

## The End Of All Things

The group walked slowly through the halls of the dank and dark prison of Azkaban. They did not wish to be there – the only ones who wanted to be there less were the prisoners – but they were on a mission to retrieve one specific prisoner.

They came to a stop outside the door of the man they were after. Albus Dumbledore, looking all of his one-hundred-sixty-odd years, stepped to the window and looked in at him. He was pale, dirty, and even more scrawny than Albus could remember when the child had been at Hogwarts.

“Harry James Potter,” he began.

“Guilty,” Harry replied. “Any other charges you want to trump against me?”

Cornelius Fudge surged forward. “You murdered that girl in cold blood, and you actually have the nerve to complain that we trumped up charges against you□”

“Considering the only two witnesses are a Death Eater and the only child of Voldemort’s right hand man, who constantly taunted us with references that the Dark Lord was going to make us pay? Hell yeah!”

“Lucius Malfoy is no more a Death Eater than I am!” Fudge said, which made Dumbledore wince. “You’re just trying to sow dissent for your master!”

“And you’re just trying to prove to the world how mind-shatteringly stupid you are. So why is the group of you here? I say group because I know that there are Aurors just out of sight – I’d imagine your lapdog Dawlish is twitching to get a shot off at me for insulting you.”

Dumbledore sighed. “We need your help to end the menace of Voldemort. We -” He stopped speaking because Harry had begun to laugh uproariously.

“You’re kidding me, right? You threw me in here saying that I’d murder my own girlfriend and let the press call me a Death-Eater-in-training, and you expect me to come rolling out to help you?”

“This is the same man who murdered your parents, Harry,” Dumbledore replied.

“Yup, and the one whose followers murdered Sirius and Cedric, yet somehow you thought a while back that I could be working for them.”

“I never thought that, Harry,” Dumbledore said kindly.

“No, you just trusted two people who hate me with a burning passion over my own word. You actually think that I’d have murdered Hermione. I’m quite certain that you think it to this day.”

“Professor Snape has always been trustworthy with me, Harry,” Dumbledore replied. “He never gave me any reason to doubt his word before.”

“Except during Occlumency lessons,” Harry murmured. “Snape used it as a chance to mind rape me. Between a choice of helping against Voldemort or getting revenge on my father, he will always choose to get revenge on my *dead* father.”

Albus simply shook his head. “Your dislike of Severus is neither here nor there. We need your help. Will you help us?”

Harry looked at them for a long moment. “Can I get an agreement from you for something if I help you?”

“It depends,” Albus said. “What is your request?”

“If I agree to help you, and successfully destroy Voldemort, I want you to hit me with the Killing Curse after. That will make everyone happy – the ones who think I’d have murdered my best friend will believe that I’ve gotten what I deserve, and you, who worked so hard to turn me into a Dark Lord, will know that I won’t rise to try to fill Tom’s shoes. Everyone gets what they want.”

“The Killing Curse destroys your soul, Harry. Are you sure you want that?” Albus asked.

“I think it’s perfect!” Fudge said. “No soul to make a comeback with! I’ll agree to it!”

“Willing to swear an Oath to do it?” Harry asked with a smile. “I know you well enough to know that you’ll try to use me politically if I win.”

“I ask you again, Harry,” Albus interjected before Fudge could say anything, “The Killing Curse destroys your soul, from what we know. Is this truly what you wish?”

“Everyone that I want to see in the afterlife won’t be there, Dumbledore,” Harry said. “Mum and Dad, Hermione – heck, even Cedric won’t be there. Sirius will miss me, but he’s missing Mum and Dad too. It’s not like I really knew him, either. So yes, I ask that full well aware of the fact that I am

agreeing to the utter destruction of my own soul. Given my life, I don't want to run the risk of reincarnation, where the gods can put me back into another life that's even crappier than this one was."

"I'll swear your oath, Potter," Fudge crowed, and a moment later, a silver flare sealed the deal. "Once you defeat You Know Who, you'll go down with him."

Albus simply shook his head sadly. Where had he gone so wrong with the boy?

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Harry was back at Hogwarts, awaiting the day that they were going to attempt to unleash him on Voldemort. He knew that the war had gone badly for the side that Dumbledore led, and Harry felt badly for those who had paid for Dumbledore's hubris.

He knew how he would defeat the bane of his existence – he had figured that out after a single year into his imprisonment. Voldemort would find himself surprised when the battle came.

Dumbledore arrived to speak with him, and several of the teachers were with him. Harry laughed when he saw two of them. "And thus is your completely failure to win against Voldemort laid bare," he said. "With advisors like Snape and Malfoy, how could you win?"

"As arrogant as ever, Potter," Snape drawled. "Apparently not even six years in prison could get rid of that."

"Is it really arrogance if I *am* better than you, Snivelly?" he asked brightly, knowing it would annoy the Potions Master to an incredible degree.

"Same as you ever were, Potty," Draco Malfoy sneered. "Too much talk, not enough action."

"I'm still trying to figure your part in this out. You always crowed to Ron, Hermione and me that your Duck Lord would show us all, the same way you always whimpered that Daddy would solve all your problems. If you've turned against Voldie, then you're on his hit list. Or, you're just a plant within the Order forces. Considering the fact that you're the one who murdered Hermione, I think the latter."

"Harry, we have been through this before," Albus said. "Severus saw you kill her and try to blame Mr Malfoy."

"And someday you will know the truth, Dumbledore," Harry said. "And it's already too late to even begin to make up for it. Remember the deal? Fudge has to AK me when Voldemort's gone for good. I'm betting that a lot of interesting information will come out during that battle, Albie, and you'll be horrified by it."

"All we need from you is for you to kill Riddle," McGonagall said sharply. "We don't need you attempting to split our forces through in-fighting."

"I want to see your face before I die, you old bat," Harry sneered at her. "After the truth comes out, I want to watch you try to apologise to me for everything you've said about me since Malfoy there murdered your favourite student. When you get proof that you've worked next to her murderer for the last several years while hating the man who was going to ask her to marry him – well, I hope to live long enough to watch you AK yourself in shame, you sorry excuse for a human being."

He was hit with an overpowered Stinging Hex from Filius Flitwick, and turned to face the diminutive professor. "Bite me, shorty," he said. "You're no better than any of the others. 'We can trust Severus. That mark on his arm means nothing. The fact that he's the one who is directly responsible for the deaths of James and Lily Potter means nothing.' You're all just sheep."

"And now you blame Severus for the deaths of your parents?" McGonagall asked in shock. "You're insane. Azkaban has unhinged you."

"Ask the Headmaster, Minnie," Harry said with a nasty laugh. "Better yet, let me tell you, and then you can ask the old fart whether or not I lied. There was a prophecy – the one that led to Dumbles demanding that I be left alive rather than Kissed – that a spy for Voldemort heard part of and ran to tell his master. Ask him who the spy was. Or, demand an Oath at the cost of his magic and see if he'll deny that it was Snape. That prophecy part that he heard was directly responsible for the attacks on my parents and on the Longbottoms."

"Is this true?" Flitwick asked of Dumbledore. "Was Snape the one who heard something that lead to James and Lily dying?"

"It is true that Severus overheard it and told Voldemort, but when he heard of the plans, he defected and came to me."

"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 ...' – That's what Snape heard before someone chased him away from the door he was listening at, and why A fraud like Trelawney works here – to keep her out of Voldie's clutches. To hell with the students – gotta keep the intelligence safe." He shook his head. "What Snivellus didn't hear was '... 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 ...' That's the rest of the prophecy." He grinned. "Nice thing is, I've figured out what it means."

"Explain," Snape demanded.

"No."

"Legilimens!" he yelled, pointing his wand at Harry. Harry simply grinned at him, stepped forward and lifted his knee into the Potions professor's crotch.

"I said no," he said conversationally. "I will not say what my solution is where a spy such as Snape or Malfoy or even Minerva McGonagall might pass it along to Voldemort."

How dare you!" McGonagall yelled.

"Can it, kitty, or no more catnip," was Harry's response to her. "Every last one of you has earned my hatred for one reason or another – Snively and Malfoy for reasons that they know all too well – and the rest of you for not bothering to ever think for yourselves, instead allowing Dumbledore to think for you. The truth will come out some day, and it will be too late for any of you to apologise for your uncaring and unthinking attitudes."

"The day I apologise to you, Potter, is the day I move into my cat form forever," she sniffed.

Harry snorted. "You wouldn't apologise anyway. You never do. You've been wrong multiple times in my short time here at Hogwarts, when you were told things – by me, even – that proved to be wrong, and nothing was ever said."

"Name one," she responded, crossing her arms over her chest.

"Professor, someone is trying to steal the Philosopher's Stone!" "Nonsense, it is completely safe." Hmm, Quirrell was carrying Voldie on the back of his head, and tried for the Stone. I knew what I was talking about, and I'm certain that you heard about what happened. No apologies, but then again, a teacher never admits to being wrong to a student. Which likely explains the whole 'Umbridge is a teacher and has a right to give detentions' thing that led to permanent scars in the back of my hand." He held up his right hand. "Was she also right to attempt to overdose me with Veritaserum and also threaten the Cruciatus? Don't answer that – it might make you need to think about kitty kibble more seriously." He turned his back on the group. "Now, if you don't mind, I think that you're not going to really get any of what you really wanted here, so you might as well leave. And Malfoy, if you think about shooting me in the back, the way I know you Slytherins like to, be aware that I *will* take the time to kill you after I'm done with Voldemort if you do it."

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They attempted several more times to speak with him, but quickly learned that all they could expect were insults. "Has anyone even thought about how I'm going to end up fighting ol' Twinkle Toes?" he finally asked one day. He chuckled to himself as he read the lips of Flitwick and Sinistra, both of whom looked puzzled as they repeated, "Twinkle Toes?"

"We are awaiting word of his next assault," Dumbledore said.

He shook his head. Closing his eyes, he sought out the link to his tormentor. *Yo, Tom!*

*Potter! You seem remarkably sane for someone who has spent six years in Azkaban.*

*Clean living. Tell ya what – I think we're both sick of this shit between us, so howabout we meet once and for all, and fight to the death?*

*Where would you suggest?*

*Well, I'm currently imprisoned in Hogwarts, but the wards here don't tend to like you unless you're in wraith or book form. Howabout going into Diagon Alley and demanding I be brought to you?*

*Hmm, yes. It's been a while since I enjoyed indiscriminate killing of the worthless ones.*

*You might want to keep the mayhem to a minimum, though – too many people dead and they likely won't bring me.*

*True. Even as a prisoner, you're their golden boy.*

*Oy. What is it with that phrase? You and Snape both.*

*How is the grumpy one?*

*As surly as ever. With a name likely his, would you expect anything else?* He was rewarded with laughter through the link.

*I look forward to seeing you one last time. I promise to make your death a quick one.*

*I appreciate that. When's good for you?*

*How does Saturday sound? About noon?*

*We sound like we're setting up for tea, rather than a fight to the death. Works for me, though.*

*Civility goes a long way in a situation such as this. You've proven to be an interesting opponent, Potter, and I'm almost sorry to know that you'll be dying on Saturday. You'll be remembered as a worthy foe.*

*Again, I appreciate that. Don't count your basilisks before they're hatched though – I'm not going to make this easy on you.*

*I can't promise you as quick a death, in that case.*

*I can ... heh ... 'live' with that.*

*Droll, very droll. Very well, Saturday at noon.*

*Don't be surprised if I'm already there. They'll likely ask what I was doing, and I'll likely tell them what I've set up. We'll see what happens from*

there.

Harry opened his eyes to find the group still there. "What were you doing, Harry?" Dumbledore asked quietly.

"Setting up the last battle with him. Diagon Alley at noon this Saturday. He's actually rather looking forward to it. Get me there before noon and we can likely keep the death toll down. Otherwise, he'll come in, start killing, and then demand I be brought to the Alley to face him."

"You're in contact with him on a regular basis?" McGonagall asked incredulously.

"No, but I knew that the link was there, and had learned that Occlumency was bugger-all for blocking it. So I used it, rather than let you people dither around and let more people die."

"I cannot believe your arrogance!" McGonagall said.

"There's a lot you can't believe about me, kitty. Mostly because you can't be bothered to think." That rejoinder left her apoplectic, and she was pulled from the room sputtering.

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Saturday bright and clear, and Harry dressed in what they gave him, and then wandlessly changed them into true finery. "How did you do that?" McGonagall asked angrily. "Your wand was snapped."

Harry simply looked at her as if to say, "The answer is right there, woman," and continued to eat the breakfast that the elves laid out before him.

"I thought I should look my best for my final day amongst the living," he said brightly. "I'll be rather surprised if Tom even gets off a shot at me, so I'm not exactly expecting to get dirty."

"Is there no way to talk you out of this, Harry?" Dumbledore asked. "We can manage a pardon for you once you defeat Tom."

"Pardoned for a crime I never committed. Pardoned for a crime that I was apparently tried in absentia for. I'd tell you what I think of your pardon idea, but the late Miss Granger would be disappointed with me, and even though her soul no longer exists, I will not dishonour her memory. So let's get me to Diagon Alley, we can wait for Tom to arrive, I can kill him, and then we can get Fudge on the scene to fulfil his part of the bargain."

Dumbledore shook his head sadly and created a Portkey to Diagon Alley.

Harry was surprised once they arrived. He was tackled by someone small and quite curvy. "Harry! You're free!" the female said, and he suddenly knew that it was Ginny.

"No, they still think I murdered Hermione, but they finally realised that I was the only one able to kill the little shit, so they sprung me. Dumbledore promised me a pardon if I defeat Riddle."

Ginny Weasley turned on Dumbledore and asked, "You still believe that greasy arsehole and the blond arsewipe? Anyone with intelligence knows that Harry wouldn't have murdered his own girlfriend."

"Severus –"

"Would lie if he thought he could get revenge on James," Remus Lupin said from a distance away. "I told you that then, and I tell you that now. Someday you'll find out who really killed Hermione and wish you could take back all you said."

"Won't matter," Harry said. "I don't want to go back to prison or be a poster boy, so I agreed to do the deed on the proviso that Fudge casts the Killing Curse at me after I've defeated Riddle. That way Dumbledore has no worries about me rising as a Dark Lord – and you know his continual musing about whether or not it would happen would end up getting twisted into me being one – and his only rival in power will also be gone. Then he can rule the wizarding world as he has been, from behind the scenes."

"You're ... you're going to let them ... you –" was all that Ginny could say.

"I love your family, but ... Hermione was going to be my life. I was going to marry her after Hogwarts, whether or not Riddle was dead. Then Malfoy murders her and gets Snivellus to swear that it was me – I heard her scream and turned the corner in time to see the green glow fading – and I'm thrown in Azkaban. Conventional wisdom states that the soul is annihilated when a person is hit with the Killing Curse, so the three people I want most to see in the universe are no longer available. Why bother anymore? If I survive, Malfoy will simply keep an eye on me and ruin or murder other women that I might become friendly with, and get Snivelly to swear to his innocence. I'm tired of it all, and I just ... I wouldn't put it past the gods to screw with me as well and throw me into another life, equally as crappy as this one. So I don't want to exist after my purpose for being born is finished."

Remus and Ginny hugged him tightly. "I understand, Cub," Remus said thickly. "It's sad that Dumbledore drove you to this."

Albus Dumbledore winced at the statement but wisely said nothing.

Ginny was about to say something, but a series of Apparations happened further down the Alley. "Oh damn," Harry said. "I was hoping to get one last sundae from Fortescue's." He snapped his fingers. "Ah, I need to see the goblins before Fudge whacks me. I need to make sure that my will is changed."

He walked a little ways down the Alley and yelled, "Voldemort! I'm over here!" while he waved his hand to let those who had just arrived know his location. One of the robed individuals bowed slightly and walked toward him in a stately manner.

"You were right, Potter. They did bring you early."

"I figured that they would. Look, it's eleven-forty-five and we agreed on twelve. How about we step into Gringott's and let me make a last minute change to my will, okay? The last one I had stated that everything went to Hermione Granger, but being framed for her murder was why I was in Azkaban."

"Hmm, yes. The goblins love their neutrality, so they won't interfere with you or me."

"I'd ask you to witness the thing, but who knows what kind of harassment that the Ministry will give if they find your signature on it."

"You've quite a droll sense of humour, Potter. You know that I'll be in charge after our fight."

"Humour me," Harry said with a laugh. "How about I have you as an *extra* witness? I can use Remus Lupin and Ginny Weasley as witnesses, and you can sign after them. All nice and clear, and everyone's happy."

Voldemort laughed. "Why not humour you in your last minutes? Let us away."

As they walked down the Alley, Harry's right hand moved oddly, and several people in the Alley recognised the Quidditch signals he was sending. For some reason, he was sending "Trust me."

"May I ask you a question about Hermione's murder?" Harry asked as they walked.

"You're quite able to talk about it, I note," Voldemort said.

"Well, six years is enough time to get the grieving out of the system. Her loss still hurts, but it's not the blinding pain that it once was. Anyway – was that a plan of yours, or did Malfoy do that on his own?"

"Oh that was Draco's own plan, but I will say that I was pleased with the results. Leaving you in Azkaban gave me free reign to do what I wished, and with you being seen as a murderer, even if you escaped, no one would help you."

"Where did Snivellus ... sorry, Severus Snape come into this, then?"

"Oh, that was the moment that I knew that I could leave the man alive, no matter what. I knew that he was a spy for Dumbledore, but the moment that he lied to Dumbledore about your involvement with the mudblood's murder -"

"Tom, enough. Pot and kettle territory, you know."

"I will allow that one reference to my old name, but do not do it again. I will not stand for it. If I choose to refer to the girl as a mudblood, then I will."

"Just remember that you were the one who threw civility out the window, then," Harry replied evenly. "I've not insulted you yet, and yet you insult the woman who would have been my wife."

"Point taken. But that is the last that I shall allow your back talk. As I was saying, however, I knew that you would not have killed the girl. I would have felt that level of anger through the link we share. And Draco does not realise that I could feel him through the Dark Mark he wears on his arm. So I knew of his plans, and when I heard that Severus gave him an alibi, thereby condemning an innocent to Azkaban, I knew that Severus was to be trusted as far as I would ever need him. A man who holds his own self-interest higher than the greater good that his supposed master espouses can easily be used by me. And since he already wore my mark, it was even easier."

"Thank you, sir," Harry replied. "I had wondered about that. Were it not for the duel, I'd ask to kill Malfoy first as a warm-up. But that would hardly be a warm-up. The blond ponce isn't good enough to even make me break a sweat."

Voldemort laughed once more as they reached the doors to the goblin bank. "The vain little child does think rather highly of himself, does he not?"

In surprisingly short order, Harry, Voldemort, Remus Lupin and Ginny Weasley were seated in front of Ragnoc. "I felt it best that I be in charge of this conversation," the goblin said.

"Thank you for taking such time from your busy schedule," Harry said. "May it profit us all."

Ragnoc smiled. "A pleasure to work with you," he said. "How may I help you?"

"While I hesitate to get one of your stature involved with a simple change to my will, I guess that is the case today. I need to change it from all moneys going to Hermione Granger to having the moneys split evenly amongst Remus Lupin and all the surviving Weasleys except Percy." He thought for a moment. "I'd add you and the goblin that first served me when I was eleven, but that could be seen as a conflict of interest for you. Perhaps my wishes will be listened to by some of those receiving?" he asked, looking at Remus and Ginny, both of whom were fighting tears.

"This seems rather sudden," Ragnoc said. "You seem to be certain that your death is imminent."

"Well, assuming I actually survive the fight with the man seated to my left, the Ministry will be executing me shortly thereafter. It was part of my requirement for agreeing to fight their battles for them."

Ragnoc scowled but snapped his fingers, and a goblin appeared with two copies of the will that Harry requested, nicely rephrased into legalese. He quickly signed it and slid it to Ginny and Remus, and then to Voldemort. Ragnoc cleared his throat. "I do not mean to insult, sir, but for your signature

to be considered a valid one for the document, you must sign with your birth name. Lord Voldemort may precede or trail it, but your birth name must be there.”

Voldemort stared at the goblin for a long moment before dipping the quill and writing a rather long spidery scratch that read ‘Lord Voldemort, once known as Tom Marvolo Riddle’ on both documents. Ragnoc nodded. “Excellent. Your will is now legal, and in effect on the date of your death.” He met Harry’s eyes. “I think that we shall need to have a conversation with the Ministry, should you win in combat against Lord Voldemort.” He turned to Voldemort. “No offense meant. Just covering the hoops, as you wizards say.” Ragnoc earned a small smile from the dark lord for that comment.

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It was actually twelve-fifteen when they exited the bank. “Looks like quite a crowd has come out,” Harry said. “Shall we choose an area and begin?”

“There is that rather large space that can easily be cleared,” Voldemort said loudly, and soon the section in question was devoid of any life whatsoever. “My word is law,” he said to Harry.

“More like they’re terrified of getting on your bad side,” Harry responded with a small chuckle.

Once they were in the area, Voldemort looked to Harry. “There appears to be a problem,” he said mockingly. “Your wand no longer exists.”

Harry waved his right hand and a shimmering wall appeared, surrounding them. “Do you really think I’d have asked for this fight if I didn’t have the contingency covered? Who do you think I am? Dumbledore or Snivellus?”

“Ah, so you’ve mastered wandless magics, Voldemort said. “Excellent, but not enough to save you.” He pulled his own wand and pointed it at Harry. “*Avada Kedavra!*” The crowd gasped at the sound of the spell being cast.

They gasped again when nothing happened.

“Looks like you forgot something, Tom,” Harry said brightly. “A lot of stuff can pass down the link between us – conversations, knowledge, and even power. I’ve been siphoning your power since I learned I could do it. Slowly but surely, I’ve been draining you. Didn’t you wonder why the conversation was so clear between us when I set up today’s duel? I had that link wide open. You’re a Muggle now, Tom. Well, you have the power of a Muggle. And I have your power.” He grinned. “Say goodbye, Tom. *Expelliarmus!*”

With that spell, Tom Riddle – also known as Voldemort and You Know Who – simply disappeared, while a fine red spray pelted heavily upon the barrier. His wand, on the other hand, flew with a loud crack toward Harry, who managed to catch the thing as it tried to speed past. Gold sparks exploded from the end of the thing. “Nice,” he said.

He dropped the shield and the spray – which had coalesced into a reddish goo – fell to the ground with a wet splat. “Well, Dumbles, it’s time to get Fudge and get this show over with.” He held out Riddle’s wand and snapped it in two.

“Harry, I -” Dumbledore began.

“Hmm, what could you possibly say? Perhaps that you heard Riddle say that he knew that it was Draco all along? Now you suddenly admit that I was innocent, because Voldemort said it? Pity that you accepted the word of a violent criminal over the word of someone you’d been grooming for this battle for years. ‘I didn’t do it!’ ‘Severus wouldn’t lie.’ ‘Oh yes, I knew that Severus lied to Dumbledore.’ You supposedly knew what Hermione meant to me, yet you could believe that I could murder her easier than you could believe that someone who hated me and my father would lie to get revenge. The first time that you trusted him, he mind raped me. The second time, he got me sent to Azkaban. I refuse to stick around for a third.”

“He lied!” an ashen faced Malfoy cried out. “You Know Who lied! I had nothing to do with Granger’s murder!”

Harry motioned and yanked him closer, stopping his flight with his fist. While the blond stood dazed, He yanked up the left sleeve and displayed the still visible Dark Mark. “I understand that it took a few days to fade the first time. Might want to make the Wizengamot roll up their sleeves at the next meeting,” Harry said. “Not my problem, though. Fudge needs to show up and fulfil his part of our bargain.” He motioned at Draco. “But as you can see, he was probably hoping all along that Riddle would kill me, and then he could be lauded as the legend that he believes himself to be.”

He spun on Severus Snape and snapped an anti-Apparation ward onto his clothing. “How about you, Snivellus? Willing to admit your part in this travesty of justice?”

“You deserved it. If your father couldn’t pay for his part in my near-death incident, then you should pay for him. So what if I lied to keep Draco out of prison? That was the first effective thing the little waste of space ever did, killing that mudblood.”

“So you admit to falsely giving Draco Malfoy an alibi, just to ensure that I’d go to prison, since you knew that Dumbledore was stupid enough to trust you implicitly?”

“Exactly,” smirked Snape. “No matter what, I get the happy thought of knowing that I will outlive you, and that your soul will be destroyed in a short time.”

Harry grinned. “Yes, and you get the joy of spending the rest of your days in prison, Snape. You’ll outlive me, but I’m betting that you won’t enjoy it, especially when they get the dementors back on the job. Your happy memory of outliving me will be gone as if it never existed.”

Before Snape – who was looking at Harry in horror now – could respond, Fudge finally came blustering into the Alley, flanked by more Aurors than Harry had ever seen at one time. “Out of the way! We have a job to complete!” he exclaimed with all the pomposity that he could muster.

He breezed up to Harry. “I understand that you have fulfilled your half of the bargain,” he said. “Now, before you have a chance to change your mind

and threaten us as an ascendant Dark Lord -" Before anyone could react, the Minister's wand had risen and he had called out "*Avada Kedavra!*"

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"Minister, you may well be the stupidest man I have ever met in my life," Remus Lupin said just before backing away from him, fury barely contained.

Ginny didn't bother containing it. Her fist crashed into the man's nose just a few seconds before her knee impacted with his crotch. The sound he released was not audible by normal humans, although Remus winced for just a moment. When he was finally able to speak, it seemed that his only word was something sounding like "Peep!"

"Cornelius, you are a fool," Dumbledore said. "But you are not the only one. Aurors, if you would kindly arrest both Severus Snape and Draco Malfoy so that they may be charged with the murder of Hermione Granger, I would greatly appreciate it." They moved to comply fairly quickly. "Yes, Cornelius. We have all heard it, from Voldemort before Harry killed him, and then from Severus Snape himself. Draco Malfoy committed the murder while Severus gave him an alibi that I helped to make unimpeachable, to my shame."

"But that means that I just -" gasped the Minister for Magic, still trying to catch his breath after Ginny's assault.

"The thing that is most important to *you* is that you have destroyed your political career," Dumbledore said with a morose tone. "The *truly* important thing is that you have murdered an innocent man, and only the fact that it was at his request keeps you from the Dementors."

"But I was following the oath he made me swear!" Fudge simpered. "He demanded the oath!"

"Because you broke him by refusing him a real trial!" Ginny yelled. "You and Umbitch and Dumbledore all knew he was guilty, so you railroaded him into prison for murdering the girl he was going to marry! Anyone who actually knew him – like the majority of the school population – knew he'd never do that!" She turned to Dumbledore. "Didn't you wonder why none of the recent graduates wanted anything to do with Hogwarts anymore? You proved that you only saw Death Eaters as proper school teachers!"

"That is why I will be retiring from the school as soon as I can return to the office and draft my resignation," he replied. "I have done too much to people. I shall also resign my position on the Wizengamot, effective immediately."

"No," Remus said. "You need to ensure that Severus does not get sentenced to the Dementor's Kiss. That would be escaping his punishment."

Albus Dumbledore looked at Severus Snape for a long moment. "Yes. I agree. To leave the world in such a manner does not begin to properly pay for the pain and heartache that he has caused."

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It was that incident that led to a change in the wizarding world, the Weasleys at the forefront of it. Ginny was quickly made the new Minister for Magic, simply because she had been so open about her support of Harry over the years. She used the people's tendency to vote for a popular candidate to get into the office, and then proved that she had good ideas. She destroyed the bigoted laws that kept people like Remus from holding down jobs and then immediately hired the man as her advisor. There was a rapid clearing of the Ministry of those who had the Mark, since it was discovered that it did not completely disappear this time – it remained a soft grey tattoo. She began a change in fashion by beginning to wear sleeveless robes to work, tailored to fit her quite well. The fact that she was a stunningly attractive woman with a figure that the new robe style accentuated helped make this a fashion that quickly took hold. Several males in the upper management took the hint and changed their own robes to bare their own arms. It was soon suspicious to walk around in warm weather with fully covered arms.

Dumbledore did as he swore, retiring from Hogwarts as soon as he returned to the school, explaining to the students his reasoning. He was followed soon after by a broken Minerva McGonagall, who could not forgive herself her part in ruining Harry's life. She died less than a year later of no known cause, but it was assumed that it was a broken heart. Dumbledore held on for several more years, making it to two hundred years old, an advocate for fair trials and full disclosure. He spent the remainder of his fortune on the Harry Potter Foundation for Justice, spending the balance of his life ensuring that what happened to his student would never happen to anyone ever again.

Hogwarts was quickly given Filius Flitwick as a Headmaster, but it was a far less cheerful man than had previously taught Charms. It was quickly decided that Two of Harry's classmates would take on the roles of Headmaster and Deputy Headmistress, and they did a marvellous job, finally returning the school to the pinnacle of education that it once had been. The fact that the Headmaster was a known scamp from Harry's day was considered unusual, but when Seamus Finnegan married the Deputy Headmistress, Daphne Greengrass, the death knell was heard for open rivalry between the Houses at the school.

Ron Weasley, who had simply left the country in grief when Harry had been unfairly railroaded into prison, returned and worked beside his sister to reform the government. To his dying day, he never really understood the Muggles, but fought hard to make them equals in society. "I loved Hermione in my own way," he told an interviewer when he was one hundred and sixty, "and it was something that I know she'd have wanted. So this is her legacy. That's why I wanted my name nowhere on any of those memorials. That's why the name of Hermione Granger will go down in history, and not Ronald Weasley. I was always the sidekick, and I'm happy with that, now that I've grown up."

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"You were wrong, you know," Ron Weasley heard when he sat up after his long nap. "You were just as important as anyone else."

He looked up, his eyes clearer than they had been in decades, and looked into the faces of his two greatest friends, the people he knew he'd never see again. "Harry? Hermione? But doesn't the -"

"The soul is a bit sturdier than people think," Harry said. "You can guess that I was pleased to find my parents and Hermione waiting for me on this side, and I took a little flak for what was basically a suicide, but they understood. Amusingly, it turned out that my death was what allowed the wizarding world to change – they saw the injustices committed in the name of politics and decided that it was time to change things."

"We're here for you, Ron," Hermione said. "We knew that you'd be dying today," - she pointed back at the old body seated in the chair - "and we needed to be here for you. You've mourned us, knowing that you'd never see us again, and did great works in our names, mine especially."

"I did love you, you know," Ron replied, discovering that even the dead can blush.

"I know," she said with a smile, and kissed him softly. "The feeling is mutual."

"But -"

"This is the afterlife, Ron. Things are a little different here than we ever expected. There's no giving or taking in marriage, because there's no need. We've got an eternity to explain it to you, though." He laughed. "And we can tease you about the fact that they'll be renaming the Chudley Cannons soon to be the only Quidditch team named for a person – the Weasley Whips."

He looked stunned at the information. "Why? I was nothing special! I was just the sidekick!"

"You prat," Harry said fondly. "Look at your life and tell me you did nothing important." He ruffled his oldest friend's hair.

Hermione simply hooked arms with Ron and Harry, and they left together on the next great adventure, as it was always meant to be.