

# Almost

*by juniperus*

A vignette from Neville's seventh year at Hogwarts.

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*Chapter 1 of 1*

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The dark figure pointed his wand at a bloodied pile of robes. As he murmured, a groan escaped the body huddled in their folds. Snape stood back, stiffly, as the boy struggled to his feet.

"Longbottom, you are fortunate Alecto Carrow is both myopic and too lazy to confirm that he *Confringo* hit you and not the statue beside you. What *is* it that you thought so important as to risk life and limb?"

"They had a second-year Hufflepuff, sir, and were holding her outside her Common Room until curfew..."

"...so they could punish her for flagrant rule-breaking," Snape finished. His shoulders sagged for a moment before he straightened and glared. "And *so you*," he spat, "renowned dueling disaster that you are, took it upon *yourself* to create a distraction."

He fought the urge to reach out and touch this oddly brave boy, to reassure himself that he was alive.

"Go," he said hoarsely, "and for Merlin's sake *becareful* this time, idiotic Gryffindor!"

Neville nodded as he looked the Headmaster in the eye, unflinchingly. As he turned to leave he whispered, almost too softly to be heard, "You too, sir."

*Almost.*

The door closed with a soft click.