape's class.

"As dividing you into couples and leaving you to your limited resources has proved dramatically useless, today I'll show you how non verbal magic should work. A volunteer would be proper."

Silence. Malfoy, of course, would be picked, just to show how supposedly better he was than the rest of us. But instead, the bat fluttered nearer.

"Miss Granger, perhaps."

Now, that was unexpected. There was obviously no choice but take my wand and stand up. From the next desk, the worried eyes of Harry. And Ron. I looked elsewhere.

"Miss Granger, come here please."

One lazy wave of his wand, and the teacher's desk flattened itself against the wall, leaving a wide empty space in the middle of the room. I took position, taking care Ron and Harry were right behind me. Where there was no way I could see them.

"The usual, Miss Granger. I'll attack. Try to block me."

I wondered what spell he would choose. Maybe something painful, that would leave a mark. Maybe just something that would have me fall... and the Slytherins laugh. But no matter. This clearly wasn't my day.

"Ready yourself."

One. Two. Three.

It was more violent than I expected, and all the worse because on the outside, nothing happened. No, probably the class just watched Snape fixing his eyes on me, and me, frozen without even the strength to back down. He'd chosen Legilimens.

His will was too strong to be pulled away, too imperative and demanding to be refused. And that day there were no resources left in me to fight him back. My mind unlocked.

All my dreams and hopes, raving visions of Ron kissing me, caressing me, making love to me; all my remembrances sad and happy, terrific visions of last year's battle at the Ministry, the first time I'd realized I too was able to see Thestrals, my mother's eyes as I tried to explain how exactly things were... and there was not a single wall standing, not a tiny defence against that inquisitive power. Until he was satisfied there was no battle to fight.

"Enough."

His voice was sarcastic, pleased; but there was something underlying, perhaps a hint of surprise. I looked at him sideways. Snape, his arms crossed, his wand lowered, was watching me like a strange curio. So what, I wanted to ask. You're just the best at this, as Harry had to find out. Satisfied? Hermione Granger's life is just a pathetic heap of ragged, useless silly day-dreams. Nothing substantial under them. Just as you might have guessed.

But the ironic dismissal I was waiting for did not come. He uncrossed his arms; and his voice was dry and terse as he said: "Again."

So, he wanted to play. Vanquish all that remained of my dignity, of my pride. So that I might never look at him again without knowing he'd seen the most precious of my thoughts, the most secret of my emotions. And he hadn't had more. Not yet. This time, I lifted my chin.

"I'm ready."

I was waiting for it this time, I knew he would do it again. He would try that door and see what else could be found. I let him in, but this time it was not a surrender. I did not so easily yield. With the bitterness piled up in months of quiet despair, I confronted Snape with all the worst my mind had in store. My worst memories; the fear, the humiliation, the physical pain of grieving love; all of this, like a sea ready to swallow him. And there was no escape; because there was no sun in me that day, and I thought there would never be again. And I clung to that tearing thought like a dying to a dagger's blade, and as it cut through me I hoped and prayed it would cut him too.

Snape's face twisted with something on someone else's face I would have called pain; and he was the one to take a step behind. The first to break eye contact.

There was a moment of silence, and on everyone's face in that room a puzzled look. They had expected sparkles and blood to be shed; not a battle fought entirely on the private fields of the mind. Snape didn't speak for a moment or two. Then, his pursed lips opened and he drawled: "Interesting defense, Miss Granger."

No irony in my voice, just that bitterness that lingered. "Thank you, sir."

It might have ended there. But Severus Snape was no man to acknowledge defeat. As I turned to go back to my chair it hit me hard, and this time not a violation of my mind but true, unendurable physical pain. Crucio.

Unforgivables, of course. And while I wondered to whom it may belong the shriek I heard filling the air, I felt my fingers locked tight on my wand and fought back. Not a scream; a pure, unbreakable thought. Incendio.

My pain ceased; and as I crouched breathless on the floor, I saw Snape set on fire. One gasp from the throats of my schoolmates as his robes were devoured by flames. His disconcerted face was my prize, and as he instantly choked the fire with another silent spell I realised how his mind should be in that moment. Enraged, indignant; maybe even scared. However, defenceless. I raised my wand. Legilimens.

He didn't expect me and so I broke through. It was like falling, swirling into pure darkness; and thoughts and memories of past evils flew by me, crossed me with burning marks; but what was most excruciating, what had me pay bitterly for my revenge, was the pain. I'd thought my unhappiness, the hollowness of my life were unbearable; I'd never known this. I'd never been able, I'd never wanted even to imagine the abysses of despair Snape's mind revealed. It was a moment before he locked me out; but it was enough. The boy he'd been, the man he was; confused thoughts, but enough. To my suffering mind the contact with this was Greek fire. No water would be able to

soothe the wounds.

And then the unyielding will I'd known took over and slapped me back with a force that backfired my own spell. Walls closed around me till my searching mind was trapped in a hollow, cold place where there was nothing to be seen or felt but that overwhelming pain pulsating behind the stone. I let my wand fall.

There was silence now; the tense silence after the battle has ceased. As the dust falls and you wait to see who still stands. The answer was - no one.

I abandoned my head against the desk's leg, dried out. There was a bad smell of smoke and burned things in the air; the ample sleeves of Snape's robes were now torn. His face was darkened by smoke. He remained silent for one long minute, and his face could not be read. Then he said, his voice steel: "Class dismissed."

A low murmur; but no one dared disobey. Harry hurried at my side, hand stretched.

"No."

Harry turned to Snape with the face of someone ready to crack crowns. I pulled his sleeve and begged him leave with one quiet stare. There was no need for him to stay and watch whatever was to come. However unwillingly, he left. The door closed with a dark thud. And we were left alone.

Chapter 2: Near

Chapter 2 of 2

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Chapter Two

Near

As the door closed, Snape waited a long moment for the steps in the corridor to vanish. As soon as they were on the stairways, I knew they'd begin to whisper and bet if anything recognisable of Hermione Granger would be left.

I didn't even try to stand up. Every inch of my body hurt, as if the pain had been real. As if it had left marks. My wand was lost somewhere in the folds of my uniform, and any spell I cast now would be useless even if screamed. My head tilted against the cold wood of the desk, my hands abandoned in my lap, I waited.

He did not disappoint me – with one quick spell he did not utter, his robes were whole again, his face clean from the smoke; even the smell of burn disappeared. I wished I could do the same with myself, wash away the memories that day had brought. I knew I'd never be good at Legilimency. I could not stand what may come from someone else's mind. No matter how many words were spent on pain, touching it was walking into fire. And today I'd been burnt.

As he, walking slowly, approached, I looked at Snape's cold face and tried to see the scars, the visible signs of what in that very moment was unravelling behind those black eyes. But there was nothing to read. A blank, distant face. Occlumency must be a second nature to him.

Three steps from me, he stopped.

"Stand."

"I can't."

A statement. All my life I had lived by the orders of others, never dreaming of disobeying. Now, laying there on that cold stone floor, no fibre of my punctilious old being stirred. I was quiet and comfortable there. A living image to quiet despair.

Snape's face did not change. His wand barely moved, and I was standing, pulled up by strong if not ungentle ropes of pure air. As soon as I felt my body weigh on my ankles, I wished it was over. So I looked up, impatient, waiting stoically for the harshness, the contempt. But neither of them came. Severus Snape looked at me, and words were balanced on a razor's edge. And then he spoke.

"What did you see?"

I raised my face, surprised. Of all he could say, this was the last thing I expected.

"Nothing. It was confused. And dark."

"Dark."

His voice its usual, familiar drawl. But now I knew better, and I met his eyes without trembling. Applying the art wizards have forgot and Muggles are masters of. Looking for the truth behind the lightless windows of his black irises.

"What did you see?"

"A know-it-all's pathetic little life." His answer full of automated cruelty. But I was too down already to be sunk further. I smiled weakly.

"You backed away."

"I could have retched all the way through."

"You didn't."

Somewhere deep inside I was surprised of myself. I'd set a professor on fire. I'd disobeyed his orders. And now I defied him quietly without even raising my voice. Of course, Snape fulfilled my expectations. He sneered.

"How typical of you, Miss Granger. Thinking your miserable little pains are enough to scare someone's will. My will." There was a spark of joyless triumph into his eyes. "I've seen worse, Miss Granger. "

I wished there was something else to say, something cutting and unpleasant; but now his pain was part of me, indelibly engraved in my memory. And so I murmured:

"I believe it."

He looked at me, and his eyes betrayed a sparkle of fury; but he said nothing. His eyes burnt.

"Get out."

Without looking at me again, he summoned back his desk and sat behind it. It was like I'd never been there. My steps muffled, silent, I walked out of the door without looking back.