

Eleven Steps to Desperation

by Memory

When love and reason fight, something terrible may happen. A dark story.

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Eleven steps...

1.

She had changed, he noticed.

The summer had ended its cycle, the school year had started again, and the impatient, loquacious girl had come back, surprisingly bloomed into a quiet, respectful young woman.

Well, he considered slowly, she had always been respectful... but in such an irritating way!

She posed questions to her teachers... and then she seemed to compare the answers she received with the knowledge stored in her mind.

She dutifully lowered her eyes when reproached... but her mind wasn't tamed.

And, surely, too many times, her brilliance had helped Potter and Weasley escape terrible dangers... and well-deserved punishments.

Was she a blessing or a curse, he wondered? He didn't know, but he caught himself looking at her more and more often in the following days.

2.

He watched her through half-closed eyelids and remembered.

Initially, he had thought that she was aiming for Potter. The boy was detestable, but undeniably had interesting cards to play. In spite of his irritating behaviour, he radiated a sort of melancholy that could be intriguing for a girl. In addition, his story was fascinating, his courage unquestionable... and his luck disconcertingly matched his recklessness, even when far from a Quidditch field.

All qualities a girl would appreciate, though Potter was a continuous source of troubles for those surrounding him. Especially for those who had the burdensome task to protect him.

But that particular girl had a strong tendency to help people in trouble, in spite of her patronizing manners.

A part of him had reacted bitterly at the possibility of a love affair between the two. Again, a Potter and this one seemed to have the same hateful characteristics of his father was conquering the most brilliant girl in the school.

So, waiting for further developments, he had felt somehow challenged; then he'd decided that she wasn't worth his attention. She didn't deserve it. She with her bushy hair and her rabbit teeth!

Really, she could have used her wits to make better choices!

3.

He saw her in the corridor. Normally, she went around escorted by her two faithful knights, but that morning she was alone with Weasley. The two youngsters were hurrying to their lessons, so they hadn't noticed the black figure standing at the opposite side of the passage. Far as he was from them, he couldn't hear what the boy was saying, but, judging from her eyes, the subject must be really involving.

He stopped to consider them and, for a moment, he smiled ironically. So very odd, the patterns of life! Such a brilliant mind in that nice, blossoming body, and yet she befriended that clumsy, red-haired idiot!

He shook his head in disbelief. And in a strange sort of irritation.

4.

The weeks passed and, finally, the truth unveiled itself. It couldn't be denied anymore, and, at last, he had been forced to accept it. Her eyes lit up in a different way when Weasley was around. Her voice changed when she spoke to him; her expression softened. She was falling in love with the boy, without even realising it. As for Weasley, the young brute was clearly and hopelessly besotted.

It was so... so painful to watch that mating dance take place again! In his years in the school, he had observed friendships and loves engage or divide his students, but none of those innumerable affairs had ever scratched his armour. So... so why was that feeling so sweet and so bitter subtly corroding his heart each time his eyes rested on her figure?

He decided to avert his gaze whenever their paths should unfortunately cross.

5.

She was speaking animatedly with Weasley, her face a mirror of her feelings. Her expression could change so quickly, and it reflected her emotions so openly! How could the young idiot not notice it? Did men really need to get old to understand what their younger eyes hadn't been able to discern?

He watched her toy distractedly with Weasley's jumper, tugging its edge in a friendly way while she spoke. Her eyes were bright in excitement, and her joy was so infectious! She was laughing now, and her fingers lingered jokingly on Weasley's hair in a gentle stroke.

He felt his heart stop in emotion, and his breath choke in his mouth. He closed his eyes and rested his forehead against the cold marble of a column. No. No. No! He was getting too involved. He couldn't afford those feelings.

He left, his rushed heartbeats pounding quietly in his chest.

6.

He couldn't help it. His eyes followed her attentively whenever she entered his gaze. Whatever he was doing, he felt compelled to stop and watch her. Quick, very quick glances, hoping that she wouldn't notice... and that nobody else would notice. But he couldn't go on like that.

That evening, for instance, the trio was busy planning something. They had wedged themselves into an old sofa near the Great Hall and spoken in low whispers. Then Potter had gone away Albus' call, perhaps? and the girl and Weasley had been left alone. She looked lost in her thoughts. Closing her eyes, she had nestled against the sofa, leaning her head back in its softness and refusing to speak with her companion while they waited silently for Potter to come back.

Hidden around the corner, he had watched her concerned face, a desperate longing in his throat. But, just a few moments later, Potter had arrived and they had left. The room was now safely empty, so he hadn't been able to resist anymore. He had sat at her place on the sofa and rested his cheek in her fading warmth. Then he had inhaled her scent, closing his eyes in overwhelming tenderness.

7.

He had ended by loving her through her clumsy partner.

Each time they exchanged a glance, each time they smiled at each other, each time they whispered words in a corner of the classroom still so incredibly unaware of the special bond that was linking them! he felt his heart twist in that awesome emotion.

And each time, the violence of his feelings surprised him, leaving him breathless and longing for more.

How many times he had hoped that Weasley could gather his courage and kiss her! So hopelessly stupid, that boy!

Exactly as another boy had been, so many years before...

8.

He had been patrolling the castle for hours, in the hope of finding peace for his misery, and in the unconfessed desire of meeting her again. And finally, he had noticed her silhouette in an unexpected place: the oval shape of a window, at the middle of the steps that led to the Gryffindor tower. She was sitting there, alone and sighing. His heart trembled. Had something happened between her and that Weasley idiot perhaps?

He had waited at the bottom of the stairs, hiding from her sight, praying to find the courage, better, the foolishness, to go up and talk with the girl.

But he hadn't dared, though his soul was bleeding.

So, he had waited, dark shadow in the darkness, till the dark of the night had fallen on his spirit. Then he had retreated, and suddenly, he had felt the alarming sensation of being watched.

The ghost "her" ghost was there. Still. Always.

9.

His prison was becoming every day more suffocating. He wanted to be free. He longed to be free. But that was not possible. He couldn't escape a cell whose walls were made of feelings.

The ghost was a possessive one that claimed all the room in his heart. Each time he savoured those bittersweet sensations about the girl, remorse was ready to follow, torturing his soul.

He had promised. He would be loyal to his word. And yet, he was beginning to regret his oath.

10.

He was drunk. He had tried to resist. The mission, he had reminded himself. The necessity of being always alert and sober. But the Dark Lord had summoned his followers just the night before, so that evening there was no risk of a call.

And she... she had smiled so charmingly to Weasley in the Great Hall!

He had left for his room immediately, a bitter taste in his mouth. The Firewhisky was on his desk, and he was feeling so lonely and desperate! Glass after glass, he had watched that lovely smile of hers shine and fade in the amber liquid.

Then, after another burning mouthful he had definitely lost the count of the glasses after a while he had raised his head, chilled by a sudden sensation of horror.

"She" was there again.

11.

The ghost was looking at him, hands joined as in a prayer and a tender, desolate smile on her lips. He felt a hot wave of self-contempt. And desperation. Staggering, he got up and stared back with a plea in his eyes.

"Please, let me go free," he whispered haltingly. "Please! Don't come again to torture me. I will protect your son. My life has been devoted to his rescue. But my soul, my immortal soul, cries for release. Just a consolation, such a small consolation, is what I ask of you. Something that can't hurt you where you are now. You are lost forever. You will never come back. And I know it's my fault, and I will grieve and regret perpetually, until my life ends, and even after. But please, let me have a spark, just a flicker of hope in my devastation."

Her ghost crossed her arms. Her expression became immensely sad, and she closed her eyes with a tremulous sigh.

Remorse, guilt, anguish and pain flooded his soul in a torrent of feelings. She had won, she had won as always, and she would always win. Trembling in emotion, he knelt in front of her glowing shape and bent to kiss the floor under her translucent feet, renewing the vow that was the blessing and the curse of his life. But his heart was breaking. Tears veiled his eyes and, when he felt the cold roughness of the stones on his lips, sobs of frustration and defeat violently shook his body.

The ghost looked down at the crying man curled at her feet. Slowly, a cold, cruel, demonic smile twisted her lips.