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Death Isn't All It's Cracked Up To Be

Chapter 1

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"I'm sorry, Harry," she said to him, "but I'm suddenly realizing how ... maybe we should wait. You're only sixteen, and things are so ... I just ..." She brought her hands up and covered her face.

Something in Harry clicked. Everything in his life came to the realization he'd just had. "I understand, Tonks. You're beautiful, but I can't demand what you offered. It's incredibly dangerous to you. You're an Auror and likely to be fired if word gets out about this. You're a member of the Order, and would be pulled from any possible details regarding me faster than Ron can pile food on his plate. And most importantly, if we made love, my mental barriers would likely drop, giving Voldemort access to, at a bare minimum, the knowledge of who you are, and even more, possibly access to your mind." He brushed his hand across her cheek. "Think fondly of me, at least, okay?" He stood and dressed quietly, and then slipped from the room, leaving the pretty Auror behind, crying. He ran across Ginny and Hermione outside, both looking annoyed.

"Go in and comfort her, okay? Nothing happened, because she suddenly realized how dangerous being with me is. She's crying right now, and I'm the worst person to try to comfort her. Please?" He asked gently.

Their faces softened, but Hermione looked at him before going in. "We are still going to talk later, Harry. It's important."

"Sure. First get her calmed down, okay?" The girls slipped into the room, and Harry headed downstairs.

It's midnight, he thought. August first. Why are they still up? He continued to head down until he reached the kitchen. He heard voices from inside. *Ah, perfect. Just the man I need to speak to.*

He pushed the door open to the surprised looks from the people inside. "Albus, I need to speak with you," he said. "I came to a realization a few minutes ago, and I need you to help me with it."

"We are in the middle of an Order meeting, Mister Potter," Professor McGonagall said with some asperity. "You can speak to him when we are finished."

"Well, since I'm Order business, we might as well talk about it now, I guess."

"As arrogant as ever, I see," Snape drawled from his dark corner.

“Stuff it, Severus,” Harry said calmly. “Albus here knows exactly why I’m Order business, and I think it’s time to make the Order aware of it, don’t you?” he asked of his headmaster.

“Are you sure about this, Harry?” the aged wizard asked.

“The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches ... born to those who have thrice defied him, born as the seventh month dies ... and the Dark Lord will mark him as his equal, but he will have power the Dark Lord knows not ... and either must die at the hand of the other for neither can live while the other survives ... the one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord will be born as the seventh month dies ...” Harry said simply, lifting his hair to show his scar. “Albus heard it sixteen years ago, and knew, when my parents were killed, that I was the one destined to die, taking Voldemort with me.”

“Harry, that’s not how it has to be,” the headmaster began.

“It clicked to me upstairs, Albus. You knew before I was born that I’d have to fight him someday. Sure, it might have been Neville, but you knew that one of us would have to do it. Neither of us received the training necessary. We are dealing with a wizard fifty years older than me, so steeped in dark magics that I don’t stand a chance at this point in my life. It’s unfair to wait for me to be ready. How many people have to die to give me some semblance of comfort? No, my job is to die taking out Voldemort.”

“And how did you come to this conclusion?” Snape asked mockingly.

“Simple, Severus. Even if it was best that I be raised amongst Muggles, which I was, I don’t believe that the blood protections were so important that I was simply abandoned until it was time to come to Hogwarts. This was to teach me not to rely on others for anything, and to teach me that none will truly mourn my death. I have no family. I may be related to Petunia and Dudley, but they’d much rather see me dead.” He looked at the horrified looks from the members of the Order. “Oh no, don’t worry, I’m not depressed. I’m not going to kill myself needlessly. I’m simply going to locate what I need, and kill Voldemort. Since my survival isn’t necessary, that opens quite a few vistas of study.”

“Harry, I can’t let you ...” Albus started to say.

“Then I need to see about transferring to Durmstrang, sir. I need training that I simply can not receive at Hogwarts. A stupid Patronus might deal with the Dementors, and even discommode Moldie for a while, but it can’t really affect him. *Expelliarmus*? Please. *Reducio*? *Reducto*? *Avada Kedavra*? I need something he might not know. If I can’t get it from you, then I need to find it somewhere else.”

He sighed. “I’m just sorry that it was Tonks who made me realize. Now she’ll beat herself up and think that she depressed me to the point where I want to commit suicide, and that’s simply not true. My life has been aimed at killing Voldemort, and not allowing emotional attachments along the way. I never learned how to love, so it’s not something that’s really a big loss. The Dursleys can be invited to the party that Severus will throw when I’m gone, and beyond that, everyone else

will basically say ‘He was such a nice boy.’ They’ll throw memorial parties for me, and maybe Ron and Hermione will name a child after me, but lives will go on as they did before I was born, and as they will were I to live a normal life span. People die. I’m just doing mine for a cause.”

“There must be another way,” Albus said, appearing almost ready to cry.

“Then you should have thought of it years ago, Albus. Instead, you chose to make me unfit to survive by trying to make me comfortable, and giving me the closest illusion to a normal life that you could, knowing all the while that it would eventually come down to Voldemort and me. By choosing to let me live a life like that, you sealed my fate, knowing the type of person I am. In good conscience, I can’t wait ten or fifteen years while thousands of people die at Voldemort’s hands. It needs doing now. By not insisting that I at least be raised with a knowledge of the wizarding world, you crippled me. By not teaching me intensively once I was in the wizarding world, you signed my death warrant. It’s as simple as that. So, do I learn at your hands what I need to know, or do I go to Durmstrang? Or somewhere else?”

The headmaster looked even older than his actual age. He thought for several moments, but did not speak until Harry moved as if to leave the room. “I am certain that something else can be found. If I have made no headway by September first in finding that other way, then I will agree to teach you what you need, Harry.”

“Are you sure this isn’t depression speaking?” Minerva McGonagall asked.

“There are five stage of grief, Minerva,” Harry said. “Denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. I’ve passed through the first four, and Tonks’s comments tonight when she realized how dangerous making love to me would be clicked me into acceptance. It’s going to happen, Minerva. I just prefer to make it happen on my terms, not his. If I have to die, then he’s going with me. End of statement. Since I was never given training to deal with anything like Voldemort – instead, I’ve been given basic Hogwarts student training – my death is guaranteed. I accept that. If I was depressed ... hell, you’ve all seen me depressed. Do I seem like I’m acting that way? Do I seem oddly cheerful at the news of my impending death? If I do, then you need to listen closer. I want to live. But it won’t happen, and I accept that. So I either sit around and deny my fate, with my head up my arse, or I learn what I need.” He shrugged calmly. “So, now that I’ve disrupted enough of your meeting, I’ll leave to let Severus spend the next twenty minutes or so bitching about me. Bye!” He turned and left the room.

He walked back upstairs and headed to the library, and began looking through the books. He chuckled as he realized that several of the books were removable now – at least by him. They had done a thorough cleansing of the house – now his, by the terms of Sirius’s will – and the books in the library were immovable. He put his hand on the bookcase and said, “Only me. No one else can remove these books. I’ll leave the house to someone else when I die, but for now, only I can remove these books from these shelves.” He felt a small agreement from the house, and began to scan the shelves. As he did, he heard two pairs of feet walking to the room. He turned to face Ginny and Hermione.

“Ah, here to chew me out for almost having sex with our Auror friend?”

“You’re only sixteen, Harry!” Hermione said. “We’re too young for that right now!”

“True. I assume that she pointed out that we never actually did anything?” She nodded. “Nothing will happen, have no fear of that. I won’t put her in that kind of danger. I won’t put any of you in that kind of danger. Besides, it’s time for me to get serious in my studies. I’m dropping Potions this upcoming year, which will make Severus happy.”

“What about being an Auror?” Ginny asked, getting worried.

He shrugged. “Won’t be alive long enough for it, so no sense in studying it.” He turned back to the books, searching the titles.

“What do you mean, Harry?” Hermione gasped.

“Simple. It was decided when I was a baby that I would *not* be trained to fight Voldemort, despite the fact that Dumbledore knew from the moment I received this scar that someday it would be between Tom and me. Either they want Tom to win, or it was decided that my life wasn’t important enough. I’m not going to study for five or ten years while thousands die, so I’m studying for spells that will take us both out.”

“Harry!” Ginny gasped. “How could you? You’re just committing suicide?”

“It’s called martyrdom,” he laughed.

“How can you joke about this?” Hermione cried, tears starting to flow.

“Simple. Step five – acceptance. I am not meant to be a wand, or a rifle, or a bow and arrow, or any long range weapon. I am a bomb. I am powerful, and I take out everything in the area. If I had been meant to survive, then Dumbledore would have begun my training when I was eleven. Instead, it was decided that I should be given a chance to experience a so-called normal life. I have a ‘saving people’ thing, Hermione. You told me that yourself. I can’t sit by and let thousands die when I should be able to stop it. When I’m dead, along with Voldemort, lives go back to normal. You and Ron can go on to have a lot of fat babies for Molly to spoil, and maybe name one of them after me, although I beg that you avoid Harriet at any cost. The world will go on when I’m dead,” he said simply. “They can throw their parades and memorial services, and not worry about me being in the way to correct them when they inflate their own part in it.”

“What about love?” Hermione asked softly.

“What about it? I’ve never been trained to know what it is. The Dursleys never showed me what it was. They detest me with the same fervour that Voldemort hates the rest of the world. What I felt for Cho was a crush – lust. What does real love feel like? I don’t know, and I see no reason to learn now.” He turned back to the girls. “Please leave me to my studying. The reason you were going to yell at me earlier didn’t happen, and I won’t allow it to get to that point again.”

“So you’re just going to shut her out of your life?” Ginny asked.

“If that’s what it takes. She’s in too much danger if she becomes my lover. She’s an Auror, and I’m still a child, as Hermione pointed out.” As she opened her mouth to protest, he spoke before she could. “‘We’re too young for that right now!’ translates out that way. Either I’m an adult, and old enough to take control of my sex life, or a child, and too young for a sex life. Can’t have it both ways. Anyway,” he said, bulling on before she could protest, “with my still legally being a child and her being an Auror, she could end up in Azkaban for underage sex. Having sex with Harry Potter could ruin her career anyway. If she has sex with me, the Order will also pull her from having any duties that involve me, thereby ending the relationship, and don’t think they wouldn’t – it goes back to them training me to be a bomb to use against Voldemort. Most importantly, my mental defences will drop when I’m with her in the throes of passion, thereby either opening her up to attack by Tom, or at the very least telling him that she’s important to me – more important than anyone else. So the relationship stops now.”

“She has no say in the matter?” Ginny asked hotly.

“No. You need two to have a relationship, and I refuse to put her in danger by having one with her.” Ginny’s answer was to walk over to him and punch him in the jaw, knocking him back against the bookcase. He stood back up and faced her. “You get one free one, Ginny. I defend myself next time.”

She reared back to throw another punch, and Harry immediately dropped into a defensive crouch. “I’d think about it, Ginny. I won’t hesitate to make them take you to St. Mungo’s if you insist on throwing that punch.” She stopped, and stood straighter, anger blazing in her eyes.

“Watch your back, Mister Potter,” she said. “If you’re going to knife your friends, one of them might return the favour.” She stalked from the room.

“She cares for you, Harry. We all do. None of us want you to die.”

“You think I do? I’ve just accepted that it’s the only way to save thousands of lives! You think I’m happy knowing that I can never get married and have children to carry on the Potter name? It dies with me, Hermione! It’s that ‘saving people’ thing. Do you really think I can sit by and let all those people die while I wait for the Order to get off their damned asses and decide I’m old enough to learn what I need to learn, and then the years it’ll take to learn enough to defeat him and survive the experience? ‘The needs of the many outweigh the needs of the one.’ That’s my attitude. I’d love to be at your wedding to Ron, but that can’t happen.”

“You keep saying that. Why Ron?”

He snorted. “The smartest girl at Hogwarts, clueless about something. It’s understandable with me, but you? Look at the way he reacts around you. The boy’s in love with you, or at least seriously crushing on you. Give him a chance, and I think you’ll find all those arguments will stop.” He walked over and gave her a quick hug. “Go get some sleep. I think if you think seriously about what I’ve said, you’ll see the logic behind it.” He led her carefully from the library, escorting her to the room she still shared with Ginny. “Calm her down, too, if you can. Good night.” He turned around before she could say anything, and he heard the door close behind

him. He looked over the railing to the floor below. “Hear anything interesting from the conversation in there?” he asked the assembled group below.

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The month leading to Hogwarts was tense, to say the least. Harry’s simple acceptance of his upcoming demise unnerved Ron and continued to anger Ginny. He was cold to Tonks, letting her assume that he was angry at her for pulling out of her ‘birthday present’ to him at the last second. This finally cause Ginny to jump at him, throwing several excellent punches that drove Harry back and onto his back. She came closer, only to discover that Harry was serious about what he had told her in the library. His feet came up, impacting with her stomach and sending her flying into the wall, where everyone who had come in to see what he commotion was heard a loud crack, and she fell to the ground gasping in pain. Ron came at him for attacking his sister, and Harry broke his knee. When both were down and not attacking, Harry turned as if to get someone, and had been surprised and pleased that they were there to get the Weasley children to St. Mungo’s. Everyone left him alone for the remainder of the summer.

Dumbledore agreed on the thirty-first to train him.

#####

During the summer, Harry had discovered a volume in the library that truly pleased him. Apparently someone had bought a rather interesting book – it was a copy that allowed him to call up every single book in the Black family library. He sneaked that one into his bag for the trip to Hogwarts, and when he reached the Express, quickly found a compartment, and opened the book to the most recent one he’d been perusing. He glossed past almost every spell he came across, because so many of them required an unwilling sacrifice, or a massive build-up to the spell. Harry was quite sure that he simply would not have the time for a the casting that some of these spells required.

The door opened to show Hermione looking in, concern on her face. “Willing to sit with the crazy Harry Potter?” He asked with a smile. “Might want to warn Luna and Neville, by the way.”

She came in and sat across from him, sadness on her face. “It’s just so wrong that you aren’t sadder about this,” she said.

“You’re still in denial. Ginny apparently jumped straight into anger. It’s been staring me in the face for all these years. Eventually you come to accept the eventual outcome.” He looked back down into his book.

A head popped in, and a very familiar voice said, “Come on down to the next car, Hermione. We’ve got people who actually care about other people over there. Leave the asshole to himself.”

“Ginny!” Hermione barked.

“Fuck off and die, Weasley,” Harry snarled as he got up and stalked to the door. “Part of your

anger is the fact that you could never get me into your knickers. It's always been about you, hasn't it? You've wanted the famous Harry Potter since before you knew who I was. You lied about Dean just to get on Ron's nerves, and probably to see how I'd react. Have you ever bothered to actually look at me as me and think about how I grew up?" He leaned down until his face was barely inches from her now frightened face. "Know this, little girl – if by some bizarre happenstance I survive this ordeal I'm training for, any friendship we may have had is over. I will acknowledge you as a sister of my real friends, but you have destroyed any chance that I could ever trust you again. Now get lost and find your fun and happy car, Weasley." He closed the door to the car in her shocked face.

"Harry, was that really necessary?" Hermione asked, concerned.

"She has been attacking me either verbally or physically since the first of August. I am sick of it, and the attacks have continued. I was willing to try to stay friendly with her, but I'm sick of it. She made her decision, and now she has to deal with it."

"Will you ever be friends with her again?"

"Well, I didn't make it an oath, so I'm free to go back on it if she ever grows up." He smiled. "Go on. I think you'd be happier in the other car. I'm just going to be reading – not really good company." She stood with a frown and leaned over to kiss his cheek before leaving the compartment.

He had been sitting there for a while when he heard the door open, and a familiar drawl spoke to him. "Oh look, the Potty has no friends anymore. He's even managed to drive away his Mudblood girlfriend." Harry continued to read, as if Malfoy wasn't in the room. "I'm talking to you, Potter!" Still Harry continued to read. He smiled inwardly as he saw Malfoy's hand come out to take the book from him. The blue-white flash that jumped from the book to the blonde boy's hand made him actually smile for just a moment.

"Oh, hi Draco! Didn't hear you come in. What's up?" he asked conversationally.

"Where are all your little hangers-on? Finally realize what a fraud you are?"

"Possibly. They're all the next car that way," he said, pointing in the direction that Hermione and Ginny had gone. "Maybe you can pick a fight over there. Now run along. I have studying to do, and no time to waste with you."

"And how do you propose to make me leave?" Draco smirked, sitting down.

"I don't. Eventually one of two things happen. Either you get bored with failing to get a rise out of me and leave, or you pull your wand on me to jinx the hell out of me, getting caught. I'm alone in the compartment. Do you really think that I'm *really* alone?" Malfoy and his omnipresent goons looked around suddenly, and left the cabin. As they headed down the hall, Harry called after them, "Hermione and the others are in the *other* direction, guys!"

#####

Harry got to school and began training intensively immediately. He dropped most classes, preferring to study his books and those things that Dumbledore was teaching him, taking only N.E.W.T. Transformation, N.E.W.T. Charms, and N.E.W.T. Care of Magical Creatures, the last only because he still enjoyed being around Hagrid, often staying behind after class to help him clean up, just so they could talk.

It was in October thirteenth when he reached a point that made him sit up and take notice. He had found a seldom used spell, often used to force oneself into an astral projection. It was truly dangerous, however, when aimed at another being. And it was precisely what Harry needed.

#####

Down in the dungeons, he waited until the most recent Potions class was over, and then entered the Potions Master's demesne. "Professor," he said simply.

"Ah, Potter. I wondered when you would arrive here. What are you here for?"

Harry spun and cast a strong Imperturbable Charm on the door to the lab. "I need to know where Voldemort is. I found what I need."

"And that is?" Snape drawled.

"I don't dare tell you, because I don't know how good Tom is at Legilimency. You have some contact with him, so it's safer not to give him any other chance than me to know what I'm doing. But it will work. I need to know where he's staying so that the Aurors can swoop in after I surprise him, and pick up the remaining Death Eaters."

"You really think it'll be that easy?" Snape sneered.

"If you tell me where he is so that I can sneak there, yeah."

"Let us just say that you have been in the area before, Mister Potter. Somewhat more than a year ago."

"Excellent. Plenty of places to hide where I can see him. Perfect."

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On the twenty-eighth of October, at dinner in the Great Hall, Harry walked up to Professor Dumbledore and handed him an envelope, and left.

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Chapter 2

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Harry flew to Little Hangleton on his Firebolt, hanging low to the trees as he did. Leaving his Firebolt where he had told Dumbledore it would be in his letter/last will and testament, he walked the remainder of the way to the old Riddle home under his invisibility cloak. A short distance away he could see the Little Hangleton Cemetery, where Voldemort had returned, and where Cedric had died. *Fitting that he'll meet his end here as well. And fitting that I should as well. Cedric's death will finally be avenged, and the one who should have died to get him free will finally be dead.* He shook his head to clear it of the morbid thoughts running through it, and continued his slow progress to the house. Getting closer, he discovered that the basement door was open. He performed a simple scan for wards and found none. *He can't be that stupidly arrogant, can he?* Carefully, he went down the stairs into the cellar.

As he passed a few Death Eaters along the way, being careful to breathe quietly as he passed, they showed no signs of recognizing that anything was amiss. He carefully worked his way to through the floor, finding no sign of his nemesis. He moved upstairs, down a hall, where he saw Nagini on the carpet in front of a chair. The snake's head rose, and it started to speak. "Masster, there is ..." It never got any further, because Harry whispered "*Reducto!*", and the beam struck the serpent, causing it to explode in a shower of meat.

Voldemort performed his fatal action then. He stood to look in the direction that the beam came from, which gave Harry the time to whisper "*Inhaesum Animus Diffindo Corpus!*" The silver beam burst from the end of the holly wand and struck Voldemort in the chest. Harry felt himself ripped from his body as both his soul and Riddle's were torn free of their earthly bonds.

"You foolish boy! Do you know what you've done?" Riddle screamed as they sank through the floor, Riddle clawing fearfully at the wood planking as they passed through it. Harry was intrigued to see the Death Eaters he'd passed by unconscious on the floor, and Aurors just now entering the building. Before they disappeared into the ground, he heard Tonks scream, "HARRY! No!"

"I've defeated you, Tom. The spell I cast binds my soul to yours and then separates both souls from their bodies. I will now follow you to your destination."

"You fool!" Riddle laughed. "You've damned yourself to Hell, then! At least I can enjoy knowing that you shall suffer the same torments that I will!"

"And I get to enjoy knowing that you won't be around to destroy any more of my friends' lives. Your Death Eaters are being rounded up as we sink. Tonks, Hermione, Ginny and all the rest can

grieve and then get on with their lives. I think I can deal with Hell, knowing that. I lived with the Dursleys. I've already spent time there. I'm just going home, you son of a bitch."

They landed roughly in a rather odorous place – the smell of sulphur was overwhelming. They were rather quickly met by a few ugly things that were quite obviously demons. Riddle screamed as they grabbed him and dragged him away, but Harry was more than a little surprised to see the ones around him looking at him with fear. One of them reached out to touch him, but quickly pulled back screaming in pain. "How did you get here?" the others bellowed, pulling pitchforks and weapons and prodding him with them.

"Enough, just lead me where you want me to go," he said with some annoyance. They shuddered, and led him to a stable. They pointed at a shovel, and into the stable. He snorted when he saw what was in there. "It actually smells better in there, guys. Might as well go find your boss and ask him what he wants to do with me." He looked outside and found the ground hard, but still apparently soil. "Well, let's start out there." He walked outside and found a pitchfork. "This should do." He began to fork the ground in places, breaking it up and turning it over. He looked back inside, and guessed how much he had at the moment, then turned back to the ground.

Since there was no day or night where he was, and he didn't get tired, he had no idea how long he'd been working when he'd finally finished working the area he'd chosen. He looked back and realized that he'd just finished turning several acres of land. "Huh. Well, time to start shovelling shit," he muttered. Again, he began a tedious chore, spreading the manure the stable held in great abundance along the ground that he'd turned over. When he'd finally emptied the stable – again, a great time later, but no way to measure – he turned back to the pitchfork and turned the manure into the soil, taking whatever time it took.

Finally standing and surveying his work, he grinned. "Useless task it was, since I have no grass or flower seeds to spread, but then again, this place is about that sort of thing." Laughing, he walked back to the stable to return his tools. Now he noticed that that there was a cloth bag along the side of the building. Opening it, he found seeds of different kinds all mixed together inside. "Huh. Well, let's see what thorny sort of things grow here from this seed." He began to spread the seed along the ground, not realizing that, as before, he had begun to hum, and even whistle as he went about his work.

When done, he looked back at the area. "Now *that* was useless!" he laughed. "No water to give the seed a chance to grow. Well, I suppose I ought to scratch it in a bit, just to pretend I'm doing something." He was halfway through his work of scratching the seed in with the tines of the pitchfork when he stopped. "Why aren't I tired? Or thirsty? I have to have been working at this for quite a long time."

"By the way you measured time topside, Mister Potter, you've been tilling this ground by hand for nearly a month." He spun to find a fairly attractive black-haired woman with wings of the style often incorrectly identified as bat wings. There were also horns sprouting from her head. She was wearing a backless form-fitting charcoal grey dress that hugged her impressive curves to her knees. Harry chuckled to himself as he realized who she reminded him of, and when he blinked, she was suddenly in a black dress that covered her nearly completely (it still gave pleasant

cleavage). She chuckled. “Ah, an Addams Family enthusiast.”

“I’m interested to see what will happen here,” she continued. “It’s not a normal thing to have a Heavenly soul doing work in Hell, so this ground is going to be fairly – well, my subordinates are going to be more than a little unhappy to step here.”

“I take it you’re Satan?” Harry asked. He brushed the dirt off his hands on his pants and walked over to him, offering his hand. At Satan’s surprised look, Harry began to pull back. “Sorry, just being polite. I can understand if you can’t touch me.”

She reached out with a grin and clasped Harry’s wrist, Harry returning the gesture, sharing a hearty handshake. “Nice to see someone who isn’t scared of me down here. What are you doing here, anyway?”

“You’ve got a guy elsewhere in here who probably is still trying to convince people that his name is Voldemort, I think.”

Satan snorted. “Yeah, Riddle. We’ve been deliberately misfiling him for a while. Got him under ‘M’ for ‘Moldieshorts’ right now. He should give it up in a century or so. What do you have to do with him?”

“Well, I needed to take him out of my world, and he had too much on me, so I basically sneaked up on him and cast a spell I was pretty sure he never expected me to know, let alone cast. It bound our souls together, and then sent us both to his destination. Since he was pretty obviously Hell-bound, based on his actions topside, as you call it, that meant I had to come here as well. So I’ve been doing make-work until someone figures out what to do with me.”

“Well, I’m that ‘guy’. Let’s go and see if anything can be solved where he is.” Harry shrugged and walked with Satan, noting as he stepped off the land he’d been tilling that a gentle rain began to fall on the land, and only within those confines.

“Oh, that’s going to be very interesting, Mister Potter,” she said. “I think you’ve accidentally increased the torture of those down here, building a small piece of Paradise in the middle of Hell.”

He looked at Satan. “Do you trick people here, or do they truly belong here?”

“Let’s put it this way, Harry. Your aunt, uncle, and cousin will end up here unless they change their ways. Hitler is here. Grindewald is here, too. Unrepentant wife beaters are here. Unrepentant bigots are here. Unrepentant ... well, I think you see where this is going. Your friend Cedric is not here. Neither is your godfather, but Peter Pettigrew will most definitely end up here – or in the equivalent section of Avalon.”

“If they really belong here, then I’ll see about being allowed to keep coming down here and doing renovations – improving it as I can.”

Satan stopped. “That’s nastier than I’m used to hearing someone who should have been in Heaven

say.”

“They belong here. That’ll be that much more of a reminder of what they gave up by being unrepentant.” He shrugged. “Maybe I should have been in Heaven when I died, but that doesn’t mean that I can’t feel angry.”

He paused. “Actually, I just realized what my eternal torture is going to be.” He sat down heavily in the road. “I’ll never see any of them again. I’ll never see Hermione, or Ginny, or Tonks, or Ron, or any of them again. I’ll get people like Fudge, or Bellatrix Lestrange. That’s my eternal damnation.” Unbidden, he felt tears come to his eyes. “Never. That’s a damned long time.” He suddenly realized what he’d said, and laughed bitterly. “‘Damned’, now there’s a joke and a half.” He broke down completely, sobbing uncontrollably as the truth of his eternal self-imposed sentence finally struck him.

#####

He finally stopped crying an unknown time later, to find himself being held in a caring embrace by Satan. “My apologies, Satan. I’d imagine that was a little uncomfortable for you.”

“Not really. I’m not the right royal bastard the Christians make me out to be. For one thing, I’m female. There’s a few other things, but I doubt you’re up for a cosmological discussion right now.”

They started to walk again, and the area they had been in dwindled in the distance fairly quickly – quicker than it should have. “Nothing is really absolute down here, is it?” Harry asked.

“Except good and evil,” Satan replied. “Distances, time, all the rest? You couldn’t judge time here based off what you knew topside. For example, you’ve been here more than a month. Up there, they’ve only just gotten your body back to somewhere that it can be treated. A day at the very most, and that’s pushing it. It’s just a bit fluid around here. Ready, everyone?” Harry shrugged, and they disappeared with a ‘Poof!’

They reappeared in an idyllic spot, and the other three walked straight to the tree they were near. There was another goat-legged fellow sitting there already, relaxing alongside the remains of a picnic and playing a set of reed pipes. “Pan! How are you?” Satan asked him.

“Can’t complain. Nice weather, frisky nymphs, good wine, good music. What more does a god need?” came the laughing reply.

“Can’t argue with you there, sexy,” she laughed. “Mind if we join you for a bit? This is Harry Potter, by the way. That fellow we’ve been looking for?”

Pan stood and held out his hand to Harry. “Pleased to meet you. You’ve had people in a bit of a tizzy.”

Harry shook his hand and looked around, curiously. “Um, are we still in ... I mean, it’s much

prettier here.”

“No, this is Arcadia; it’s part of the Greco-Roman afterlife,” said Satan. “It’s kind of neutral territory. Easier to meet other parties here. And speaking of the other party ...”

Another man approached, whose appearance Harry couldn’t properly pin down. There was a halo above his head, and he appeared to be bearded and wore a blue tunic, but as for skin colour or hair colour, he simply could not decide exactly how to describe it. “Harry! There you are!” the man exclaimed. “Satan! Good to see you again. How have you been taking care of him?”

“Found him ploughing a field by hand, then sowing seeds by hand as well. Make-work. He was whistling, for Your sake!” Satan said, laughing. “My demons were scared to tell me about him! That’s why it took so long.”

Jesus laughed. “Come along, Harry, you have a lot of people who want to meet you.”

“But what about Riddle?”

“Oh, severing the connection between you was the easy part. Don’t worry, we’ll make sure he stays where he belongs. Getting you where you belong may take a little while, though. Your method of dealing with him was a bit extreme.”

“Probably, but I wasn’t going to let another ten thousand people die while they finally dithered about deciding to train me for fighting. So I found a spell that would do the job and save my friends. Eventually they’ll stop grieving, and get on with their lives. Ron and Hermione can have those fat babies, for example, and Tonks can find someone.”

Jesus smiled, and Harry felt warm down to his toes. “And that attitude is exactly why you belong upstairs.”

Pan shook his head. “I didn’t think humans like you existed anymore.”

Suddenly Harry lost the thread of the conversation as his eyes fell on a beautiful woman walking toward the group under the tree. “Oh no!” he said, getting up and heading toward her. “Why are you here, Tonks?”

The woman, green-haired and naked, looked at him rather puzzled. “Who is this Tonks you speak of? I am a nymph.”

Harry snorted. “Green hair and a nymph. My Nymph could have green hair when she wanted. Heh. Your name isn’t Nymphadora Tonks, though?”

“No. Is she someone special to you?”

“Very much so. Your green hair made me think of her.” It suddenly struck him that it was blatantly obvious that her hair colour was natural. Despite being a spirit, his reaction certainly felt to him as if he had a body, and blood to be redirected south.

Behind him, at the tree, he could vaguely hear, "...it's that whole Father, Son, and *Holy Shit!*" He looked to them, and Pan was looking toward them with amusement. "For a human, that's pretty damned impressive!" he was saying, and Harry realized that his reaction to this nymph was more than a little obvious.

An amused Jesus answered, "I think you meant 'Father, Son (that's me, of course), and the Holy Ghost, or Holy Spirit', Pan."

Jesus stood and walked to the two of them. "What's your name, miss?"

"I don't really have one. They tend to call me after the tree I prefer – Willow. So," Willow asked, turning to Harry, "would you like to have sex here, or over in the bushes?"

Harry's jaw dropped, and he stood motionless for several moments, moving only when she took this as an agreement and reached out to undo his trousers. "Wait!" he squeaked. "As much as the idea is ... wow ... umm, I shouldn't."

"Why not?" she asked, looking both curious and mildly hurt.

"Because I'm still a virgin, and if I do, I'm likely to give you a little bit of my heart, and I may never see you again."

"Wouldn't giving me a piece of your heart hurt? Besides, I have nothing I could carry it in." She said it so seriously that Harry didn't laugh, realizing that she was taking his statements literally.

Satan stood and walked over to her. "No, Willow. I think what he's saying is that for him, sex isn't merely just the joining of two bodies. He needs to feel something more than lust for the girl he's doing that with, taking it from merely fucking to making love. Which means that he'd be falling in love with you, if only a little bit. Am I right, Harry?" Harry nodded.

"I've never had someone love me before. We nymphs are always used merely for sex, when we aren't performing the other duties our existence requires."

"And if I fell in love with you, even a little bit, it would hurt if I knew I'd never see you again," Harry finally said. "I really appreciate the offer, Willow, but I think for both our sakes, I should say no."

Satan stage-whispered to her. "Willow, when a human of his exceptional character says that, you have definitely not been rejected. It means he already likes you, and it happens to be a compliment."

She cocked her head in a cute manner and asked, "Is this true?"

"If I didn't have some respect for you already, I'd be off in those bushes with you by now."

Satan snorted. "Right," she muttered. "If he didn't respect her, he wouldn't even contemplate it in the first place."

"And that's why he's such a troublemaker upstairs," said a familiar voice behind Harry.

He spun to see Sirius Black standing near the tree, a wide grin on his face. "Sirius!" he cried, running and tackling his godfather in a tremendous hug. "I am so sorry ..."

"Stop right there, Harry. I know you, and I am telling you now that if *I* don't blame you, then you don't have the right to blame yourself. Turns out that I've gotten a look at the Book that old Pete reads, and that was my day. Now, I could have gotten it from an A-K, I could have been *Crucio* 'd to death, I could have been killed with that slice that Anton used on Hermione, and that would have been painful, let me tell you. My day to die was then. No matter what you had done, it would have happened. If you'd called me and gotten me, it's possible that a large rock would have fallen from the sky, plowed through the house, and gone hunting for me. Or I could have stepped outside and had one of those Muggle Knight Buses hit me. I was going to die that day. I went peacefully, with no pain. If you want to look at it that way, then I owe you a debt of thanks for making my passing peaceful."

Harry was simply staring at the man. "Really? You would have died that day no matter what?"

"That's what he tells me, and he doesn't tend to lie about that. Probably would have been a heart attack, or Severus and me strangling each other to death. Both kinda painful, if you ask me."

"Yeah. So you actually made it upstairs? Heh. That'll drive Snape totally bug-fu ... umm, crazy. Sorry, Jesus," Harry said, blushing.

"It's just words, and they aren't really meant to be hurtful, are they?" When Harry shook his head no, Jesus smiled again. "Besides, describing someone as 'going bug-fuck' is so much more interesting sounding than 'it'll really annoy him'."

"I'm actually looking forward to seeing the old snake again. Winding up in the same place will make him even more bug-fuck."

"Snape's destined for Heaven?"

"Well, no, he's destined for the high-rent section of Avalon, same as me. Most of us who grew up in the wizard community never bought into the Christian thing so we don't wind up in their heaven, but in the Avalon of Merlin and Morgana. Muggle-borns tend to wind up in Heaven. And a bunch of us kinda ... commute. Everything's connected anyway."

"Then why was Riddle in Hell?"

"It was what he expected," Jesus put in. "He spent his early years among your Muggles, and at that time Christian education was part of the basic schooling in the orphanages. He internalized the beliefs, even if he denied them later. It's why he tried so hard to become immortal. He knew he'd never make it to Heaven, and he didn't want to go to Hell."

Harry looked up hopefully. "If you're here, Sirius, does that mean ..."

“Hello son,” said a deep voice as a man stepped out from behind the tree, followed by a beautiful red-haired woman.

Harry’s next words sounded as if they had come from a six year old. “Mummy? Daddy?” He ran forward and threw himself at them, crying uncontrollably.

He cried fifteen years worth of not knowing them, of being abandoned at the Dursleys, and of not knowing love. They held him as he cried, and when he came to his senses, there were tears all around – even Satan was wiping away tears.

“Forgive me,” Harry said. “I don’t usually break down like that.”

“It’s not everyday you meet your parents who’ve been dead for fifteen years either, Harry,” Sirius chuckled. “I think a little emotional outburst is warranted, under the circumstances.”

“I want you to know that we’re very proud of you, Harry,” Lily Potter said. “Despite everything that worthless sister of mine did to you, you grew up to be a fine young man.”

“Who died before he was a man, Mum,” Harry added with a wry smile. “I was still at Hogwarts when I avenged you.”

“But a man nonetheless, Harry,” James said. ““Greater love hath no man than to lay down his life for his fellow man.””

“That’s not quite how it goes, but close enough,” murmured Jesus, quietly.

“Harry, you sent your soul to Hell to save your friends and loved ones. If it weren’t for the fact that you set off two separate warning bells in Heaven alone, you’d be there for eternity. To save people you didn’t even know.”

Harry blushed. “Actually,” he said quietly, “I did it to save four people. Ron, Ginny, Hermione and Tonks.”

“You love them, don’t you?” Lily asked with a smile.

“Well, yeah, but not necessarily *that* way, at least where Ron is concerned.”

“Can’t say that about the other three, can you?” she chuckled at him.

“Makes me glad I won’t be going back. Choosing would kill me, if only because the other two would get me,” he laughed.

“Why choose?” Sirius asked, leaning against the tree.

“Why am I not surprised that you said that?” Harry asked with a loud laugh. What surprised him was his mother’s response.

“He’s right. Why choose?”

“Mum?”

“You love all three. Ask all three of them to be your lovers, and not just purely physically. We see more up here, remember. Ask all three of them, and see what they say, knowing that they’ll be sharing you.”

“Lily ...” James warned.

“Oh, you know what the decision will be as well as I do. Do you really think that Jehovah is going to sentence to Hell someone who took *His* lesson so far to heart that he threatened his everlasting soul?!” She grinned suddenly. “Pride might be a sin, but that’s *my* son that did that.” She thrust out her chest.

Harry was suddenly very uncomfortable, and James laughed. “Honey? You forgot that he never got that filter installed – the one that most people have that says ‘Thinking *that* way about Mum is a no-no’? He has the look of someone who wishes he could nurse at your breasts again, but not for nourishment. Our son has my taste in women – look at the three he died for.” Harry looked down at the ground, blushing, but also very angry at himself.

He heard her voice as she gently lifted his chin to look at her. “Harry? It’s all right. It’s compliment, really. Your dad is right, though. All you’ve ever heard about me was that I was pretty, and seen a few pictures of me. Now you meet me in the closest thing to flesh that we can have, and you’re suddenly reminded of the fact that all three girls you love are like me in various ways – and the most obvious one being that they all have very pleasant curves.” At his startled look, she shrugged. “Hey, I might not ever have been a Seeker for the other team, but I appreciate beauty as well as the next person. All three of your girls are quite attractive. And curved like me.”

“Are you trying to say that I thought ... um, *that* about you because I was thinking of them?”

“If that makes it so that you don’t want to beat yourself up anymore, sure,” Lily laughed.

“Up, no,” Sirius stage-whispered to Pan. “Off, likely.”

“Keep that up, Sirius, and we’ll kick you out of the bed for a month,” she said sternly, but with a twinkle in her eye.

James tapped her shoulder. “Honey? I think you broke Harry.” Harry was looking between the three of them, his jaw nearly touching the grass. “Son, that’s something we didn’t intend to spring on you, but since the cat ... uh, dog is out of the bag ... When we were alive, things were a bit more unusual than people thought. I’m your father – of that you can be sure, but ... Harry, if you end up going back, of which there is some possibility but don’t get your hopes up, you’ll be the reverse of our set-up. Remus, Sirius and I revolved around your mother. She married me, but if things had been different, you probably would have had a half-sibling named Lupin, and one

named Black.”

“Potter. Never Black,” Sirius growled.

“So – so you *all* were lovers?” Harry asked carefully.

“Yup,” Lily said rather matter-of-factly. “Bed could get busy with all four of us.”

Harry’s eyes bugged, and he shook his head. “Please – we’re heading back into that territory again. I’m looking at you, Mum, and – well, I’ve been taught that a bloke shouldn’t think things like *that* about his Mum.” He looked around and said with a weak laugh, “Nice weather we’re having here, eh?”

“I have an idea,” Jesus said suddenly, and disappeared in a puff of pleasant smoke.

“Worry when he does that,” Satan laughed. “Interesting things happen when he gets ideas.”

A short time later, Jesus reappeared with five people that Harry instantly recognized. “I see what you mean,” said Merlin. “Excellent potential, and he seems just the type to give those wizards out there a needed kick in the ass.” He walked over to Harry and asked, “How would you like to do a little studying while you’re here?”

“What subjects?” Harry asked warily.

“Anything you want,” Rowena Ravenclaw responded. “We want to teach you until the time comes to send you back. You can be a force for great change in the wizarding world.”

“Yes,” Salazar Slytherin added. “That ‘kick in the ass’ that Merlin spoke of.”

“Wait ... send me back? I was just getting used to being dead!”

“Well, unfortunately the Book has you down for quite a few years yet, and since we haven’t convinced the Fates to use White-Out, it looks like you’ll have to go back. For a while.” Harry looked at his parents and Sirius with a stricken expression on his face. “Oh, don’t worry. It will probably be quite a while before we send you. There is a lot you need to know first. So you’ll have plenty of time to be with your parents and godfather. And you’ll be back soon enough.”

“How long will I be studying?”

They laughed. “Time is rather plastic here. You’ll study for as long as you want to, in as many subjects as you want.”

“Gods, I wish Hermione were here – she’d love that sort of an offer!” His face fell. “No, come to think of it, no I don’t. The world will be a much poorer place without her, when her time comes. In hopes that she has a long happy life with the man of her dreams, I accept. Besides, she’ll always be that little voice in my head.”

“What would you like to study first?” Merlin asked. Harry thought for a moment, and his eyes fell on his parents and Sirius, who had shifted to his canine form, rolling around on the grass with Lily scratching his stomach. “I think I’d like to be an Animagus, sir.”

“How many forms?” Merlin asked with a grin.

“I can have multiple forms?” Harry asked in shock.

“The average person can only handle one form, mainly because everyone has trained them down through the years that way. As a wise man once said, ‘Argue for your limitations, and they’re yours.’ Pick a form, and we’ll work you through it. I think you’ll discover, once you learn how to do it once, that adding new forms will be easier than you can possibly imagine.” Merlin laughed as he watched Padfoot lick Lily’s face from chin to hairline. “Come along children – it’s time to start classes.”

#####

Jesus and Satan relaxed under the tree as the magical group phased from Arcadia to Avalon.

“Well, that worked out rather well, I think,” said Jesus.

“Quite nicely. Now I just have to remember to re-file Riddle every so often, and red-flag the Dursleys when they show up.”

“What are you going to do with them?” Jesus asked curiously.

“Oh, I think making them tend Harry’s garden will do for a start ...”

#####

Harry lost track of the amount of time he spent in Avalon. His chosen first form was that of a snowy white owl, in honour of one of his constant friends. The process was far easier in Avalon, where magic flowed so much more freely. He had mastered the form within a few weeks, and moved on to others, adding one for the fun of it when he discovered that he could.

He moved from there to Metamorphmagus training, which he started when he mentioned the situation concerning his hair and Aunt Petunia. He spent considerably more time getting that right, and also learning things that he hoped he’d someday be able to teach Tonks. He learned swordplay from the four finest wielders of the weapon that Avalon had to offer – Godric Gryffindor, Rowena Ravenclaw, Salazar Slytherin, and a certain young man of royal bearing who insisted that he call him Arthur.

It was one morning after making love to Willow for a third time before getting up for his studies that he realized how things had changed. “Oh my,” he whispered. “That’s the second Nymph I’ve fallen in love with.”

“Thank you, Harry,” she whispered against his shoulder as she flowed into an embrace. “I understand what you meant a few years ago when you said that you would give me part of your

heart, because you have some of mine.”

“And you mine,” he whispered into her ear.

“I have more than just your heart with me,” she murmured, placing a hand on her stomach. “You have sired a child with me, Harry Potter.”

He knelt before her and kissed her stomach, making her release a throaty chuckle. “That sort of behaviour is what led to our child, Harry.” He stood, holding her tightly. “Oh Harry, I can feel your love for me.”

“Yeah, I think it’s throbbing against your stomach,” he laughed.

“That too,” she replied. “I speak of your emotion, though. You love me deeply, as deeply as you love those mortals you still pine for.”

“Yeah, I still miss them.” His head shot up. “Wait, ‘a few years ago’? How long have I been studying?”

Rowena Ravenclaw walked into the room, giving him a hug. She was dressed as he was, which meant that he enjoyed the view of the beautiful nude woman, and enjoyed the feel of her body against his. “Later, Harry,” she chuckled as she ended the hug. “We have things that must be done.”

“Agreed. How long have I been here?”

“You forget that time is fluid here. You have been studying with us for a number of years. You have actually surpassed us in certain areas. Have you noticed that you have begun teaching *us* some of the things you have discovered?”

He chuckled. “Yeah, like touching you *there* gets the most delightful shivers passing through your body.” He matched word to action, brushing his fingers gently through her pubic hair.

“I said later,” she gasped. “You have learned the greatest lesson of all here, Harry, the one that all must learn to survive. Love is to be shared. Not necessarily physical love, but spiritual love. It truly is that which makes the Universe, and that which truly allowed you to defeat Tom Riddle – your love for your fellow beings.”

“Getting physical about it can be fun,” he said, hugging her again, this time from behind and nibbling her neck. “And with certain people, it’s definitely a spiritual experience.” His hands came up to cup her breasts, and the nibbling became more pronounced, as did her reaction. “I never thought I’d be able to say this about a woman who died a thousand years before I was born, but I love you, Rowena. I finally understand that I *can* love many women, and not necessarily physically. I can love my Mum as a woman in her own right, and not just as the woman who bore me in her body for nine months, and that love doesn’t have to have a physical expression. I can love my father the same way.” He paused, and then chuckled. “I *can* be as incredibly pedantic

and boring as old Professor Binns.”

She moaned quietly. “I love your sense of humour, and I’m afraid that I’m going to have to leave us both hanging, Harry. You have a meeting to go to, and that’s why I was sent to get you. I told them they should have sent Salazar.”

“Oh, that would have been worse,” Harry said seriously. “He ever use that tongue on you?” She spun and looked at him, wide-eyed. “Gotcha!” he laughed, and took off running, the founder of the house of Ravenclaw in laughing pursuit.

They finally arrived at Harry’s meeting after a short delay, since when she caught him, it was right near a bush, and they *were* both rather aroused “Harry, so good of you to join us,” Merlin said with a hearty laugh.

“Well, I joined with her first, hence the delay,” Harry laughed back. A ripple of laughter flowed around the room, and Harry realized that quite a few were there. He could see Satan, Pan, Jesus, and several nymphs, including Willow, who he blew a kiss to. He was amused to see an imprint of his lips appear momentarily on her cheek. His parents and Sirius were there. A few others of some noticeable power were also evident in the room. One who so obviously had to be Jehovah stood.

“Harry Potter.” It was said with considerable power, and Harry fought hard to keep from falling to his knees in terror.

“Present,” he finally said, a little cheekily, which got a laugh from the deity.

“The time has come for you to go back to the mortal plane. For a while only. You will be returned to your body, and we ask that you make an effort to change things.”

“Change things?”

“You will have returned from the dead, Harry Potter. People will tend to listen to you. You have defeated the Dark Lord of your time, and we’d rather like it if you could manage to hold off producing one for another few years, please.”

“Rather high on my list too, so we’re in complete agreement there.” He bit his lower lip. “I want to go back, but I’ve been studying here for so long. Are the people I knew still around, even? And just today I discovered that, well, Willow is pregnant. How long will I be gone? Will I ever even meet my baby?”

Jehovah laughed. “Let me worry about the first two. As for the third – how would you like to be able to travel to and from Avalon and Arcadia at will? Be involved with your child’s life? Perhaps even introduce Willow to your world, as proof that you weren’t merely the victim of a particularly vivid near-death dream?”

“Would you like that, Willow?” he asked. At her excited nod, he chuckled. “Need to get the

world used to nudity, too. I don't think you've ever worn clothes, love."

"Why? I would only end up taking them off later. Why put them on to take them off?" She shrugged pleasantly.

"Are you ready to leave, Harry?" asked Jehovah.

"Just a moment. Satan, thank you for the hospitality when we first met. I don't care who I might anger with this, but you will always be a welcome guest in whatever household I am inhabiting. The same goes for you, Pan, if you visit the mortal realm in my era. I wish I could offer the same to you three as far as the mortal realm goes, Mum, Dad, Sirius, but I guess your time there is done. Willow – I will be back for you, beloved. Rowena, you'll be one of the reasons I keep visiting here as well." He growled the seductive purr that he knew sent shivers down her spine. He turned back to Jehovah. "I can't begin to thank you enough for everything – getting a chance to really know my parents, the ability to come back occasionally, everything – all I can say is 'Thank you'." He was mildly surprised to find tears in his eyes as he said it. He closed them, and the world around him went away.

Chapter 1

Chapter 3

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Death Isn't All It's Cracked Up To Be

Chapter 3

Death Isn't All It's Cracked Up To Be

Chapter 3

Harry came to his senses lying down, feeling soft warm lips pressed against his. "I'm sorry, Harry," he could hear Ginny saying. "I love you, and I never got the chance to tell you." He felt tears strike his cheek.

He couldn't move yet, nor open his eyes. His cheek didn't twitch under the tickle of Ginny's tears. He didn't even think he was breathing. *Wait*, said a voice in his head that he knew to be Jesus from their years of long talks. *You'll be released in a few minutes. You'll know when. And you'll love the prank aspect of it, too. The Weasley twins will worship you for it. Tell them they can thank Padfoot, Prongs, and the Purrfect One.*

When did I come back to? he thought. *And where am I?*

Well, three days is traditional, Jesus said with a chuckle. And as for where ... well, we thought it might be useful for you to know what people truly think of you, and where better to hear that than at your own funeral? Make the most of it, he said before his voice faded away.

He felt another pair of lips brush his. "I'm sorry, Harry," Tonks said. "I wish I'd followed through on that present. You might be in my arms today, or even Ginny's, rather than here. I know you wouldn't want this, but I probably won't ever forgive myself." He heard sobs begin. "I'd rather Voldemort were still around, because you would be too!" she whispered before breaking down.

The parade continued, giving him a few surprises, such as Susan Bones kissing him and whispering, "Hermione and Ginny were very lucky girls, Harry. I wish you'd had a harem, I'd have joined it, if you'd have had me."

Good God, I'd be a fool to turn that down! Harry thought. *She's such a sweet and giving girl. And I've seen her out of those robes in more form fitting clothes. I think there's a few who'd like to be given that. Hmm, I think I should hope that the bottom half of this coffin is closed, or else they'll realize I'm back.*

Ron reached the coffin. "I understand why, mate, but can you understand how I can hate you so much right now for leaving us? You were my best friend ever, Harry, and now you're gone! You've destroyed Hermione, and Tonks, and all us Weasleys. You were my brother!" There was a pause, and then Ron yelled, "How could you do this to us, Harry?" and collapsed onto Harry's chest, sobbing uncontrollably.

Still he couldn't move. *I hope they forgive me when I sit up in the coffin.* Hermione arrived finally, and carefully pressed something soft into his hands. "Something to take with you into the afterlife, Harry," she whispered after placing a loving kiss on his lips. "Something I was too afraid to give you when you were alive. Take them as a token of my wish to have given you my love. *All my love, Harry.*" She kissed him again. "Gods, I'm blushing so hard that it feels like your lips are warm, Harry," she whispered. "I hope you enjoy my knickers."

If he'd been able to, that alone would have caused him to sit up in the coffin, from shock alone. *Why don't they do things like that when a guy's alive and it might do some good?* he wondered. The procession continued, teaching him some interesting things about some of the Slytherins. He'd definitely have to talk to Daphne after he was back ...

Draco approached next. "Heh. I'm probably the only one here who will admit to being glad you're dead. In fact, I'd like to thank you. You took Voldemort out of the picture, clearing the way for my father. After money gets to the right people, he'll be free and completely clear of the charges of being a Death Eater. And then the Mudblood and her friends will get what they truly deserve. And there's not a damned thing you can do now to stop me." Harry heard Draco walk away.

The next set of footsteps had Harry curious. He wondered who it was, because he had only heard the footsteps, mixed lightly with the swishing of a cape. He felt a hand touch his shoulder and rest there for a long moment before the person spoke. "Goodbye, Harry," he said. "Thank you." *Snape? That was Snape? Well, I guess if I can come back from the dead, he can change into a nice person.*

Finally, the parade of people wishing him a safe and happy journey to the afterlife ended, and the speeches were to begin. As soon as Harry heard the first speaker announced by Headmaster Dumbledore, he knew exactly when his return was planned.

Cornelius Fudge took the stage and began to speak. "Today we mourn Harold Potter, the Boy Who Lived. That title no longer applies, unfortunately for Harold. But he died saving us from the worst menace the wizarding world has seen for over a hundred years."

"When the spell he used was discovered in some old books, it was realized immediately how dangerous it would be. It would kill the caster as well. The Ministry did not wish for him to even know of the spell's existence. But he insisted, saying that losing his life was worth ridding the world of the greatest evil it has ever known. Eventually, we were swayed by his protests that thousands would die needlessly, and handed the spell over to him."

Harry felt the restraints about him release, and he opened his eyes. As Fudge opened his mouth to speak again, Harry sat up and looked him squarely in the eyes. "That's a lie, Minister Fudge, and you know it. You don't even know which spell I used. Only one man knows, and he certainly wouldn't have told you about it, before or afterwards. He knows how stupidly dangerous it is." He paused to take a deep breath, and looked down. He found that he wasn't in a coffin – instead, he was laid out on a platform. *Think they call it a bier,* he thought absently. Grinning, he stood on the bier and flipped himself onto the stage in a rather sprightly way, landing on his feet, which he

suddenly realized were bare. “By the way, Fudge. If you’re going to read a eulogy for someone, at least get their name right. My birth certificate says Harry James Potter. Not Harold – Harry. Got it?” He turned around to face the audience, and carefully placed Hermione’s gift in his robe pocket, winking at her as he did. Her face flickered through several emotions – horror, surprise, happiness, embarrassment, and suddenly – a little arousal. “Scuse me, folks, I have a couple things to do.”

He walked to Ginny, dropping to his knees before her. “Ginny, love, can you forgive me for being an asshole since my birthday? I didn’t want to understand how much you were hurting, knowing that I was going to die. Please forgive me?” Her eyes were filled with tears as she nodded, violently enough that some of her tears sprayed his face. He made no effort to wipe them off. “May I be permitted to kiss one of the young women that I love, Ginny?” he asked, placing his hands to either side of her face and drawing closer. When her eyes closed and her lips parted slightly, he sighed and kissed her the way he had enjoyed kissing Rowena and Willow. Her eyes held a question, and he nodded. “Yes, Ginny. I love you,” he whispered. “I also love Hermione and Tonks.”

“I’ll share if they’re willing,” she whispered.

He stood and walked to Hermione. Pulling her to her feet, he gently pressed his lips against hers, and felt her melt into him. Her arms flew around his back, and soon he could feel her moan slightly in his mouth. “I’ll follow through on that gift,” she blushed. “If I’m allowed to.”

“We’ll all talk later, beloved, but I have to say my welcome to Tonks.” He walked to her and pulled the shivering woman into his arms and kissed her. Whispering in her ear as the kiss broke, leaving her panting, “Was the gift rescinded, or just a rain check given?”

“Rain check,” she answered numbly. As he gave her one final squeeze before releasing her, she suddenly grinned. “I love you Harry Potter!” she shouted at the top of her lungs, laughing happily.

“And I love you Nymphadora Tonks!” he shouted in reply.

“I want everyone to know,” he said in a voice designed to carry through the magically expanded Hall, “that there are three main reasons I returned to life today, along with a slew of minor ones, like setting that git up there straight, publicly. But those three main reasons? Ginny Weasley, Hermione Granger and Nymphadora Tonks. I came back to life for you three. You literally are my reasons for living. Never blame yourself for your part in my death, Tonks. Sirius forgave me my part in his, and I was far more to blame for it than you were for mine, my beautiful Nymph. I adore you, and have for years.”

Her eyebrows quirked. “Uh, Harry?”

“Okay. Years subjective time. Lots of stuff to talk about what happened while I was dead, and I need to get on with it. But if you walk from here today with only one thought in mind, let it be that I died to keep you three safe, and I came back to make you three happy. You *are* my life.” He gathered all three young women into what the Muggles called a “group hug.” A very

enthusiastic group hug. With tears all around. “Excuse me,” he said as he finally let go of them. “There are things I have to do right now. Talk to you all later.”

He turned and jumped up onto the stage, and Fudge shrank back from him. “Oh, bugger off, Fudge. I’m not a zombie or undead. Madame Pomfrey? You here?” She stood up in the audience. “Mind coming up and doing a quick check-up, in public, to prove that I’m not dead?”

Quite stunned, she came to the stage and ran her wand over him, murmuring various charms and such as she went along. Finally, she stood up and looked him in the eyes. “Well, Mister Potter, if you’re dead, you’re the most alive dead person I’ve ever met.” She impulsively hugged him. “Please don’t do that to me again,” she whispered. “As much as I’ve joked about your own room in the hospital wing, I don’t like mourning students.” She released him and headed back to her seat.

He spoke quietly and quickly to Snape. “Don’t let Draco near an owl. He talked about Lucius taking over for Moldie, and using bribery to get out and have a clear record. Probably Fudge is on his list. Let the others know.”

Fudge stepped forward. “Harry? Would you like to say a few words to everyone? Tell us about the titanic battle between two foes fated to meet. The Aurors ...”

“... will admit that they came into the house to find Moldieshorts and myself dead and everyone else unconscious. Well, and the exploded remains of a snake. That reminds me. Peter Pettigrew. What was done with him?”

“He was tried by the Wizengamot and sentenced to Azkaban,” Fudge replied weakly.

“And Sirius Black? The man sent to prison for killing someone? Let’s see, who was it? Oh yeah, that’s right! Peter Pettigrew! Sirius Black was imprisoned for more than a decade because he murdered a man current sitting in Azkaban!” Harry grinned a nasty grin. “How about you publicly declare Sirius to be innocent? He fought Voldemort the same as I did. Hell, the press knows he was innocent now – Pettigrew is in prison as we speak!” He scowled at Cornelius Fudge for a moment.

He then turned to the audience. “Okay. I’m back. Tom Riddle – the so-called Lord Voldemort - is permanently dead. Now the fun begins. Hopefully, we can prevent a situation like the rise of another Voldemort from happening again.” A shudder passed through the audience. “Come on folks! He’s a deader! I ferried him to Hell myself!” He put both hands on the podium and leaned forward. “That’s what that spell did, by the way. It ripped Voldemort’s and my souls out of our bodies and bound us together, and took us to Hell. No titanic battle – I sneaked into his supposedly well guarded headquarters, past several Death Eaters, wearing an Invisibility Cloak. Nagini, his snake, saw me, so I cast *Reducto* on her, hence the snake meat all over the walls. He got stupid and stood up to see what had just happened. Some great Dark Lord!” Harry laughed. “He walked into the spell!” There was some small laughter in the Hall.

He stood back up. “Think about what I said that spell did, though. It ripped both our souls out of

our bodies and sent us to his destination. Hell isn't just a concept, people – it's where people who think that just because they can trace their heritage back to Merlin's grandmother, they have the right to lord over and oppress other people – that's where they go. Hell or the Wizard equivalent in Avalon. Not nice places, either of them. Voldemort, Grindlewald, Lucius Malfoy when he dies, almost all the Death Eaters." He paused. "Unless they change their ways and truly atone for what they've done."

"But that's the thing, folks. If not for a certain – heh – infernal luck of mine, I'd still be down there shovelling shit and trying to grow a garden. In Hell. You get interesting tasks, people. I'd like to stop this sort of thing from happening again. Voldemort running rampant, graft in the Ministry, hatred and distrust of the other species. We've warred with the Goblins how many times? Haven't we learned anything yet? We treat centaurs as second class citizens when we acknowledge their existence at all. And we treated our own people as worthless if they don't happen to have the right bloodline. One of the finest families I've ever met anywhere, people who I'm assured have earned a place in Avalon, is looked down on for being poor. They're the richest family I know, people – they have love. And integrity. We can all learn a lot from the Weasleys."

The crowd sat in stunned silence. "Wow," he said. "I thought I'd been dead, but this crowd? It's as silent as the grave out there! And trust me, I know what I'm talking about!" He heard a few chuckles out in the crowd. "I'm tired of talking, though." He laughed. "I'm tired, and I'm dead on my feet." He paused for a moment, and then was rewarded with a braying laugh. "Thank you, Tonks," he grinned. "At least someone got it. So, since I just screwed up what seems to be a really nice funeral, for which I'd really like to thank you all, how about we have a party instead? I know I'm not that much of a comedian – well, unless you ask my teachers about my grades, that is," he said, drawing some laughter from the people, most noticeably from the Hogwarts staff, "but we need to have some fun. Let's make it as enjoyable as it was sombre a few minutes ago." He waved and a row of tables appeared along the wall, covered in food. As the crowd stood and slowly began to move in that direction, he waved a few more times, causing the seating to head to the walls, leaving plenty of room in the middle of the floor. He turned around and smiled at his teachers, who were looking at him in surprise. He walked over to Professor McGonagall, crooking an arm at her. "Shall we dance, Professor?" As he asked, strains of soft music filled the hall.

"I would love to, Mister Potter," she said. They began a slow, gentle waltz, surprising everyone who could remember Harry's prior attempts at dancing. This was not the shy, clumsy boy who had two left feet at the Yule Ball – this was a young man in control of himself, and more self assured than anyone had ever seen him.

"This is an unexpected, but quite pleasant surprise, Mister Potter. It tempts me to believe that something truly amazing happened to you while you were gone."

"It did, Professor. Something truly astounding happened to me while I was dead. I'll describe it for a select group of people after we're done here."

"Why are you doing this? I'd think you'd want to be away from the press."

"I do, but they'll follow me, and make things up if I don't give them something to write about."

They will anyway, once they get wind of my plans.”

“You’re not ...” she began in horror.

He laughed. “After all the crap I went through with Tom, you really think I want to replace him?” He hugged his professor. “I look forward to being in classes. I think you’ll be pleasantly surprised with me.”

She looked around. “I would think so, considering that Miss Tonks has your wand enshrined in her possession.”

“Merlin was happy about it, too.”

She tripped at that statement, but Harry made it look as if he had chosen to dip her slightly. “You do have quite the story, Mister Potter.”

“Harry. And I’d like to apologize for August, when I started using your Christian name without permission. It will not happen again.”

“In a situation such as this, Harry, I will not complain if you call me Minerva.”

“Very well, Minerva. It will be Professor when back in class, though.” She nodded, and as the song ended, he bowed to her to a round of applause. The floor filled, and the music continued, but they parted, her to return to the teachers, and him to search out his friends.

He went straight for Ron. “I’m sorry, Ron, and if you want to hit me, then I’ll stand still for it. I never truly realized how many people it would hurt when I did that. I still would do it again, but I wouldn’t chase people away this time.”

Ron looked at him, and then pulled him in tightly for a hug. “Don’t ever do that to me again, chum,” he said thickly.

“I’m back for a long time, Ron.” He saw others approaching and said with a grin, “Apparently I’m supposed to die at two hundred and thirty-seven, killed by an angry father after impregnating his twenty year old triplet daughters.”

“Are you serious?” Ron asked incredulously.

“No, but a guy can dream, can’t he?” Harry laughed, and was joined by several of his classmates. He turned and was hugged by Parvati.

“Don’t do that to us again, Harry!” she was crying in his chest. “We all thought we’d never see you again!”

He returned her hug. “If I didn’t have friends in certain places, then I wouldn’t be back.” He paused. “I hope you don’t mind, Parvati, but I’d like to do something that I’m betting most guys at this school will hate me for.” As she looked quizzically at him, he leaned in and brushed her

lips with a gentle kiss. "Hey, I was dead for three days. Lesson one – when you come back from the dead, do everything you always wanted to do, because you may never get another chance." Grinning, he released the stunned girl into the hands of her best friend Lavender.

Hermione was actually fairly close, so he grabbed her again, this time kissing her with more passion than before. "Hermione, I love you," he whispered in her ear. "Can you deal with the fact that I love more than one woman?"

"As far as I'm concerned, Harry, you can have a harem of a thousand girls, as long as I can be one of them," she whispered into his ear.

"I wouldn't have one that large nor one without you in it, Hermione. You're one of the girls I really wanted to return for." He grinned suddenly and let his hand fall, where he squeezed her shapely rear end.

"Harry!" she squeaked, blushing furiously. He continued to meet and greet people, carefully speaking to the reporters who came by, promising them more information once he'd actually had a chance to understand it.

Finally, as the impromptu bash wound down sometime in the early evening (the funeral having begun in the late morning), Harry carefully made his way to the headmaster and quietly asked him something, to which he received a nod. Half an hour later, he was in the headmaster's office with Snape, McGonagall, the entire Weasley clan, Tonks, Hermione, and Flitwick.

The first thing Harry did was to walk over to Snape. "Sir? I'd like to apologize to you for my treatment of you over the last few months. I may have accepted what was coming, but I got really ugly about it. And too much of it I took out on you."

Severus Snape was physically affected by the apology, and took several moments to get the look of shock from his face. "Had I not seen you dead on that bier, Mister Potter, I would have thought that this was, perhaps, some effort to play a prank upon me. Speaking as one who knows, preparing oneself for death does not leave you in a very good mood. I have been prepared for years, and three days ago you gave me something I never thought I would have again, P ... Harry. I have hope again. Thank you. No apology is necessary, but I accept it if you feel it must be done." He held out his hand, which Harry shook.

Harry laughed. "Now that we've freaked out everyone, I assume I should tell you what happened." He recounted his adventures as concisely as he could.

"That's quite a tale, but it still leaves so many questions unanswered," Professor McGonagall said. "For example, how did you do such effortless magic without a wand?"

"Well, magic is in the mind, and when you have a decade in which to study, you pick some things up." He grinned. "Like the fact that Rowena Ravenclaw lets loose with the most interesting squeals when ... never mind."

The looks everyone gave him made it rather obvious that they thought he was crazy. "Look," he said. "I was dead for three days, and you have no problems with me being alive again, but you have trouble believing that time might act a little wonky Over There?"

"Actually, Mister Potter," Snape said, "I believe that it is that you are referring to people who have been dead for one thousand years in the present tense. And in a less than respectful manner, I might add."

"I lived around them for about a decade, Professor. And as embarrassing as it is for me to talk about it around adults, things went a little bit further than 'Hi, how are you?', if you catch my meaning. I learned swordplay from Godric, Salazar, Rowena, and Arthur. Merlin helped teach me magic, along with the Founders. I was living with a nymph for a good portion of that time." He paused. "Let's see, how can I prove this to you?" Thinking for a few minutes, he finally looked up and said, "Professor Snape? Willing to travel with me to Avalon? I promise to bring you back."

The ladies in his life looked hurt. "Sorry girls, but he's going to be the most sceptical. If *he* comes back and says that I was telling the truth, then everyone else might be willing to believe me. I'll take everyone over one at a time at some point, but I'm betting that it won't be an easy thing. No proof; just a feeling." He walked to Tonks. "Believe me, beloved one. I need you to understand that I am not doing this to slight anyone."

"I'm an Auror, sexy," she replied. "As soon as you mentioned that he's the most sceptical, I understood." She kissed him, and he returned it with a promise to talk to her further, preferably horizontally. They broke, and she panted, "Come back soon, we all need to talk."

"Agreed," he replied. "Professor?" he asked, holding out a hand to the Potions Master. The man looked for a moment, took the proffered hand, and Harry suddenly disappeared from the headmaster's office.

#####

They appeared near the tree that everyone had been sitting around when he'd first met so many people. "This, sir, is Arcadia, the Greco-Roman afterlife. There is a bit of cross talk between the afterlives, I understand. This seems to be the place everyone likes to visit, and talk."

"I can see why," said Snape in a strangled tone, as a nymph danced up to them and tucked a flower behind Harry's ear.

Pan trotted out of the woods, obviously following the nymph, but he seemed perfectly willing to be distracted by an old friend. "Harry! You're back, and you brought someone with you!"

"This much is obvious," Snape murmured under his breath.

"Be nice, sir," Harry laughed. "Pan, I'd like you to meet one of my professors from school. This is Professor Severus Snape. Sir, this is the Greco-Roman god Pan, god of ... sorry, sir, I forgot.

He's my friend, so I kinda forgot that there are write-ups about him in half a million books."

"This is all well and good, Mister Potter, but how can you prove to me that this is indeed the afterlife?"

"Oh, this isn't *the* afterlife, it's just one of them. Take him to Avalon," Pan said. "I think he might get a kick out of meeting Merlin and a few of the others."

"Yeah, and I'll have to knock Dad down a peg or sixty, quite probably. Let's not even think about Sirius." Harry shook his head and looked to Snape. "Okay. This was actually a stop-over to get you used to the fact that I could leave Hogwarts, thereby proving that it isn't Apparation. Now we're going into Avalon proper, into the house I was using." He put his hand on Snape's shoulder, and suddenly they were in the main hall of his house. He heard a squeal, and turned in time to catch Willow as she launched herself at him.

When he had finished kissing the nymph senseless, he disengaged and turned to Snape. "Professor? This is Willow, a nymph."

"Put some clothes on, young lady!" Snape said, almost stuttering. He opened his mouth to continue, but Harry cut him off.

"Sir? Honestly, she's never worn clothes in her life; I see no reason she should start now. She started off as a nymph in Arcadia, but she's been changing into a much more complex person, so she lives here now. For her, the only reason for clothing would be for a sexual effect – icing on the cake, as it were. We're here in Avalon now. She dresses the way she feels comfortable, just as everyone else here does."

As if to punctuate his statement, Sirius and his parents came into the place from outside. "We heard Willow squeal, and figured you'd come back with a friend," Lily said. "Severus! Please tell me you're here as a guest, and not as a permanent resident."

Harry chuckled to himself to see his Potions teacher beyond stunned, since he and Harry were the only ones clothed. Harry fought down the mild annoyance at the evidence that Snape liked what he saw. *Hell, she's my Mum, and I reacted.* "Dad, Sirius? I ask that you not prank him here. Please?"

"Agreed, son," James said. He extended his hand to Snape and said, "Severus? You have no reason to trust me on this, but I want to apologize for all the crap we put you through. I was an obnoxious, big-headed prat, but by the time I realized that, it was too late – I'd already damaged things with you beyond repair. I doubt that even when you get here permanently that you'll ever really forgive me, and I guess I'd deserve that."

"It's not like we'll see each other that much," Snape replied, a little shaken. "I'd imagine that I am destined for somewhere a bit ... shall we say ... warmer?"

Sirius laughed. "Actually, you get the joy of seeing me for all eternity! We're going to be

roomies!”

“Thus is my point proven,” came the drawling response. Sirius put on a hurt expression.

Lily began to laugh. It started as a slight giggle, but it grew to a full-fledged belly laugh. “Severus, I never knew you had it in you to joke like that! That was perfect! I saw that twinkle in your eye just before you responded!” She fell to laughing again, this time to the point of crying, with the others joining her, the laugh was so infectious.

Eventually the group left Harry’s home to explore Avalon, and Harry ended up introducing Severus Snape to the four Founders and Merlin. Finally, it was decided that they should return to the headmaster’s office. “I’ll see you guys again soon, at least from my point of view,” Harry said.

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They reappeared in the headmaster’s office, and were immediately greeted with Hermione’s “How did you Apparate on Hogwarts grounds?”

“Well, that answers the first question I had,” Harry chuckled.

“What is the verdict, Severus?” Albus Dumbledore asked the Potions Master.

Shaking his head, he looked at a bemused Albus Dumbledore. “The young man tells the truth, sir. I was in Arcadia and Avalon, and spoke to the god Pan and a nymph, as well as Sirius, James, Lily, Merlin, and all four of the Founders. It is my belief, having verified that much, that if Harry says that he studied magic for ten years, that he did so, even if only three days passed here.” He shook his head. “This is quite probably the most interesting Halloween I have ever experienced.”

“Halloween?” Harry asked. “I left on the twenty-eighth.”

“You did not arrive at your destination until after midnight, Harry,” Dumbledore said. “Your spell was cast at roughly twelve-thirty AM on the twenty-ninth.”

“Interesting,” Harry said. “I come back to life on the anniversary of the day that Voldemort killed my parents and tried to kill me. Balance of a sort, if you will.”

“You’re much calmer about this than I expected you would be, Harry,” Dumbledore said.

Harry laughed. “To be honest, sir, part of it has always been a fear of the other side. I’ve been. I’ve met my parents, and I know that they love me. Not loved, but still love. I have the love of beautiful women both sides of the veil. I’ve made jokes about it, regarding Rowena, but I wouldn’t have gotten sexual with her if I hadn’t fallen for her. Hell, in a way, I did what my Dad did, too. I fell in love with my Mum as more than just the woman who gave me life and gave her life for me. There’s a nymph on the other side – the one you met, Severus, sorry; Professor Snape – she’s, um, well, she’s pregnant – by me - right now. ‘Now’ being relative, I suppose.” At the shocked looks, Harry shrugged, a bit embarrassed. “When they said I was coming back, I didn’t

know how long I was going to have been gone from here. I found out she was pregnant the day they told me I had to come back. I didn't even know someone *could* get pregnant over there, but I guess there are different rules for nymphs." He looked up at the women who meant everything to him, and let the fear show – fear that they would now decide that they wanted nothing to do with him.

Ginny answered first. "Harry, I almost lost you. It's only the other side deciding you still had something to do over here that brought you back. If I have to be wife number ten thousand, then I will be. I love you, Harry James Potter, and I'm willing to share you with as many women as it takes to make you happy."

"Hmm, you, Hermione, Susan, and Daphne have all said something about my having a harem." He looked up at Tonks. "My beautiful human Nymph – will you consent to being my senior wife? Wife number one?"

"Are you asking me to marry you?" she gasped. In response, he reached into the air above his head, and everyone felt the magic flare. In his hand, he held a ring of braided gold. Set into it was a flawless pink diamond about the size of a pea. At his questioning glance, one he knew showed his fear of her rejection, she simply held out her left hand. A moment later, she was sporting an engagement ring women would cry themselves to sleep over for weeks.

He stood and pulled Tonks into a powerful hug. Without a word, he walked over and knelt before Hermione. Once again reaching out, he held another ring just like Tonks, only this one contained a perfect emerald just the colour of his eyes. He didn't even have to open his mouth – her hand was out in a heartbeat, and tears flowed from her eyes. He kissed her deeply before finally releasing her and walking to Ginny. Finally, he spoke. "Ginny, I know you're only fifteen, but if I ..."

"Harry, I wasn't joking before. My answer to your proposal is yes, even if I have to wait until I'm one hundred years old. I will marry you."

"Hurt her, chum," Ron said, "and you'll live to regret it. Sorry, but I had to get the family threat out of the way." He laughed. "Welcome to the family, by the way."

Harry looked solemnly to Ron. "If I ever intentionally hurt one of these women, then there won't be anything left for you to even spit on – they'll see to that. And if I unintentionally hurt any of them, then the others would deal with what was left after I was done with me. As it is, I have to make up for deserting everyone three days ago, and it should take me a lifetime for that." He knelt before Ginny and held out a ring that matched the others, except for the stone being a flawless ruby. Her hand came out, and she soon sported the engagement ring.

Harry looked up at her parents. "I don't ask your permission, Mr. and Mrs. Weasley, but I do ask your blessing. Know that I would rather end up back in Hell again as a permanent resident than hurt Ginny again."

Arthur and Molly looked at each other for only a moment before turning back to Harry with a

smile. “Our only condition, Harry, is that you wait until she has finished at Hogwarts. Beyond that, you have our blessing.”

“We always thought of you as part of the family,” Molly said with a happy sniff, “and now you will be!”

“What about dowry?” Harry asked.

Their faces fell. “Harry, we don’t ...”

“I mean, after all, if I’m taking such a treasure from your household, I should be paying you something in order to do what little I can to make up for the removal.”

“Harry, we won’t take money from you, you know that,” Molly said sternly.

He grinned impudently. “Then I guess I’ll just have to make the dowry a complete renovation of the Burrow, with all the latest things, my offer. And I’ll have you know that’s my lowest offer.”

“Don’t you mean highest offer?” Ron asked, a bit puzzled.

“Oh no, Ron. That’s my starting point. It only goes up from there.” He turned and looked at Tonks and Hermione, but suddenly a thought struck him. “Oh no. My will!”

“Unprobated as of yet, Harry,” Dumbledore smiled. “I read it to see what should be done with your body, but beyond that, it has not yet taken effect. Since you are here to be able to contest your own will, I think that you need not worry about your financial situation.”

“Whew,” he breathed. He turned back to Tonks and Hermione. “Bet I’m the only guy who will ever have to worry if his will has been made official or not. As I was going to say, however – the same must go for you two as well. Tonks, I will need to talk to your parents to agree on the dowry, and the same goes for you, Hermione.”

Percy, who was standing with his brothers, spoke up. “Um, marrying three women is highly irregular, Harry. I don’t know if the Ministry...”

Harry levelled a suddenly icy gaze on him. “Percy. Do you honestly think that I care what the Ministry or your boss think? With or without official approval, it’s going to happen. End of statement. But now that you’ve got some advance notice, perhaps you can find some precedents so we can do it all legally and everyone will be happy.”

Percy smiled. “Why, yes, I think I can do that.” He started mumbling to himself about legal research until Fred punched him on the shoulder lightly and George informed him that he was being a git and should shut up.

Harry turned back to Dumbledore. “N.E.W.T.s are only done at the end of the year, right?”

“If there is truly a need for it, they can be rescheduled. Why?”

Harry blushed. “Not to brag, sir, but I could probably teach most of the courses at Hogwarts now.”

“Harry, you’ve never even taken Arithmancy or Ancient Runes,” Hermione said softly.

“Not while I was amongst the living, at least,” he replied. “I had Merlin and the Founders teaching me. And trust me, they’ve been keeping up on the advances since their day.” He thought for a moment. “May I be allowed to go into Diagon Alley tomorrow and buy the seventh year textbooks for all subjects, Professor Dumbledore? I can study them and see what else I need to learn. I’d like to take the N.E.W.T.s this year and then we’ll decide about next year.”

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After further discussion, they broke for the night, Dumbledore agreeing that a trip into Diagon Alley the next day might not be amiss. School had been cancelled for the week due to Harry’s death and the defeat of Voldemort, so it wasn’t as if he’d be missing classes. Tonks led him, Ron, Ginny, and Hermione back to the Gryffindor dormitory for the night, but not before Molly gave him a bone-crushing hug that he returned. “I love you, Mum,” he murmured to her, making her snifle happily.

When they reached the common room, Harry pulled Tonks in with them. He was immediately surrounded by the entirety of the fifth year and above Gryffindors. The others seemed scared of him.

“Come closer, folks,” he said to the younger ones. “I’m not some freaky undead thing, like a vampire or a zombie.”

“How do we know that?” one third year asked, voice shaking, but still defiant.

“Good question. What do you know about vampires?”

“They can’t be seen in mirrors, they can’t stand holy items, they can’t cross running water, they can be killed with a stake to the heart, they ...”

“That’s good. We’ve got two methods right there that you’ve listed that we can use to test. Mind you, that stake to the heart will kill just about anything. Make sure you’re dealing with a vampire before you go staking anybody. Okay, we need a full length mirror down here. I want nothing to do with procuring it.” A minute later, a mirror floated into the room. “Okay. Get where you can see the spot on the couch I’m sitting, but far enough away to feel safe. Now, after you’ve done that, can you see me in the mirror?”

“Yeah,” the third year student said.

“Good, that wipes out the vampire thought, but just to be sure, anyone here have a religious icon that means something to them?” Parvati pulled a necklace from her blouse and pulled it over her head, kissing the symbol there before handing it to him.

Harry cradled the pendant in his hand and looked at it closely. “Hey, Ganesha! Cool dude! I like him.” He slipped the chain around his own neck. “See? No pain.”

She blinked at him. “What happened to you, Harry?”

“Short version. Found spell, killed Moldie, ended up in Hell with him.” He opened his mouth to continue, but Lavender cut him short with a wail.

“If *you* ended up in Hell, what hope do the rest of us have?”

He smiled. “Lavender, I went there because I was tied to Riddle by the spell I cast. It ripped our souls from our bodies and threw us to his destination. Jehovah severed the connection, and left Moldieshorts down there. Right now *his* torture is being misfiled in Hell’s system.”

“Me? Well, they didn’t know what to do with me, so I just planted a garden.” He snorted. “If I know the way that Satan thinks, when the Dursleys get down there, she’ll put them to work keeping my garden in pristine condition.”

Those who knew of Harry’s treatment at the hands of the Dursley family began to laugh at the concept. Harry started to speak, but the painting moved aside, and Remus Lupin came running into the common room. His eyes fell on Harry, and tears sprang to his eyes. “It’s true,” he whispered. “You really *are* alive!” He nearly leaped across the room, pulling Harry into a hug so tight that he couldn’t breathe.

“Remus,” he gasped, which finally got the werewolf to release him. He didn’t release Remus, though. He closed his eyes for a moment and thought, *Jesus, if you’re out there listening to me, is there any way I can cure this man of his curse? He’s been there for me so many times, even when I didn’t appreciate it, and the ... well, the hell I put him through with my death ...*

I understand, Harry. Remember what you learned with Merlin and the Founders about meta-auras? You can apply that to this situation, and to others as well. Harry felt a chuckle in his mind. And if it helps you any, I give you My blessing.

Harry opened his eyes and looked at his friend. “Remus, do you trust me?”

“Of course I trust you, Harry. Why?” Harry didn’t answer. Instead, he looked around the room, and looked past everyone, getting himself into the mindset to read meta-auras. The feeling flowed across him as he took in every one in the room. Remus’s stood out in stark contrast to everyone else’s.

“Well, magic is all about energy flow,” he murmured to himself, not aware that everyone heard him. He began to work with Remus’s meta-aura, and slowly began to alter its ‘colour’. It wasn’t that it had an actual colour, but more that it had a feeling of that colour. By the time he had finished, he was sweating.

“What were you doing, Harry?” Remus asked. “I feel strange. My senses are suddenly duller.”

Panting slightly, Harry said, "Remus, at next full moon, I'm sitting with you. You're not taking the Wolfsbane potion, either."

"Harry," Remus said in some alarm, but Harry stopped him.

"Remus, there is something called a meta-aura, that only a handful of people can really even see. If you know how to read it, you can even get a feel for a person's talents. It also shows things like vampirism and lycanthropy. It is *very* dangerous to play with. Not to the recipient, but in the fact that it could be used to give or take things away from someone. I'm not sure I'm willing to train anyone who isn't willing to make a major oath not to abuse it. Let's put it this way – I could make Bellatrix and Lucius and the rest all Muggles. Not Squibs – Muggles." He stopped and took a deep breath, finally getting his wind back. "I took out the lycanthropy from yours, Remus." He thought for a second, and took off Parvati's necklace with its silver chain and Ganesha talisman.

Remus looked carefully at the offering, and then let Harry place it in his hand. The look of wonder that came onto the man's face made it all worthwhile to Harry. "This is silver, right?" he asked. At Harry's nod, he began to laugh happily. "I am human again! Harry, don't take this wrong, but I love you!" He pulled the young man into a bear hug.

When he released him, Harry was grinning. "Can't have the last of the Marauders having pesky little problems like being a werewolf."

"That's unimportant. Not that I'm complaining at all, Harry, but how are you alive? I saw your body – I was on that mission to Little Hangleton, and I saw Tonks carrying your body out. We verified – you were as dead as you can get. I couldn't – I didn't think I could bear going to the funeral, but then all of a sudden there were owls all over the place, and – then the news ..."

"Well, I've got some friends in the afterlife on both sides of the equation. Satan, who happens to be a nice person as well as a dead sexy babe; Jesus, and yes, I'm talking *that* Jesus; Merlin, Pan, Ganesha ... the list is actually fairly large. Oh, by the way, Remus, I have a message for you from the Purrfect One. 'We're waiting for you, but don't you dare hurry here.'" Harry grinned.

"You ... you saw your parents?"

"And Sirius. The group is nearly complete, but they don't want to see you for a long time, Remus. They'll wait." He leaned in and whispered in his ear, "They're keeping the bed warm for you."

Remus's eyes were wide, and Harry nodded, whispering again, "It might have been nice to have had a half-sister named Lupin."

"Merlin's ghost! You *have* seen them," Remus breathed.

"At least now you won't look at me as if I'm crazy when I start to do some things. I've been given the mission to change things to avoid another Tom Riddle debacle if at all possible. I have some ideas, but I need to finish school first. I have a good long life ahead of me, so it's not as if I have

to get it all done yesterday."

"What sort of ideas do you have?"

Harry returned to the couch, flanked by Ron and Hermione, and everybody else – even the first years, who probably didn't understand all that much of what was going on but were proud to be included – gathered around.

"Why are centaurs and goblins considered lesser beings? Why is being a Pureblood better than a Muggle-born? Why do you think Tom was so interested in power, and convincing everyone he was a Pureblood? We need to fix those attitudes. The most brilliant witch I know is a Muggle-born – one of the more powerful ones, too. Look at me. I'm only a half-blood, and I was raised by Muggles. I might as well be Muggle-born. I don't say it to brag, but how many people do you know can cast a Patronus that can chase away a hundred Dementors?"

"Muggle-borns bring a new way of looking at things to magic. Purebloods are used to the way things are done – that's how they've always been done, and how they will be done in the future. I'll bet that if you look back at all the innovations in magic, the majority of them had a Muggle-born or a Half-blood somewhere in its creation, even if a Pureblood got the credit."

"I'm not saying that Purebloods are bad – the greatest family I know is a Pureblood family." He smiled at Ron and Ginny. "But the Weasleys prove my point. They accept Muggle-borns and Half-bloods as just as good. And they're better for it."

Katie Bell laughed. "Gods, Harry, it sounds like you're running for Minister for Magic!"

Harry stopped dead. He thought for a moment. "You know something, Katie? When I'm old enough, that might just be a great place to work from. Thanks for the idea!"

"I was joking," she murmured to some chuckles around her.

"Look," Harry said. "Things aren't going to be solved tonight. First off, it's been a big day for everyone – you guys had to attend a funeral where the corpse chooses to sit up and tell off the Minister for Magic, and I had a day where I was that corpse. It's been busy all around. What say we all go get some sleep, and we'll hammer out some more of this tomorrow, okay?"

The crowd nodded, and slowly went their own ways to their dorm rooms, eventually leaving just Harry, Ron, Ginny, Hermione, Tonks and Remus. "Hey Tonks?" Harry said. "What do you think about August fifteenth?"

"It's a day. Why?" she asked, puzzled.

"Well, I was thinking more along the line of the fifteenth as the day you get the companion to this," he said, kissing the ring on her left hand. Her eyes widened, and she threw her arms around him, crying. "Can I take that as a yes?" he asked, his own voice thick with emotion. He felt her nod vociferously.

“Okay. I’m torn now. I’d like both Remus and Ron to be my best man, but I can only have one.”

Ron smiled. "Since Remus is the closest thing to family to you, choose him for the first one. I can be best man at either Hermione’s or Ginny’s.”

Hermione looked at him in wonder. “Ron, that was ... that was surprisingly mature.” Her voice sounded serious, but her eyes were twinkling merrily at him, and she wasn’t able to keep the smile from showing.

“Yeah, well, don’t get used to it,” he laughed. “Even us guys with the emotional depth of a teaspoon can have a good day.” He was grinning merrily, and was joined in laughter by the rest.

“I can see there’s a lot I need to catch up on, Harry,” Remus said. “I think, since you apparently got engaged to these three today, that you should ... ahem ... retire to somewhere private and talk.” His eyes sparkled happily, telling Harry exactly what he meant.

“I like your idea, Remus,” Harry laughed. “Today of all days I think I can get away with being out in the halls after curfew.” He went serious for a moment. “Remus, I want to apologize for ...”

“Stop right there, Harry. You did what you thought had to be done. I am incredibly happy that you’re back, but I know that you were giving your life to save us all. Don’t apologize for that.”

“I want to apologize for putting you through the emotional pain. I did that to too many of my friends, and as I said earlier, I’ll be making up for that for the rest of my long life.”

“... killed by an angry father after impregnating his triplet daughters,” Ron snorted quietly. “My arse.” He was rewarded with laughter.

Harry grinned, and took Tonks hand. “My lady? Correction – my ladies? Would you be willing to retire with me to the Room of Requirement, so that we may continue our very necessary conversation?”

“Only if you walk in front of us,” Ginny quipped. “We want to look at your nice tight Quidditch arse.”

“It’s a deal, ladies,” he laughed, leading them from the common room.

Chapter 2

Chapter 4

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Death Isn't All It's Cracked Up To Be

Chapter 4

The week wasn't out yet when Harry was called to Professor Dumbledore's office. With no small amount of trepidation, he worked his way toward the office, the girls behind him, although he had asked them to stay behind.

"If you're going to get yelled at, we want to be there for you afterward," Ginny replied as they mounted the stairs.

"Admirable sentiment," came the voice from inside the office, "but unnecessary. Rather, I have a proposition for him."

"Proposition?" Harry asked. "What sort of proposition?"

"We developed something of a problem the other day, when I discovered that I had managed to hire yet another Death Eater to the position of Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher. Apparently he had been in a late night conversation with Minerva as they patrolled the halls of the school when he clutched his left arm and apparently said, rather eloquently, 'Urk.' We were disturbed by this, especially when the tattoo was discovered upon his arm."

"Um, forgive me if I'm a little thick, but what does this have to do with me?" Harry asked, puzzled.

"Ohmigod!" Hermione squeed. "You're going to ..." Harry looked at her in shock for a moment - Hermione never squeed.

"Precisely, Miss Granger. He has shown an aptitude for teaching – perhaps he might enjoy being our Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher." Dumbledore's eyes were twinkling madly.

"I haven't even taken my N.E.W.T.s!" he replied, shocked. "Besides, I was joking about that when we were here in the office!"

"The proctors will be here tomorrow, for several days. You, and any other students who may wish to attempt them, will be tested. If you pass, Harry, you will receive an offer to begin teaching Defence."

"If?" Hermione squeaked. "He studied with the Founders!"

"The N.E.W.T.s, obviously, will be a formality, but a necessary one," replied Dumbledore with a soft chuckle.

"Why are the proctors coming out just for me?" Harry asked.

Dumbledore openly laughed. "Not only did you die saving the world from Tom, you came back from the dead. There was no denying that you were in fact quite dead. And yet here you are

before me, rather obviously alive. They feel it is the least that they can do for you. If you wanted the Minister's job, you would probably get it by public acclaim."

"I'm too young. I'm only sixteen. I'm probably too young for teaching, but at least that I have some idea of how to do it." He looked at Professor Dumbledore. "If I pass the N.E.W.T.s to your satisfaction, then I will accept the teaching position." He turned to Ginny and Hermione. "Sorry, ladies."

"What are you apologizing for?" Ginny said.

"I'll be a professor. You'll be students. See the problem?" He looked at Hermione. "Even if you *are* of age right now, it's considered bad form to get romantic with your students."

The girls blanched. "Two years without being able to kiss you?" Hermione asked.

"Three for me," Ginny sighed.

Dumbledore laughed. "I'm certain that we can work something out. Harry is amongst the living because of the depth of his feelings for the two of you, as well as Miss Tonks. We will have him as a teacher because of his love for you. I will not be ashamed to give him preferential treatment, given what I have done to him in the past. Three years of allowing an unusual teacher a romance with a student or two doesn't not even begin to clear the slate for what I have done to you."

"Sir," Harry said, "What does that tell the students and the other teachers, though? Doesn't that undermine the authority of the teachers, and send a bad message to the students?" He turned to Ginny and Hermione. "Don't think I'm doing it because I don't love you, I'm asking this because ..."

"... because you're so honourable that you'll hurt yourself to do the right thing," Ginny sniffed. "That's why I love you, Harry. Forgive the language, professor," she said, looking at Dumbledore, "but I was a right royal bitch this summer because I was hurting, and I took it out on the source of my frustration. I'm hoping to *earn* the forgiveness he's given me."

Harry took her hands. "Beloved, I had a decade or more to learn and to think. I understand completely what you were thinking, and that's why I forgive you." He turned to Dumbledore and said, "You have no idea how much I wish that she were of age, sir, because if she was, I'd ask you to get Tonks here, and I'd marry these three ladies on the spot."

Albus Dumbledore's eyebrows rose, and soon his body followed suit. He walked to the fireplace and tossed Floo powder in, saying "Nymphadora Tonks!" Her head appeared quickly in the fireplace.

"Wotcher, Albus! Whatcha need?"

"Could you go to the Burrow and get Molly for me? I need to speak to Arthur as well. It would be best to bring them to Hogwarts. I shall have the Floo connection opened for your travels."

Mere minutes later, the three he had requested came through the fireplace. “Albus! Is something wrong?” Molly asked, worry evident in her voice.

“It depends,” the headmaster replied with a twinkle. “Young Harry here has stated a wish to marry your daughter, as well as his other two fiancées, immediately, if only she were of age. He seems to be unaware that she could marry with parental permission.”

Arthur walked over to Harry. “I *need* to ask you this, Harry, not out of an attempt to stop the wedding, but to assure myself as a father. Harry, do you ...”

Harry interrupted. “Sir, one of the reasons I *wanted* to come back when they told me that I had to was because of your daughter. I died to save the world, but mostly because I didn’t want Ginny, Tonks, or Hermione to have to worry about that psychotic little inhuman thing anymore. I wasn’t a martyr to save the world, I was a man who loves these three women so much that I would die for them *again* if need be.” He grinned. “Sort of hoping to avoid that, however. I want a very long life with these beautiful women.” He blushed. “I want to rival your family for size in number of children.”

“I’m agreeable, after I leave school,” Ginny said quite seriously. “Father, I love him. We had a chance the other day to ... well, let’s say that the Room of Requirement giving us a room with a Jacuzzi and a bed large enough for four to sleep comfortably should give you an idea of what happened in there, since it was Harry, me, Hermione, and Tonks. The most he would do with me, Dad, was touching me, because I’m still considered underage. I understood, and I actually appreciated it, especially since ... well, let’s just say that neither he nor the others let me get too frustrated, if you catch my meaning. Daddy, he cares, and I can tell how much he still hurts for how he treated me over the summer. He loves me.”

“I do, sir. For you it's been s couple months. For me it's been at least ten years. It bothers me still. I’m sorry that I interrupted you, but ... there simply are not words for how much I care for these three women.”

“Why now?” Molly asked.

Albus spoke up. “Because he will soon be taking over the role of Professor of Defence Against the Dark Arts.”

Molly and Arthur were silent in shock for a moment, while Tonks simply began to jump up and down like a schoolgirl, letting loose with a quiet “Squee!” if such a thing could be said to be done. “My husband, the best D.A.D.A. teacher that Hogwarts has ever seen!” she said.

“Well, I have to pass my N.E.W.T.s first,” Harry said with a laugh, “and then I have to actually teach, Nymph. I don’t think you can say immediately that I’m the best D.A.D.A. teacher Hogwarts has ever had just yet.”

“Sure I can! Who was it who taught other students – *while still a student himself*, mind you – how to cast a spell that is beyond N.E.W.T. level?”

“Be that as it may be,” Harry said, “even if I marry you and Hermione, I promised the Weasleys that I’d wait until she had left school. I can’t go back on that.”

“Are you really sure about this, son?” Arthur asked carefully.

“Sir, I know that for all of you it was only a handful of days ago, but I have the memories in my head of roughly a decade or more of studying and ‘living’, while they worked on what was to be done with me before I was inserted back into my body. I can quite honestly tell you that Ginny was always in my thoughts. If you ever meet Willow – and I hope to introduce your family to her – she will tell you that, even though I was with people over there, part of me pined for these ladies. I can very honestly say, sir, that I have loved your daughter for more than ten years. I’ve waited that long, I can wait for a couple years more.”

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"I still couldn't believe that they let us marry that very weekend," Ginny said, her head on his shoulder. She rested her free hand on her bare swollen belly. "And in three more months we make them grandparents for the fourth time."

"How did I get so lucky?" Harry murmured into her hair and he kissed the top of her head.

"Probably by waiting a decade for us. It had been so obvious that what you were saying was true."

"Harry has been a wonderful man for as long as I have known him," Willow said with a smile as she entered the room. As the day that Harry had met her, she was dressed in nothing but a smile. She was also pregnant, although only four months along, and Harry could hear Ginny's giggle as he reacted as he always did to any of his wives.

"And I broke the curse of the Defence Against the Dark Arts teaching position," he laughed. "Fifteen years in the job before I decided to take a break and work even harder at making a generation of Hogwarts students that are all Potters!"

"Are you being a megalomaniac again, love?" Katie Bell Potter asked as she walked into the room, her arms around the Patil twins waists. Behind them came the rest of his large family, as well as Severus Snape.

"Of course he is, Miss Bell – correction, Mrs. Potter," Severus said with a smile. "It's one of his more endearing qualities."

"Might be easier to refer to us by our maiden names," Ginny said with a laugh. "You call out for Mrs. Potter in here and a lot of women will answer."

"I still don't quite know how that happened," Harry said with a puzzled look. "Ginny, Hermione, and Nymph are understandable, as is Willow. I guess I can understand Susan and Daphne. But how did I end up with the rest of this beautiful troupe that runs my life so wonderfully?"

"By being yourself and having a heart that can hold so many," Hermione murmured in his ear, and

he shivered slightly with incipient lust.

"We have a guest, beloved. It would be rude to do what I want to do," he murmured back into her ear, enjoying listening to the quiet moan from her as his breath tickled her ear.

He heard a giggle from Daphne before she said, "Well, we could have an orgy and invite him. Give me a chance to finally seduce the head of my Household."

"I'll contact Mr. Zabini then," Severus quipped. "I'd imagine he'd be more than willing to assist in your conquest."

"He's my classmate, sir. He'll never be my head of household. A certain hook-nosed Potions Master, however, has always set my blood to boiling for some odd reason."

Severus looked as if he had been slapped with a wet salmon. "Miss Greengrass ..." he began.

"Severus, she has harboured feelings for you for a very long time. I know I won't have any problems if you choose to borrow a room and give the girl what I think you both want very much, especially since I can't yet see you just stripping down amongst us, although a few of my wives would certainly not complain about it if you did."

The Potions Master shook his head. "It is when you make such statements that I realise just how much things have changed between us, Harry."

"For the better, too," Harry answered.

"Yes, for the better." Severus thought for a moment, and soon his clothes were folded neatly and resting upon a small table nearby. He seemed more than a little embarrassed by his rampant condition, although he fought valiantly to avoid the appearance of embarrassment.

"Don't worry about it, Sev," Harry said. "I've seen 'em for fifteen years dressed like this, and I still react that way."

Daphne decided to take control of the conversation by walking up to Snape and flowing into his arms, where she proceeded to give him a kiss that left *Harry* slightly out of breath. "Good lord," he murmured. "I know she loves me, but ... wow!"

Severus blinked for several moments. It seemed to be the only thing he was capable of doing. "Wow indeed," he finally breathed. He permitted himself to be led into a side room.

As the rest of the group sat and talked a while, they were startled by Daphne's voice shouting, "Oh Gods YES!" while settled into some fairly loud squeals of obvious pleasure. When the two finally returned to the rest of the group, they saw their old Potions professor with something he'd never had before - a look of happy contentment of the 'I never knew that I had a soul worth loving' type. Daphne was leaning on his arm. "Can I keep him Daddy?" she asked with a grin.

Harry looked to the other girls with a smile and received chuckles and nods all around. "You

heard her, Sev. You've officially been invited into the family, and the rest all agree. Give it some thought. We don't need an answer now, or even quickly. Just think about it."

"I shall indeed," Severus replied. "Now, I came to talk to you about something, and was delightfully distracted." He lifted Daphne's chin and smiled. "A worthwhile distraction, I will add. But I have come to speak with you about the Ministry."

"What have they done now?" Harry grumbled.

"Well, they've managed to get another Fudge into office; a Wilberforce Throckmorton by name. He panders to the wrong people, and has been trying desperately to rescind so many of the laws that were passed after your return from the dead. I fear that you may be forced to run for office just to keep the wizarding world from pissing off the Muggles sometime soon. I have come to realise, after talking with Hermione, just how much they can do *without* magic. Imagine what we might do if we cooperated!"

"And if someone who was a Death Eater can come to that conclusion, imagine what the average wizard will think." He looked around the room, realising that all his wives were there. "Should I rain on Throckie's parade?"

#####

He was elected with a landslide vote.

#####

He'd done his time (fifteen years worth) cleaning up the Ministry again when word came to him about a rather interesting religious order that had begun, with its main place of worship in the village of Hogsmeade.

The Church of Harry Potter.

"How do I react to this?" he asked when he heard about it. "My first thought is to go raging into the town and tell them to stop this silliness immediately, but that's just not right."

"There's a few ways you can go about this, but I don't know which is best," Hermione said. "Perhaps we should talk over some of the possible reactions you can have, and decide which is best."

Willow cocked her head. "Why not ask those who deal with it already?"

The other ladies in the room looked puzzled, but Harry simply slapped his forehead. "Of course! Who better to talk to?" He grinned. "Can't take you all, but I can take as many as four with me when I visit Avalon."

#####

Harry arrived with Hermione, Daphne, Padma and Susan in Arcadia, where they found Pan chasing nymphs. "Yo, Horny!" Harry yelled, bringing the god to a stop.

"Harry! Long time no! What brings you here?" He wiggled his eyebrows suggestively. "And you bring your own nymphs! Smart man."

Susan was blushing furiously, and had yet to manage to unglue her eyes from Pan's most salient attribute. Harry slid over next to her. "Susan, if he offers, take him up on it. According to Mum, it's certainly an enjoyable experience."

She finally managed to pull her eyes from Pan's erect member. "Your Mum ... Lily Potter has ..."

"Yep. Learned a lot about Mum when I was dead all those years ago." He nudged her again. "Go on, you know you want to."

"Are you sure?" she squeaked.

"If I didn't have a problem with you carrying one of Ron's children, then I'm sure as hell not going to have a problem with you making love to Pan, who's just as good a friend as Ron." She blushed and took the proffered arm.

Harry excused himself for a few seconds to show up at the Pearly Gates and ask for Jesus. "You could go in and look for him," Peter said with a chuckle.

"Doesn't feel right to me. I wasn't pulled bodily from Earth and I'm not dead yet. Don't belong in there yet."

"Again. You're not dead *again* yet," Peter corrected, smiling.

Jesus appeared with his own smile, his mother next to him. "Harry! So good to see you!" she said, leaning in to kiss his cheek.

"Good to see you again, Mary," he replied, returning the greeting in kind. "Can I borrow the both of you for a while, down in Arcadia?"

A second later, they appeared next to the other three girls, who looked up. Daphne and Padma immediately set about waking Hermione up from her faint. Susan's familiar pleased scream came from the bushes, and the group chuckled as Hermione finally woke up. "Ladies," Harry said with a grin, "I'd like you to meet Jesus and his mother, Mary." He turned to his new guests and said, "I'd like to officially introduce you to three of my wives, one of whom is the reason I was willing to die the first time. Susan is over in the bushes with Pan, so you'll meet her after she comes down from that rip-roaring orgasm we just heard, and these three are Padma, Daphne, and Hermione."

Hermione was blushing furiously as she smiled at them, and Mary pulled her into a gentle motherly hug. "You're a very special lady, dear, if he was willing to die for you. I look forward to meeting Ginny and Nymphadora someday."

"It doesn't ... shouldn't you ... isn't our relationship, um, frowned on by you?"

Jesus laughed. "I heard of a bumper sticker that says it all, as far as your fears are concerned. 'Jesus, save me from your followers' is what it said. Too many down there have their own hang-ups and chalk them up to me to give them validity. Answer me this, Hermione - do you love him?"

"With all my heart," she answered honestly.

"Then you're good by me. Those who understand love understand all my most important messages. Those who don't need to use my name to give it backbone. You love him - all of you do, I can tell - and he loves all of you. He's still my friend, and I don't personally care that he's currently contemplating the way your clothes hug your body, Hermione. I just ask that he not follow through on his thoughts until I'm not around." Jesus finished with a large smile. "And by the way, from an aesthetic sense, I have to agree with him. I see why you turn heads."

Harry shrugged. "Hey, I have good tasting women." His eyes twinkled as he waited for people to catch what he said before he continued. "I need to talk to a number of people and deities, to be honest. I've just found out that there's a religion being formed in my name, and I honestly don't know how to react." He looked to Jesus. "You're my friend, and ... well, I don't want you thinking that I'm even contemplating horning in on your territory."

"I knew this could happen, Harry. Remember, I helped you with my shtick - coming back from the dead after three days? What you'll have to get used to is the overlay of what you were obviously thinking when you said something, and the people who will give you certain attributes."

"I'm very fond of his attributes," Daphne said with a purr.

"I'm sure," Jesus laughed. "How many people know that I have brothers and sisters? How many people know that I have children? My mother and I were both proper Jewish people. I studied and taught the Kaballah. I was married, if only for grounding in the physical world, and we did what all married people do. Two people who were celibate made the rules that currently govern those who are my followers these days. Peter absolutely hated my wife - to be honest, he was a misogynist. One of those cases where attribute overlay can have a good effect. He's a lot more mellow now that he guards the main gate. Friendlier. Paul never even met me, but realised that he was on the cusp of being able to form his own sect, and it got to be more successful than even he ever realised." Jesus shook his head. "Just needed to warn you."

"Perhaps ... can any of you ..." Hermione began. "Can any of you set foot in our world?" she finally squeaked out.

"Any of us that classify as deities can," Pan said. "We can set up a portal to talk through for some of those in Avalon that you might wish involved in the conversation."

Harry grinned again. Let me go get someone else for the conclave. Want to meet back here, or at our home?"

Mary grinned and was suddenly wearing a flattering yet demure swimming outfit. "Harry? Swimming pool. Your place." He laughed in response.

#####

He appeared on the outskirts of a familiar place, the old smell of sulphur wafting past his nose. Wafting, that is, if you consider being hit in the nose with a olfactory equivalent of a twenty pound sledge wafting.

He walked to the massive doors and knocked. A moment later, a very puzzled demon opened the door. "Oo's knockin' out here?" it asked.

"Me. Might I have a word with Your Lady?"

The demon's eyes widened, and he slammed the door fully open. "Yes, Lord Potter!" it said and it scampered off into the distance quickly.

Lord Potter? he mused, an eyebrow quirking skyward. Before he could think any more on the meaning behind it, he felt, rather than heard or saw, the presence of someone of power coming closer. He looked up to see Satan, wings at full extension, running for the gate. She arrived and went to one knee before him. "Welcome back, Lord Potter," she said, her face down.

He could hear the impudent tone in her voice, however, and said with a chuckle, "Get up, you! You should not be dropping to your knees in front of me."

She stood, grinning widely and said, "I can think of reasons to be on my knees in front of you that I doubt you'd complain about." She added an extra little purr at the end, and Harry couldn't help but laugh.

"You little minx! If I weren't putting my immortal soul in peril, I'd spank you!" he grinned.

She looked at him with curiosity. "Why would that put your soul in peril? Certainly not from me."

"I'm a married man, Satan. My wives ..."

She laughed. "I see. They might surprise you, however. Be that as it may, sexual innuendo was not the reason you showed up here, although it is a pleasant bonus. What's your prob?"

"I'm running the risk of becoming a god, and I'd kinda like to get some input into how to nip it in the bud, you know?"

She stopped and stared at him for a very long moment, long enough that he began to get more than a little nervous. "Do you have any idea just how remarkable you are, Harry Potter?" she finally breathed. "I have never before met a mortal with the possibility of becoming a deity there within his hands who didn't want the power that comes with it. You stand there and ask me how to go about avoiding it."

"I don't need the responsibility, you know?" he shrugged. "I've taught students, I've run a government, and I've fathered enough children for several Quidditch teams. The first was gratifying to see them learn, the second was a pain to set things right, but the third was the whole purpose for living. Right there, bundled in my arms, was living proof of the feelings I have for the mother. Our love made manifest. What do I need with power? Will it make my sons and daughters love me more? Will it make my wives happier? From what they tell me, that's not possible. So what do I need with godhood? That will simply yank me away from my loved ones."

She smiled at him. "No, it won't, Lord Potter. Your godhood has already begun. We knew this was coming the day that you arrived with Riddle. Remember, time is fluid here, so we had rumblings of the Church of Harry Potter even while you were here. It was easy to keep you from hearing about it, or else you might never have gone back." She grinned at the last comment. "I'm pleased to meet one of my new adversaries. Remember, I'm evil."

"Not in my book," he said seriously. "You were the first to show me kindness and caring. You also admitted that the job you've got is rehabilitation."

"Curses!" she laughed. "You and your excellent memory! Sure I can't seduce you into forgetting?" she asked, wiggling enticingly in front of him.

He blinked. "Tempting, I admit. Get my wives to agree without coercing them, and I just might let you do the seduction part."

She blinked. "You're serious, aren't you? If I ask your wives, and they agree, you'd ... you'd actually contemplate ..." She stopped speaking and walking, stunned by his words.

"Why not? You're a beautiful woman, and I mean that as by what I'd refer to as a soul - I don't know what it is in the deific realm." He paused. "Deific? Is that even a word?" He shook his head. "Doesn't hurt that you're dead sexy as well. Don't be surprised if one or two of my wives seem to hover near you when you're at the house. By the way. Pending their ratification of it, you have permission to visit whenever you want to."

She blinked at him for a moment more, and then shook her head. "We'll talk later. As for now, I have something I'd like to show you." They walked for a short distance, and Harry suddenly recognised a certain area. It was looking rather park-like now, and quite beautiful. He was surprised to see two rather overweight men working laboriously in the area.

"Vernon Dursley," she called, and the elder of the two stood and walked closer. He stopped for a moment and then walked closer to them.

"Harry," he said simply. This in itself surprised the man spoken to, for there was no malice in the voice. It was a simple statement of his name, but there were so many undercurrents, sorrow being most obvious. "I'd offer to shake your hand, but I'd get you filthy, and I doubt I'd appreciate the touch from me anyway."

Harry looked long and hard at his uncle for a moment, judging the sincerity of the man. "I'd ask

what happened, but that would be cruel," Harry said. "When did the ... how ..."

"When did I stop being such a thundering asshole about you and finally get a grip on myself?" Harry winced slightly, but nodded. "When I'd been working this park of yours for who knows how long. I sleep in the same conditions as you did under my ... ahem ... 'care', eat the same portions, and experience the same back-breaking conditions we set on you. One day I woke up and realised that I deserved to be here. Not for the beauty, but for the intense work required to keep it this beautiful. Just wish I'd come to that realisation while I was alive - I'd have at least tried to turn Pet and Dudley around. Instead, Dudley works over there - we're punished if we get too close to each other for too long - and he whines incessantly about the hard work." He sighed. "If I'd made him actually work, he wouldn't have died in his early forties of extreme obesity related heart disease."

Satan whispered in Harry's ear, "Mind you, since he's come to the realisation, he no longer needs to be here, but he refuses to leave until he feels he's paid back his debt to you, and everyone else he's wronged."

"No need to whisper," Vernon said. "I know you've said that I've paid, but I haven't yet. When I think I've finally paid, I'll let you know. I've still got a few years to pay off, you know. Didn't come to that mindset until recently." He smiled a genuine smile at Harry. "Glad you hear you're moving up in the ... well, I was going to say world, but ..."

"I know what you mean, I think."

"Talk is all over the place about your getting promoted," Vernon said. "Part of me feels proud of that, and that's one of the reasons I need to stay here longer. I've got no right to feel proud of you - you're Pet's nephew, and I treated you like something I lay in this park on a regular basis. I have no right to feel proud of you - I wasn't part of what made you what you are today."

Harry looked at his uncle. "Are you proud in a 'What can I get out of this' sort of way, or more of a 'Hey, I know him' sort of way?"

"The second, but I've no right to feel good about even that. You're showing now who deserved to be scraped off whose shoes, and I've no complaints about that. I'll not even call you Harry again, since I haven't earned that right. Maybe someday I will, but until then ..." Vernon paused. "Don't take this wrong, but I don't want to see you around here again. You deserve better than to be in Hell."

"One of my best friends is here," Harry replied, hugging Satan. "She helped me get settled when I first got here."

"Yeah, got you settled where you belong," she said with a cheeky grin. "Upstairs." She looked to Vernon. "You'll understand someday, Mr. Dursley, about your debt to the Universe. Until then," she finished, tipping a non-existent hat. Vernon chuckled and returned to working.

"His debt was paid as soon as he realised that he had a debt to pay, wasn't it?" Harry asked as they

headed to the gates.

"As Hamlet said, 'Give every man what he deserves, and who would escape a whipping?' All have a debt to pay. You have, I have, even Jehovah has. We are all part of Universe, which is a living thing, and we play our part. In my small corner, I hand out some small amount of retribution and large doses of redemption. Vernon isn't yet redeemed until he has redeemed himself in his own eyes. He said he came to the realisation recently? He died when he was sixty-five. You'd been Minister for five years. He had his epiphany two years later. He insists on doing at least sixteen years of hard labour, sleeping in a tiny cupboard, and eating almost nothing. He knows that he's been here for ten years. He's put in eight years, and he insists on another eight."

"Won't that make it eighteen years then?"

"Yes. He insists that he pay in years of conscious knowledge of what he's doing. The first two don't count, in his eyes."

"Has he truly earned his release?"

"Yes."

"Is there a way to intercede on his behalf?"

She grinned. "You'd have to claim your divinity, and he might not appreciate it."

Harry frowned. "All right. Keep me apprised of his doings, though, please. If it starts to get excessive, then I want to know, so that I can come talk to him."

She linked her arm with his and kissed his cheek. "That's why you'll be joining the Pantheon upstairs," she chuckled as they poofed out to his home.

#####

There had been a few moments of curiosity when Harry appeared with Satan, but when they realised that there was no blow-up scheduled between Jesus and Satan (Mary even kissed both cheeks in an 'it's been too long' gesture), they quickly got down to business. A portal was opened to Avalon.

"Sorry for not dropping by this time, folks," Harry apologised.

"S'okay, kiddo," Sirius replied. "Understand you've got other things on your plate at the moment."

"Yeah. Apparently I'm on the fast track for becoming a lesser deity."

Sirius turned to James and said, "Gives a whole new meaning to the term 'GOD-son', doesn't it?" He grinned widely, and the other seven at the table placed their heads in their hands.

"Why do we need him here again?" Merlin asked with a wide smile.

"Admit it, I spice up your afterlife," Sirius mock-whined.

"I'm over here," Lily purred. "Unless there's something you haven't been telling James and I?"

Harry began to laugh. "I have missed you guys. Sorry I haven't visited in a while." He sighed. "We need to get going on this, though. I pretty much can't get out of this deity thing, unfortunately, so..."

"What's so wrong with being a god?" Jesus asked simply, interrupting him.

"I don't belong there! I'm just this git who had a lousy childhood and was lucky enough to end up with all these beautiful women in my life. I've done nothing that makes me deserving of them, and especially nothing that makes me worthy of ascending!"

There was silence around the table, and finally Nymph came over. "Harry, you cast a spell that could have left your soul permanently in Hell. You didn't belong there, but you were willing to go there anyway. You literally died to save our lives, to save the world, and it was only because Jesus and a few others thought you were worthy that we all have sons and daughters by you."

"What else was I going to do, run the risk of letting Tom kill you all while I dithered around?"

James sniffed. With a thick voice he said, "I am so proud of that boy."

Harry simply looked confused. "What?"

Pan smiled at him. "There is just something about you, Harry. Things that should have made you a terror made you into a sweet and gentle man, one that deserves to be a deity."

"Which brings us back to the reason for getting together to talk," Harry finally said. "What do I do about this church?"

Rowena spoke up. "My thought is that you watch them. Maybe go a few times in disguise. If their theology is something you can agree with, then let them be." He started to open his mouth, but she cut him off. "Ignore the divinity aspect. You can't avoid that. I know you don't want it, but you can't get away from it."

"Why are you fighting it so hard?" Godric asked.

Again, Harry moved to speak, but Sirius surprised them by answering. "He'll be immortal. His wives won't be. Simple as that. Right, Harry?"

Tears were in Harry's eyes. "I know that there's life afterwards - you guys prove that - but to know that I'll live until there's no one around who believes in me anymore, when they're in Avalon -"

Jesus laughed. "Harry, you bodily ascend. That's basically what you're doing every time you visit us."

"Are you saying that I've been a god since I woke up thirty years ago?" he yelled.

"Actually, yes," Satan said. "You could say that the moment that You decided to marry these ladies was the moment You actually married them. It was Your decision, after all."

He closed his eyes. "Have I fathered demi-gods or something?"

"No, just damned powerful children," Satan said, eyes twinkling at the unintentional pun. "And Your divinity does explain a few of the interesting children you have, you know. Those children that Ginny and Katie bore that you were sure were Lee Jordan's and Dean Thomas's? The Patils were the fathers. They wished it could happen, you thought it would be wonderful yourself, so it happened." She paused. "It also explains how come you can impregnate Willow. She's a bona fide immortal, you know. A mortal shouldn't be able to get her with child."

He turned to his wives, his heart in his eyes. "How do you feel about this, ladies? A case could be made that you were coerced, since I might have used divine power to make you love me."

Katie walked over and sat on his lap, wiggling until she got the reaction she was after. "I have a sweet and loving husband, who I wanted to trap in the Gryffindor locker rooms before any of this happened." She grinned. "I've always said that your lovemaking was heavenly." She kissed him gently and sweetly.

#####

It was a few hours later when the group broke up, and it devolved into a pool party. Harry sat at the edge of the pool in a lounge chair, watching as Satan floated by in a bikini that was obviously using divine power to cover her salient points, since he could see no other explanation for how it kept her covered. Jesus sat on the surface of the pool in a pair of bathing trunks in the shade of blue that Harry had come to associate with him, floating gently alongside her as they talked.

"I will take some time getting used to having my entire theological and cosmological worldview changed," Hermione said softly next to him. "I was always taught the Satan was a) male and b) His mortal enemy. Well, *im-* mortal enemy. Instead, I watch them floating next to each other in our swimming pool, carrying on a friendly conversation." She bit her lower lip. "I think I'm going to need you guys later. I would really like to be in that pool doing interesting things to her, if He weren't there."

"When Jesus eventually leaves, feel free to ask her. I don't deny that I wouldn't kick her out of the bed if I found her next to me in the morning."

"Have you ever ..."

"Nope. Never had the chance before coming back, and ever since marrying you ladies, you'll note that I've never added anyone myself? The invites always come from you ladies."

She thought for a moment. "You're right. You've never, in thirty years, asked to add someone to

the family. The way you phrased it, though - when you were dead - I seem to recall comments about Rowena Ravenclaw?"

"When I was waiting around to come back, yes. There were a few women. Rowena, Mum, Willow, Helga, a couple of the other nymphs used to cuddle with me ..."

She blinked. "Wait. Did you just list your mother in that group?"

"We were dead. It wasn't like I was going to get her pregnant." He bit his lower lip. "You still respect me, don't you?"

She laughed. "I love you more than words will ever be able to state, my darling Harry," she said as she climbed into his chair to cuddle with him. "If you were happy, and she was happy, and your father didn't mind -"

"Mind? We double-teamed her a few times," he said softly, and chuckled as he watched her nipples stiffen under her barely-there bikini bra.

"We have got to visit them at some point," she breathed in his ear. "That has been a fantasy of mine since I started Hogwarts." At his puzzled look, she said, "I turned twelve nineteen days into my first year. These breasts you enjoy so much were already starting to bulge under my shirts. I had my first orgasm the May before I started Hogwarts." She gave him a half-lidded look that smouldered with pure, raw sexual desire. "Do you have any idea what it was like watching you at the school, wanting to ride you on your broom? Yes, I said that properly. I love you Harry, and even though Ron intrigued me for a while, it's always been you."

"We'll have to visit Hogwarts some summer," he said in a husky voice. "But right now, it would be rude to start this in front of Jesus."

"Feel free," Jesus said. "I need to be heading back - no, you didn't chase me off - so you can get back to your favourite past-time." He laughed. "Remember what The Book says: 'Be fruitful and multiply'." With a jaunty wave, Jesus disappeared, and Satan climbed from the pool.

"Pity," Harry said conversationally. "I think a few of my wives wanted to peel you out of that bikini and have their way with you. This little sexpot being one of them."

"How about you?" Satan asked.

"I like the idea, but I'm not losing a wife over it."

"You wouldn't," Ginny said. "We've been talking throughout the day. You two are obviously friends, and the sexual tension between you - well, we haven't let it hit that level without an orgy taking place. We know you after thirty years, Harry. If you want to invite her, go right ahead."

#####

"Why do you all accept me?" Satan asked the next morning at breakfast. She was surprised by her

treatment last night, as well as being a bit tired for the same reason. "Not complaining, mind you - just curious."

"Harry considers you worth knowing. That's enough for me," Katie said, coming up from behind her and kissing her cheek as a good morning greeting.

"I think you'll find that it's the same for all of us," Parvati said from down the table. "Harry vouched for you, so that was a major point in your favour."

"Didn't do anything to make us think otherwise either," Ginny said. "You held yourself in check around us until you were informed that fondling was acceptable, and even then, you only did it when those you knew might be bothered by it weren't around."

"Basically, we're giving you a trial membership in the family," Hermione said. "If nothing else, he'll finally be able to do to you what I think he's wanted to for forty years, his time."

Satan raised her eyebrows and looked at Harry, who was now the colour of Ginny's hair. "Your form is female and shapely. I'm male and heterosexual. You do the math."

She snorted at him. "Yeah, right. You're too caring and wonderful for the zipless fuck. If you've wanted me for that long, then you think I'm worth it, and I'm honoured."

"And horny," snorted Ginny, "if visual evidence is correct."

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There was never an official wedding, but she was considered a part of the family from that point on.

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There was much more that happened to him and his family, but what do you expect in the life of a deity? But those are stories for another day.