

# Nox Maris

*by cmwinters*

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*Chapter 1 of 1*

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**Author's notes:** This was written for lunalelle for the HP DE Spring Smutathon 2008. Among her requests were werewolves, Severus/Hermione, mindfuck, darkfic, bloodplay, consensual or dub con, and a special request for psychological horror and plot.

I deliberately left the time period vague in this, but what I personally had in mind was an of-age Hermione, with a DH surviving Snape (and therefore, AU).

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Had it been late autumn, one might have called the fat yellow crescent lying low in the eastern Scottish sky a "harvest moon", but as it was mid-spring, such a moniker was entirely inappropriate.

Not that it mattered; not a single being in the castle noticed it. All the owls were out hunting, and even the elves were fast asleep. In fact, the sole being in the castle who was still awake was one Severus Snape, who was swooping down the hall in a towering fury.

Not that "towering fury" was an unusual description for the man; quite the contrary. However, today (or, more appropriately, this morning) it had even more outside influence than usual.

As if he didn't have enough to do, he had to contend with a certain bushy-haired Gryffindor know-it-all asking him entirely too many entirely too personal questions about his activities as a Death Eater. It utterly baffled him that for someone who prided herself on her supposed intellect, the explanation "pointlessly tortured, maimed and killed Muggles and Muggle-borns for sport" was considered "not descriptive enough". Merlin's beard, what did she want, a play-by-play?

He knew, just *knew* to the core of his being, that his colleagues were getting a great deal of amusement out of his discomfiture. He knew equally as well that none of the other faculty would have been subjected to such interrogation.

He ruthlessly silenced the small voice in the back of his mind ... which bore an amazing resemblance to that of Albus Dumbledore ... that tried to point out that none of the other faculty had joined the Death Eaters in the first place.

*Well, to Hades with the lot of them*, he thought bitterly to himself. He had had his fill . . . and Severus Snape had some very unique and incontrovertible ways of making his displeasure known.

Unfortunately for a random fourth-year Hufflepuff (and fortunately for Snape), Severus had only this evening confiscated one of the blasted "Skiving Snackboxes" offered by Weasleys' Wizarding Wheezes. After confiscating the "snackbox" with a one-hundred House point deduction for "possessing contraband unbecoming of a Hufflepuff", Severus had stormed off to dispose of the thing, but at the last minute fate stayed his hand.

What he found in there delighted him, in the dark and twisted way that only Severus Snape (and his myriad fans, whom he would have sworn did not exist) could be delighted.

Contained in the box was a Patented Daydream Charm. And Snape's desire for retribution against a certain someone suddenly seemed feasible.

As an instructor, the Weasley twins had irked him to no end. They had clearly understood the material he'd laboriously prepared for presentation in class, judging by their unflinchingly correct (if disrespectful) answers, and they had generally done well on exams, although they rarely bothered to turn in assignments and occasionally didn't bother with completing what he assigned to be done in-class. Lack of aptitude would have annoyed him too, truth be told, but this was blatant disregard and disrespect for his time and efforts and was a completely different matter than simple lack of comprehension or skill.

As an academic, he had been horrified when the two had left school, effectively destroying their chance for any formal or even informal education. He couldn't imagine behaving in that manner himself.

But as a staff member who had suffered under the rule of Dolores Umbridge ... a rule so tyrannical that it put both Dumbledore and the Dark Lord at their worst to shame ... he privately rejoiced in their getting one over on the Ministry toady. He himself had only been able to stomach his time under the imbecile because Lucius had put in a good word for him with Fudge, and as such, she left Severus alone for the most part. He shuddered to think what attentions she'd have devoted to him otherwise.

Despite what many of his students apparently thought, even Severus Snape had standards.

But the discovery of the Patented Daydream Charm had considerably lightened his mood. Although Charms hadn't been his strongest subject, he was quite talented with spell casting when there was something resembling a point to doing so. In Severus' opinion, growing one's nose hair into ringlets seemed to be devoid of said point.

So while he was certainly capable of reverse-engineering the Charm (on theory alone) had he needed to do so, since such a Charm had fallen into his lap ... so to speak ... there was little need. He'd simply adapt the existing Charm for his own uses.

Which was what brought him to the dungeons at this ridiculous hour. Although no longer teaching Potions, he had not lost his laboratory privileges, and besides all of the faculty had access to the entire school. However, the stores weren't kept nearly as regimentally ordered as they were when he was in charge of them, and it took him a few minutes of rifling before he found the Memory Duplication Draught he was looking for.

Few in the Wizarding world knew Legilimency was a double-bladed sword, and Snape highly doubted that most of the Death Eaters would ever have dared dream what Snape had done. Truth be told, the first time it had happened, Severus was sure he was going to die an immediate but slow and very painful death, but the Dark Lord hadn't seemed to notice.

Over the next several years, Severus had tested his theory. It seemed that while the Dark Lord was combing his mind for information, a vulnerability to the Dark Lord's mind was likewise exposed.

While the Dark Lord was far more a naturally talented Legilimens than Severus was, Severus was a far more talented Occlumens. And Slytherin that he was, Severus found out things about the Dark Lord that he'd never uttered to a single soul ... not even to Dumbledore.

One of those things was about to become an ingredient in a potion he was about to brew. A potion that was very dark and what would undoubtedly be distinctly Ministry Unapproved, were they to know of it, but as the thing didn't exist yet ... well. What the Ministry didn't know wouldn't hurt them, now would it?

A few waves of his wand secured the lab and ensured he wouldn't be disturbed, and Snape set to work.

First, he cleared his mind completely before focussing on the shred of memory he needed. Because he was going to pull it out of his head, he needed to ensure he had only the relevant parts of it to embellish. This was going to be difficult since once he removed it, he wasn't going to remember what he was doing in the first place. When he finally had the base memory trimmed sufficiently, he siphoned it off into a vial of memory preserving liquid he nearly always had on his person from sheer habit. He hadn't always had unfettered access to a Pensieve, and rather than be caught unawares, Snape just started carrying the necessities with him when he was just a young Potions master, all those many years ago.

Given an unexpected Summoning, it was easy enough to thrust one's compromising memories in a phial of the liquid for safekeeping, stash the phial on the way to gathering one's Death Eater robes, and proceed as if nothing were amiss.

Once withdrawn, Severus viewed the targeted memory from the dispassionate third-party perspective presented by the Pensieve, and he realised it was even more perfect than he'd hoped. He pulled away from the bowl with a triumphant sneer and picked the memory back up with his wand, dipped it in the Duplication Draught, and put the original back to his temple. He then took the Charm, wrapper and all, and put it into the duplicated memory, and poured it in a cauldron to simmer.

He stared at the mixture for a bit, contemplating his next move. He was undeniably angry with Granger and outraged at her questioning, but he wanted to frighten and demoralise her, not destroy her. He drummed his fingers on the bench, thinking over everything he knew about her, and everything he wanted to accomplish with this experiment. She needed to be taught a lesson (or two), that much was clear. However, too heavy a hand could kill her or make her a permanent resident of St Mungo's next to Lockhart. Despite his generally misanthropic nature, Snape disliked very few people enough to sentence them to *that*. Better too little than too much, he decided after careful consideration.

Confident with his decision, he rose and walked to the hidden cabinet that held supplies for faculty only and withdrew a small brown paper bag. Careful not to touch the specimen with his fingers lest he contaminate it, Severus sterilised the tip of his silver potions knife to scrape off a bit of the cap, a smattering of gills, and a minuscule slice of the stem of a blood red and white spotted toadstool. When he was satisfied he had the right amount of the fungus harvested, he tipped it into the cauldron and watched impassively as the contents turned bright red.

He sterilised the knife again. Because he would need to be there once Granger swallowed the potion (to direct the "activities"), he needed the potion to be tied to him, so he jabbed his left wrist with the dagger, just under where his Mark sat. A single drop of blood fell into the cauldron, and Snape touched his wand to his arm to staunch the flow, entirely out of a need to ensure the potion didn't become contaminated further.

When finished, he covered the pot, concealed it with an Eyes-Only Charm, and set it to simmer. Nobody would disturb it if nobody could see it.

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Almost two weeks later, the night before the moon was due to rise full in the sky, Snape slipped back into the lab and pulled a heavily wrapped parcel out of his robes.

Before proceeding, he Occluded his mind completely. Others in the Order would have sworn he'd be better off to wield his wand offensively rather than shield his mind defensively, but the problem with spell casting is that it generally required a wand. He was an accomplished enough Occlumens that he could Occlude without a wand, and he preferred to rely on wandless magic where available. Besides, a silver companion gallivanting about the potions lab was not the safest thing he could think of. Snape untied the cord that bound the parcel and pulled off several towels to reveal a sturdy but small, wooden box. Opening the lid revealed a small vial surrounded by sphagnum moss. The vial itself was pitch black, and merely exposing it seemed to make the temperature in the room drop several degrees. Grasping the bottle in his dragon-hide gloved hands, he put a single drop of it in the middle of a complex double-distillation apparatus. The sole drop would ensure that the hallucinations Granger had tended toward the negative, and the toadstool would ensure an extended length. The distilled potion would filter through the drop of potion as it made its way down the condenser, and the mixture would be again distilled over the next twenty-four hours.

Only an hour ago, he reflected, he'd convinced Granger to abandon her (no-doubt titillating) plans for tomorrow evening by spinning some spurious tale about showing her a secret cavern underneath the castle. The naïve twit had fallen for it, and so he set his plans into motion.

The Ministry didn't even know it was possible to bottle Essence of Dementor, and he was quite certain were they to find out he possessed such a bottle, he'd be ensured a one-way Portkey to Azkaban at best. But abiding the letter of the law when he needed or wanted to accomplish something illegal had not ever been Severus' *modus operandi*, and he saw no particular reason to change now. The fact was the Dementors obeyed those with the Mark, and Severus had been able to lure one into a trap. With breeding Dementors everywhere, nobody had noticed one missing. All the better for Snape, because were the Dark Lord to find out . . . well. Suffice it to say, Severus would not have had a good evening.

With his alembics and the distillation still gurgling happily, Snape secured the lab again and made his way back to his office.

He even slept soundly that night.

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The next evening, Severus bottled his freshly-brewed potion, Banished the residuals, and set the house-elves to cleaning the equipment. He met Granger at the top of the stairs, the very picture of cultivated grace and manners. He took her to the Slytherin Head of House office for a civilised tea, and slipped the potion into her second cup. Forty minutes later, he'd told her he'd delayed enough, and with a self-deprecating smirk rose from his chair, genially offered her his hand, and she took it with a fleeting narrowing of her eyes.

Good, he'd thought to himself. She was off-guard, which was just how he wanted her. She'd spend more time trying to figure out what he was up to than cataloguing her reactions, at least until it was too late.

As they approached the subterranean cavern she stumbled and shook her head slightly as if to clear it.

"Oh I'm terribly sorry, Miss Granger," Severus apologised, reaching a hand out to steady her. "I forgot there was an uneven paving stone there. I instinctively avoid it now," he continued, pulling her closer to him.

The stones were perfectly even but as she couldn't see them, she couldn't know that. She smiled up at him, stupidly grateful for his solicitous behaviour.

Quick as lightning, he whipped out his dagger and sliced her palm. Before she'd even registered the pain, he'd pressed her bleeding hand up against the wall.

"Ow!" she yelped and tried to pull away. But his hand held hers firm against the stone, and she fixed him with a severe glower.

"There must be a blood-sacrifice to enter the cavern, Miss Granger," he whispered. Behind his back, he deftly waved his wand, activating the Charm as well as moving the guardian boulder aside.

Of course, this was untrue for their current location, but it sounded good.

There was little light, but Hermione could hear and smell water. She could also see that deep within the cavern lay an island which was lit by a strangely iridescent glow. She turned a questioning glance back at Snape, and he motioned that she should enter the cavern.

Still trusting him, she entered, and he slid the guardian stone behind them shut with a theatrical bang. A casual wave of his wand transfigured his faculty robes to the style favoured by Death Eaters, and she gasped.

"No one will hear you if you scream," he hissed at her darkly, taking delight in the look of fear in her eyes as he silently disarmed her.

Before long, that look would be terror, he knew.

"Ahh, Snape," rasped a taunting voice from deeper within the cavern, "you've brought me one! And here I thought you didn't like me!" Hermione spun around to see a whiskered man wearing very tight robes that seemed to contain recent bloodstains.

Even Snape had to suppress a shudder; he *hated* werewolves. Beside him, Granger squeaked and flinched and made like she was going to hide behind him.

He grabbed her and roughly forced her in front of him. "I don't think so, Miss Granger," he snarled at her. "My days of protecting you from rogue werewolves are long behind me. It got me *so far* the last time, after all."

Her eyes flew open and her mouth dropped. He was sure if the room had been better lit, her skin would have been pale to rival his own.

"Not quite yet, Greyback," Snape cautioned, and the beast turned to him with a speculative look. "I want to make sure she sees our *friends*."

Greyback grinned ferally, his jagged, yellow teeth exposed in the meagre light. "Ah, yes," he agreed. "Well, come 'round here, I was just about done," he offered and backed away.

Snape wrenched Hermione's arm and dragged her with him.

"Ow!" she yelped again. "Stop!"

"No," Snape replied in an icy voice, shoving her ahead of him.

Hermione refused to walk forward any more when her feet collided with a pile of something which was unidentifiable in the gloom. The metallic stench wafting up to her, however, made her want to retch.

Snape used his wand to illuminate the area, and Hermione nearly screamed. She was standing in a slowly expanding puddle of blood, which was draining in a morbidly meandering fashion toward a stinking lake. In the puddle lay a body so gruesomely disemboweled that she could no longer see any identifying features, or tell the gender or even the skin colour. Greyback was kneeling in the carnage, cheerily shoveling various bits into his gaping maw.

Hermione was not known to be weak-willed, but in the face of such unexpected terror and carnage, she vomited violently.

Snape stepped away from her with a scoff of disgust and Greyback looked at her murderously. He rose and neatly sidestepped the remains of Hermione's dinner, approaching her with a wicked gleam in his eyes. "Since you've been so kind as to destroy my dinner," he snarled, his ears and snout longer and hairier than they'd been only a few minutes before, "I'll just have YOU for dinner!" he spat.

Hermione shrieked and backed against the wall, scrabbling helplessly against the rock in her panic.

"Not yet," Snape ordered from the side where he stood with arms crossed. "Dispose of the other evidence first," he directed with a nod toward the other body. Greyback growled, but hauled the body toward the water's edge.

With Greyback so occupied, Snape appeared next to Hermione so fast she thought he had Apparated. He yanked her hair back and poured something in her mouth, then pinched her nose shut and held her jaw closed and his hands over her lips in a motion so smooth she knew he'd had long practice.

"Swallow it," he ordered imperiously, but she refused. "Swallow!" he commanded again, his voice more demanding. She still refused.

He leaned close to her and whispered in her ear. "It is not poison, and it will not kill you. Swallow it, or I'll kill you and feed you to them," he told her, wrenching her head

back so she could see the army of approaching Inferi.

She whimpered, and he held her tight to him and jammed his wand in her neck. "Avada . . ." he whispered.

She swallowed thickly past the lump in her throat, sobbing helplessly.

For her reward, Snape ground up against her, ensuring she would feel his erect cock against her bum. She whimpered again, and he thrust her away from him, landing her neatly in between the Inferi and Greyback.

"Now, Miss Granger, you get to make a decision," Snape said, his voice a silken caress wrapping around her skin and weaving through her hair. "You may go to Greyback," he said, pointing at the slavering werewolf, "and though he has strict orders not to kill you, I imagine whatever he will do will be quite painful and disfiguring, to say nothing of the fact that any monthly hormonal imbalances you have experienced unto this point will pale in comparison. But, he has orders to be quick about it ... not that stamina was ever his strong point."

Greyback eyed her hungrily, clearly, dearly hoping she'd choose him. Hermione had no intention of doing any such thing, of course. Aside from the blood dripping from his too-tight robes, he was picking flesh out of his pointed yellow teeth with a sharpened and dirty claw. His hair was matted and coarse, and a rangy stench emanated off him, which seemed to be worsening with the approach of the full moon.

"You may go to them," Snape continued, pointing at the advancing army of Inferi, in various stages of decomposition. One stumbled the uneven ground and collapsed with a sickening squelch; the others ignored it, trampling over the remains of the body and turning it into a masticated, slimy pulp. The one closest to her had mould growing where the eyes should be and the long hair had fallen out in patches. Others had crumbling bones exposed or gangrenous flesh melting away. A heavy cold preceded them, thick with decay and despair, and Hermione would have vomited again at the taste of death had she anything had left in her stomach. "If you do not fight them, they are not likely to rend you limb from limb. However, I'm given to understand that once drowning, one's instinct overrides one's desire for calm. But then, what with the excruciating cold, you likely to go into shock sooner rather than later."

Hermione whimpered in despair.

"Or you may come to me," he offered softly, and Hermione turned to face him. She was agog to find him stroking his throbbing cock. "I will not be quick, but neither will your body be in any worse shape than it is now when I am done with you." He paused for effect and held her frightened gaze with obsidian eyes. "Your mind, however, is another matter."

Hermione started and stared at him. Surely he couldn't be serious. But at that moment, Greyback let out a feral howl, and Hermione shrieked in terror. So distracted was she that she didn't notice the approaching Inferi were nearly on her until one of them swiped clumsily at her and she felt the wafting air.

Panicked, she darted toward Snape, who leered at her lasciviously. "Are you entirely sure about your decision, Miss Granger? You will not have the opportunity to choose again," he taunted her.

"Yes, YES!" she gasped, clinging to him, utterly disregarding his state of undress.

"Good," he drawled and withdrew a ruby-hilted engraved sword from his discarded robes. "This is a display artefact," he informed her, handing it to her. "It is polished silver, whereas the original was goblin-wrought," he explained when she eyed him warily. When she made no move to take it, he thrust it at her again. "Take out the werewolf," he ordered.

"I couldn't do that!" she squeaked.

Snape shrugged. "Very well. Then I'll feed you to him. Greyback, dinner is ... "

"NO!" she yelled, wrenching the sword from him and brandishing it inexpertly in fear. She'd had no formal weapons training and it showed; she was horribly overbalanced and stumbled forward where the Inferi swiped at her again.

Her panicked expression was truly a sight to behold, Snape thought to himself, watching as she heaved backward, desperate to hold the sword at a defensive angle. But the polished silver weapon was unwieldy, and the effort and stress were exhausting her. Greyback was merely a metre from her and crouched into a pouncing stance, and right as he leaped forward, Snape waved his wand, giving Hermione the last-minute assistance she needed to raise the sword. Greyback impaled himself on it, crumpling into a writhing, howling mass of fury.

Hermione dropped the sword, gasping. She staggered backwards as the Inferi fell upon Greyback's body with a primitive moan. They plunged into his body face first and ripped flesh from bone with a nauseating crunch. The cracked bones were suckled for marrow, blood slurped up off the cavern floor, and organs torn out and squeezed into open mouths as she watched, dumbfounded by the carnage. The lycanthrope, suffering from silver poisoning, writhed helplessly on the ground in a vain attempt to fight them back, his movements becoming progressively weaker and less-coordinated.

As she stared, Snape pounced and grabbed the collar of her robes, ripping them down the middle in an impressive display of strength that his lean body belied and threw her onto the ground. A surgically sharp dagger slipped from his sleeve, and he thrust it toward her abdomen. Terrified, she made to step back, but he flicked his wand hand dismissively and she was immobilised. The tip of the dagger plunged into her flesh and was pulled upwards, slicing her neatly from mons to the base of her throat. She whimpered and tears leaked from the corner of her eyes.

He released his spell and knelt between her parted thighs, grinding himself into her. She sobbed helplessly. "You said you wouldn't kill me!" she protested weakly.

"And so I haven't," he pointed out, collecting the trickling blood in a small bottle. He gathered the remaining on his thumb and stared intently at her. "Blood ... especially of a Muggle-born ... can be very useful," he explained and leered at her. "Like, for example, *this*," he purred, licking the blood from his thumb.

Waves of incomprehensible pleasure rolled over her, seeming to feed off one another. The sensation was in such stark contrast to her surroundings and situation that Hermione didn't know what to think. She looked at Snape in confusion. His lust-filled eyes studied her carefully. Just as she saw him suckle the tip of his thumb, she felt the comparable sensation on both of her nipples and her clit. She moaned and her eyes drifted shut; the last thing she saw was him reaching to stroke his dribbling cock again and felt as if hands were lightly caressing her all over.

"Please . . . don't . . ." she protested. His chuckled reply vibrated through all of her pleasure centers. "Not like this . . . not here. Oh god!" she moaned.

"Yes, Miss Granger; remember, this was your decision," he pointed out. "Do not try to act as if you do not enjoy this; every sensation you feel, I feel; likewise, everything I feel, you feel."

"And I feel as if my pleasure hasn't reached the correct intensity yet," he lamented, positioning the wet and swollen head of his cock just beneath her clit, which he grabbed and massaged between his thumb and forefinger. She wriggled beneath him, unconsciously arching into the sensation. Snape grunted when her writhing very nearly engulfed his cock in her warmth, and he plunged roughly into her with no further preamble. The force of his thrust pushed her away from him, scraping her back on the rough floor of the cavern.

He picked up his pace and continued driving into her with a vicious gleam in his eyes. Her back was being rubbed raw, but so intense was the pleasure rolling over her body that the pain only highlighted and amplified her arousal. She moaned wantonly, hovering on the verge of orgasm.

Just as the sensation became so intense and focused that a wave of pleasure crashed over her, Snape grunted in her ear in time to his thrusts. "Do you know . . . what the . . . amazing . . . thing about . . . Inferi is? . . . They are . . . always . . . drawn to . . . fresh blood." She felt him jerk and heard the tinkle of glass, and forced her eyes open.

The vial of blood he'd gathered was lying broken not far from her head, and the liquid within was trickling down toward the gore-spattered undead, who were looking up with interest . . . and not at the bottle, like she'd have thought.

They were looking at her. Advancing on her. Slavering at her.

She squealed and tried to rise, but Snape held her down. She looked at him in a panic, and he slammed her hand to the floor, and she felt his wand make contact with her palm.

"One thing will hold them back, and one thing only. They are consumed by, and thus afraid of, fire," he whispered in her ear, still sliding languidly into and out of her.

Hermione gripped the wand and turned to defend herself . . . and faltered.

Two Inferi were ahead of the others and in slightly better condition than the others. The one on the left was tall and gangly, with visible red hair; the one on the right was shorter and skinny, with black hair.

Both were reaching for her.

Neither had visible eyes.

"Cast the spell, or they can have you," he threatened darkly.

It took until the closest one (*the one that looks most like Ron*) reached his hand out to her and nearly touched her before she was able to focus enough to cast the Incendio, but she managed. Snape thrust into her a final time with a strangled groan and hovered over her for a moment, trying to catch his breath.

Presently, he rose to his feet and righted his own robes, then yanked her to her feet and thrust a bottle against her lips. "What is that?" she asked weakly. He glowered at her viciously, strongly contemplating rescinding the gift. "The antidotes," he finally snarled at her. "Much as I would prefer to leave you in this blessedly quiet state, I am quite certain my colleagues would notice if you wandered about screeching at things nobody but you could see." She swallowed the contents of the bottle and shook her head in confusion when her surroundings morphed into a large but abandoned classroom. He tossed her ruined robes and her wand to her and hissed, "I trust your curiosity about the recreational activities of the Death Eaters has been sufficiently sated, Miss Granger?"

She glared at him and struggled into her robes. "Christ, Professor! If you wanted a shag, you could have just asked!" she snapped, muttering a spell that would hold her robes together long enough to get back to her room.

He rose an eyebrow at this. "But what would have been the fun in that?" he asked her rhetorically.

She favoured him with a black look. "You'll forgive me, I'm sure, if I don't particularly feel motivated to explain that to you just now. But next time I'd recommend the old adage 'you can catch more flies with honey than with vinegar'."

He smirked at her. "Unless you are referring to yourself as a pestilential insect, Miss Granger, might I remind you that you are here simply because you seem singularly incapable of *mind your own business*."

"Don't expect me to pretend like this didn't happen, Snape," she warned him.

"Don't expect me to pretend that it did," he countered. "After all, you were heavily under the influence of a mood-altering substance, and nothing *you think* happened can be proven."

She sputtered at him in fury. "You just FUCKED me, Snape; that leaves a trace! And my back is all torn up," she continued, clearly ramping up for an impressive diatribe.

He held up a hand to stall her. "Really?" he asked, his tone disbelieving. "Prove it," he challenged.

Her eyes flew open in rage, and she spun to display her back to him. He took advantage of her back being to his and raised his wand in anticipation. When she turned her face to continue railing at him, he spoke a single word.

*"Obliviate!"*

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**Author's notes:** Yes, I modeled the cavern off the Lake of the Inferi. Snape hadn't been there, but he'd gotten a glimpse of it out of the Dark Lord's mind. The entire thing was a nightmare Snape had concocted for Hermione's viewing pleasure (or lack thereof, as the case may be).

Special thanks to Sandy for the beta, Lunalelle for the fest, and the mods and admins at TPP for putting up with my abject inability to understand the proper application of commas (although I truly am trying to get better!)