

# Need

*by CiraArana*

After the war, Harry chooses the one he needs most. One-shot.

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*Chapter 1 of 1*

After the war, Harry chooses the one he needs most. One-shot.

A/N: I wanted to read a story where Harry consciously chooses Snape over Ginny. Since I couldn't find one, I wrote one myself. You might want to have a hanky ready. This is the first story where I cried while writing it.

### **Need**

She sat in the dark room staring out of the window. Her eyes were vacant, focused on nothing. Downstairs, she heard the sounds of her family, talking and laughing. She felt distant. Alone.

Light steps hurried up the stairs and stopped abruptly in front of her room. The door burst open. She didn't move.

'Ginny!' exclaimed Hermione. 'What are you doing here alone? Why are you sitting in the dark?'

After a moment's silence, Hermione spoke again.

'Where's Harry?' she asked quietly.

'Gone.'

'Gone? But ... I thought he wanted to talk to you.'

'He did. Now he's gone.'

More silence. Then, Hermione stepped into the room and closed the door softly behind her. Ginny heard her steps on the carpet, coming closer. The other witch came into her view. In the little light that fell through the window, Ginny was able to see Hermione's worried expression.

'Ginny, what is wrong?'

Ginny's lips twitched into a minute smile. She could hear in her friend's voice that she already knew. And probably more than Ginny herself knew.

'He said he found someone else,' she answered.

Somewhere inside she was howling, but the words came out unemotional and distant. She barely recognised her own voice.

Hermione remained silent.

Ginny raised her head to look at her friend.

'How long have you known?'

Hermione looked taken aback. 'Known?'

'Don't lie to me, Hermione. You were with him all the time. You must have seen something, noticed something. When?'

Hermione sighed heavily and sat down beside Ginny. She turned her face to look out of the window. For a long while, the two young women sat together in silence. Laughter drifted from the living room. Fleur's baby squealed.

'Half-way through,' Hermione said finally.

Ginny turned her head. 'Half-way through what?'

'Half-way through the war.'

Ginny looked back to the dark landscape in front of her window. The crowns of the trees in the field swayed softly. Should she feel surprised? Angered? Betrayed?

'I ... I didn't know at first,' Hermione went on hesitantly. 'Of course not, because ... Well. But ... I saw them, one day. Sitting together. Talking. I knew that something had changed. But, Ginny,' she said beseechingly, 'I really thought it nothing! I honestly believed it was temporary! That Harry loved you and would come back to you when it was all over!'

Ginny nodded. Her insides felt like a bubbling cauldron. One of Neville's attempts at making a potion; it would soon explode. She said, 'But he loves the other more.'

She felt Hermione shake her head thoughtfully. 'I wouldn't call it love.'

Ginny gave a bitter laugh. 'No? And what would you call it, then? The body aching for the other's presence. The feeling of loss when not together, and the feeling of ... of completeness when you are. The feeling of balance, of home and safety and peace in the other's presence. The longing to hear the other's voice. What would you call it, then, Hermione, if not love?'

'Need.'

Ginny exhaled in a shaky sigh and slumped.

'Ginny, do you ... Did Harry tell you who?'

'Yes.'

'Oh.'

The silence stretched. With detached curiosity, Ginny watched the roiling potion that was her emotions. The cauldron shook. She gave a bitter laugh.

'That's the most ... humiliating thing about it,' she said. 'He ditched me for another man.'

Hermione remained silent, only looking at her.

A tremor ran through Ginny's body.

'And ... and for *Snape* of all people,' she gasped. Her fingernails dug into her palms.

'I don't understand!' she wailed suddenly. Her body was shaking so hard the bed under her was rocking. 'I don't understand! Why? Why, Hermione? Harry always loved girls! He ... He'd had a crush on Cho for years, and ... and ... he reacted to the Veelas! He wouldn't have if he didn't like girls! He loves girls! And he loved me! Why does he suddenly love men? Why?!'

She collapsed into Hermione's arms and cried. The cauldron spouted streams of hot, acid potion as Ginny screamed her hurt and grief into Hermione's shoulder.

Hermione held the shaking witch closely, stroking her hair and back, allowing her to let out her emotions. When the storm had calmed down, she said sadly, 'He doesn't, Ginny. He doesn't suddenly love men.'

Ginny jerked violently. 'B-but ...'

Hermione began to softly rock her friend. 'It's not love, Ginny. Or, perhaps, it is, but not love as you or I would feel.'

'Harry hates him,' Ginny choked out. 'He hated him. I know it. And now he he I-loves him!'

'Harry needs him,' Hermione corrected gently. 'Always has. In a different way, of course, but Harry has always needed Severus Snape. To hate him, to blame him, to save him.'

'To love him,' Ginny added in a hoarse whisper.

They were silent. Someone jumped up the stairs past Ginny's room. They heard them move around in the room above. Then the steps thundered back down. A gust of laughter followed.

'I don't understand,' Ginny said finally.

'I don't understand it, either.'

'But you said...'

Hermione sighed. 'Yes. I understand ... and I don't.' She shrugged helplessly.

Ginny looked up. 'But you can accept it.'

Hermione shrugged again. 'Harry is my friend. I've known him for seven years. We've been through so much together. I won't stop being his friend because of ... of this. I may not understand why, or why now, but I can see Harry needs this. Needs Snape ... that way. It does him good.'

Ginny closed her eyes. The cauldron was empty. She was tired. Hermione sat back and flicked her wand, then handed her a handkerchief. Ginny sat up and blew her nose. Her eyes felt dry and gritty. She looked down at the handkerchief in her hands, then up at Hermione.

'Tell me,' she said, her voice exhausted but determined. 'Tell me what happened. How it happened. Help me to ... to accept.'

Hermione nodded, but then sat for a long while without saying anything. Finally, she straightened and turned to look out of the window at the swaying treetops.

'You know that we went with Harry last summer,' she began. 'After Bill and Fleur's wedding ... we went with him to Godric's Hollow. He visited his parents' grave and the house where they had lived. It was almost in ruins. Nobody had come there since Harry's parents died. There was a charm on it, to keep Muggles away. I don't know who put it there, but it was still strong after so many years. Perhaps Dumbledore. I don't know.'

She paused, closed her eyes. Ginny watched her, watched as Hermione remembered.

'Harry stayed there for a day. He even went in. Well, the parts he could go in. He said he wanted something to ... to remind him. Something of theirs. If he could find anything. Strangely, there were still some things that hadn't rotted away. And ... Harry found a key.'

She opened her eyes and looked at Ginny.

'A Gringotts key.'

Ginny frowned in surprise. 'But ... Harry always had the key to his parents' vault!'

Hermione nodded. 'To his parents' vault. This key was the one to his mother's vault. Apparently, the Evans had insisted on Lily having her own vault when she started Hogwarts. After she married, she didn't use it anymore for money. But she kept it.'

'You went to look into it?'

'Of course. Well, Harry went. We accompanied him to Gringotts, but he went down alone. He stayed there for a long time and came back with a huge bag. Apparently, his mother had stored most of her books in the vault. Her schoolbooks, books she bought for herself. And her diaries.'

Ginny's head jerked up. Hermione nodded.

'She kept a diary, all her life. Through Hogwarts and her marriage and everything. The last entry was the morning of Hallowe'en 1981.'

Ginny gasped.

'Harry took the diaries with him. For days he didn't do anything else but read. Then, one day ... he exploded. I don't know what it was that set him off. He hadn't yet reached the end, but something he read must have angered him. He blasted every single piece of furniture in the room, then stomped out and locked himself in his room. He stayed there for three days, didn't talk to either me or Ron. We heard him from time to time. Screaming. Crying.'

She rubbed her face. Ginny sat in silent anticipation.

'When he came out, he looked half dead. Wouldn't tell us what was wrong. We never saw the diaries again. He must have either hid them or destroyed them. He went to Gringotts again and got another couple of books out of Lily's vault. Don't ask me what books. He almost bit Ron's head off when Ron asked. All I can say is that they were large tomes, bound in dark leather, and probably very old. Harry took them to his room. I don't know if he read them. They were gone the next morning. I suppose he sent them away.'

At Ginny's questioning glance, she said, 'When I came down to breakfast that morning, he was tying a small parcel to Hedwig's legs, whispering to her. Then he told her to be very, very careful and sent her off.'

Ginny nodded.

Hermione sighed deeply. 'Hedwig was gone for four days. Harry was unbearable during those days, so we left him alone most of the time. The fifth day Hedwig came back, only a little ruffled. She carried a note. I don't know what it said, but it set Harry off again. He tore it and set the pieces on fire and then Evanesco'd the ashes.'

She smiled weakly as Ginny opened her mouth. 'Why am I telling you all this? Because Harry sent these books to Snape. He never told me, but I'm sure he did. And that ... that was the beginning. Harry never talked to us about his mother's diaries. But I noticed that his tirades on Snape had stopped. And he didn't fly off kilter when one of us mentioned Snape accidentally.'

'We didn't see or hear about Snape for months after that. Then, one day when we came back from ... Well, I suppose I can tell you now. You know about Voldemort's Horcruxes. Everybody does now. We were looking for them but mostly without success. In the almost five months we had been searching we'd found only one.'

'So, one day we came back, tired and at a loss of what to do next. There was a note on the kitchen table. It was torn and dirty, almost illegible. It told us where to look for the next Horcrux. Not in so many words, but ... we got hints. We had no idea how it got there. There was no owl around, and it couldn't have come through the Floo. Now I know that Snape had left it there. And I suspect that Harry knew it even then but never let on.'

She shrugged.

'And you trusted it?' asked Ginny. 'The information?'

Hermione nodded. 'Yes, although we had a lengthy discussion. But Ron said, and Harry agreed, that we didn't have any other clues, so why not try it.'

Both women rolled their eyes, and Hermione went on, 'But it was real, and we managed to find the Horcrux and Harry destroyed it. We didn't doubt the next message. Which was good, because it warned us about a trap and if we had gone ...' She shuddered.

'So, it was all only messages?' Ginny looked incredulous.

'Oh, no. We did meet Snape. Accidentally.' She sighed once more. 'And the second they saw each other, Snape and Harry were at it again. Snape taunting Harry, Harry talking back, you know. But they didn't hex each other. Not once did either of them threaten the other with a wand. Ron was so stunned he burst out, "Didn't you mean to kill him, Harry?" They stopped their yelling, looked at Ron, looked at each other, Snape made a desultory remark about Ron's intelligence, Harry snapped back, and they were yelling again.'

'That was in early January. For the next five or six weeks, we heard nothing more from Snape. Then Harry got a message and left without us knowing. He was away for hours and we were half dead with worry. I don't know what the message had said or where Harry had gone or what for or what happened. But when he returned he looked horrible. He was bloodied and bruised. His clothes were torn and dirty. And if he hadn't looked so horrible, I'm sure I would have killed him, I was so angry with him. To go away like that without us knowing! And he wouldn't tell us anything, only said he had solved a problem.'

'Snape?'

'Yes, I think so. Neither ever told me, but when we saw Snape ten days later, he sported a bruised eye and moved very cautiously as though his ribs ached.'

'Oh, you mean they ... fought? Like Muggles?'

Hermione snorted. 'Obviously. And as horrible as this sounds, I think it was the best thing they both could have done. You know, get rid of all their hatred and anger. One of my uncles used to say that boxing was the best way to vent negative emotions. I suppose they did just that. Because afterwards they could talk together without yelling. Oh, Snape still was horribly mean and sarcastic, and Harry was still talking back and calling him names, but they had stopped yelling.'

'They met more often afterwards. Almost regularly. But barely ever in company. I only saw Snape twice before his trial, and one time was down in the Ministry. But Harry talked about him. Told us what Snape had said, about Voldemort and his plans, and surprisingly about other things as well. I think even Ron noticed what was going on

when Harry said, totally off-hand, "Snape says lion's tooth isn't necessary in an Itching Unction." "

'Wha...?'

'Ron was complaining about the twins again. He said he'd brew an Itching Unction and wash their ... erm ... undies in it. He asked me about the ingredients, and then Harry came out with ... well. I never saw Ron's jaw drop so low.'

Ginny's jaw, Hermione noticed, was in close competition. She had to bite down a grin, but sobered quickly when she remembered Ron's reaction.

'Hermione?'

She smiled lopsidedly at Ginny. 'Ron didn't like the idea that Harry and Snape had come so close. I mean, Harry talking with Snape is strange enough, but Harry and Snape talking about potion ingredients?'

Ginny nodded, her eyes wide. 'What did Ron say?'

Hermione grimaced. 'He yelled a bit and called Snape names and then asked Harry flat out if talking potions with Snape meant he was in love with the ...erm, bastard.'

'And Harry?' Ginny inquired breathlessly, her hands clenched into fists.

'Gaped at Ron as if he'd suggested the Giant Squid play Seeker for England.'

The women grinned weakly at Hermione quoting George's line.

Hermione tucked a strand of hair behind her ear and said thoughtfully, 'I wonder, though, if that didn't clue Harry in about what he was feeling for Snape. I don't think he'd ever thought of love, but now that Ron had mentioned it ... well. And considering what Harry looked like after his next meeting with Snape ...' She trailed off and flushed.

Ginny watched her face both hungrily and apprehensively. 'Yes?'

Hermione squirmed. 'He ... he was walking oddly and ... had a hickey.'

Ginny gasped out what might have been a sob and hid her face in her hands. She felt Hermione scoot closer and then wrap her arms around Ginny's shoulders.

'Sorry,' Hermione said thickly. 'I shouldn't have said that.'

Ginny shivered violently and tried to breathe calmly. 'No, no,' she gasped, "s okay.'

'No, it's not.'

Ginny shook her head and concentrated on calming her rapidly fluttering heart. When she felt she had herself under control she looked up.

'And then?'

Hermione looked away. 'The ... the showdown at the Ministry and then Snape's trial.'

'The *Prophet* reported that Harry spoke for Snape,' Ginny ventured.

By tacit agreement they both avoided talking about what happened at the Department of Mysteries when Harry had vanquished Voldemort for good.

'Yes, Harry spoke for Snape. We can bless ourselves lucky that the Skeeter woman wasn't present.'

The apprehensive look was back on Ginny's face. 'Why? What would she have written?'

Hermione grimaced. 'Nothing that's not true, she wouldn't dare cross Harry again, but she would have horribly twisted everything.'

'What happened?' Ginny urged. She had not been there during the trials since they had not been public. She had hated it at the time, feeling left out. Now she wondered if it hadn't been for the best. If she had seen Harry defend Snape ... She pushed the thought away and concentrated on what Hermione said.

'Well, Harry began with telling them events from his point of view. Which didn't look all that good for Snape, and you could see Scrimgeour brightening at the idea of sentencing Snape. But then Harry went on, told them what Snape had done to help him. You know, vital information from inside the Death Eaters. He told them to get the file of Snape's first trial. And then he told them to go and get Dumbledore's will.'

'Dumbledore's will? But ... I thought he didn't make one?'

'He did. And apparently he told Harry where to find it and left it to him to reveal it or not. Well. The hearing was adjourned, and when they met again they read the files of the first trial and Dumbledore's will. And it left Scrimgeour with no other option but to exonerate Snape if he didn't want to have the Wizengamot clamour for his blood.'

Ginny nodded. 'Yes, there was a long article in the *Prophet*.'

'Yes, and it covered almost everything of what had been said,' agreed Hermione. 'So, now you know what and how it happened.' She looked at Ginny. 'Does it help?'

Ginny blinked and then shook her head. She would think about it later. There was something else she needed to know first, needed to know if Hermione knew ... 'Hermione, the trials were months ago! Why ... why would he wait so long if ... if he knew?' Her voice became very small towards the end. She waited, shivering, for the answer.

Hermione shrugged. 'I don't know. Harry didn't tell us much about his ... his relationship with Snape. That's why I always thought it was temporary. But from the little he did tell us, I gathered there was trouble. I thought he was having trouble because ... well, because now that the war was over, Harry was returning to normal, to you.'

Ginny felt her insides turn once more into a roiling cauldron. She swallowed heavily. 'Yes, we all thought ...'

She felt Hermione hug her close. 'What did he do, Ginny?'

'N-nothing, really,' whispered Ginny. 'He ... he came to visit and we ... we talked. Played Quidditch. Had fun. Like when he was here for summer hols, you know? He never said a word. Until ...'

'Until tonight.'

'Yes.'

'And what did he say?' Hermione asked. Ginny heard the curiosity hidden under her concern.

'That he ... that we couldn't be together because ... because there w-was someone else, and he ... he couldn't not be with this other someone because he ... he a-ached for his presence and f-felt lost when not tog-gether and s-safe w-when...'

Her increasingly shrill, haunted voice drowned in heavy sobs, and then Ginny was crying again. She hadn't thought she would still have tears left, but the cauldron that was her heart was boiling over, spilling hot, burning liquid over her soul. Hot, salty tears ran down her cheeks and dropped from her chin. Hermione rocked her gently, humming tunelessly. It took a long while until Ginny had cried herself out.

And even when she had calmed down she did not move, and neither did Hermione. They sat together on Ginny's bed, silent, listening to the slowly quieting family meeting downstairs.

Ginny felt worn out. All her strength had left her with her tears. There was still an angry and hurt ball in her chest. But she had no strength left to feel these emotions. This blessed state of numbness wouldn't last, she knew. The anger, the hurt and grief would come back. But not now, not now ...

'...and look for them!' they heard Ron's voice call from the first landing. His steps thudded up the stairs and then the door to Ginny's room burst open once more.

Hermione turned her head. Ginny started but otherwise didn't move.

'Hey, here you are! What're you doing, sitting...!' Ron interrupted himself, took in the dark room, his sister huddled in the arms of his girlfriend. 'Oh.'

He stepped inside and closed the door, then came over to the bed.

'Harry talked to her, eh?' he softly asked. Ginny felt Hermione nod. The bed dipped as Ron sat down. 'Oh, Ginny,' he sighed, and she felt his hand on her shoulder.

A shiver ran through her body. Her throat closed, and she would have cried again if she hadn't been so weak and numb.

'I'm so sorry, Ginny,' Ron said, patting her awkwardly.

Ginny sat up and wiped her face, then tried to give a small laugh. She hated being seen so weak and girlish by her brother. It came out oddly.

'What, no outrage on behalf of your poor little sister?' she tried to joke.

Ron and Hermione exchanged a look. Ron patted her shoulder again. 'Nah, you're better at making people pay than I am. I'll leave it to you.'

'Ron!' Hermione protested, but Ginny smiled. It was tiny and it was over in a second, but it was a real smile. Ron smiled back. Then he cocked his head, curious.

'Ginny, did Harry say why? I mean, why now? Harry's been here all the time, like he was trying to get back together with you. We all thought he would.'

Ginny trembled and clutched her hands in her lap.

'He said he needed Snape,' said Hermione, answering for her friend.

Ron raised his brows. 'That doesn't explain why he told her now and not before. Ginny? Did he say anything?'

Ginny closed her eyes and nodded, slowly. Her lip trembled, and Hermione once more wrapped an arm around her shoulder.

'He said,' she began slowly, softly, hating to revisit the memory, to say it out loud, 'Harry said he was trying to ... find out what to do. About ... us. He or ... or I.' She sucked in a sharp breath, held it, let it out. 'He said he had needed the time to decide ... And that he had decided now. He said he ... loved us both, in a way, but he could only be with one of us, and so he ... he had to choose the one he needed most.'

'And Harry has always needed Snape,' Hermione whispered.

Ginny took another shaking breath. Harry loved her, but it wasn't enough. Love wasn't enough. He needed Snape, had always needed him. And as she gave way to exhaustion and slipped into sleep, she realised she had never really had a chance with Harry.

*Fin*