

Not Quite the Alleged Inferno

by karelia

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Disclaimer: Not mine.

He had no doubt he'd just arrived straight on the ninth level of hell. *From a horrid life to the worst place of all...* he thought, bitter. His neck hurt like hell, too, but given where he was, it did not surprise him. *Damn snake...* What did astonish him was that *she* was there, her sobs grating on his fragile nerves, inducing the headache from hell.

He knew he'd committed bad deeds, but could he really be compared to the Dark Lord? *Perhaps the eighth level after all,* he thought with a minute glimpse of hope. *Or he's still alive...*

"Mrs Weasley killed Bellatrix Lestrange," he heard her whisper. *Her.* At least she'd stopped with her histrionic sobbing for now.

He thought if Bella was dead, she'd be here. She was nearly as bad as, and probably more demented than, the Dark Lord, but if Voldemort was to be on the ninth level, she'd be on this one.

He carefully reached out with his metaphysical feelers. She wasn't there. *Surely, she committed more bad deeds than I did... Perhaps it is only the seventh level here.*

He was suddenly overcome with acute hope, which he tried to brush away. *Impossible.*

He noticed the pain had faded to a more bearable level, though his headache was reaching torture point. She'd started sobbing again. *Where is her tap so I can turn it off?* he thought and was relieved to feel his sneer working as efficiently as ever, even in death.

A heaven-sent, pleasant male voice interrupted her sobs.

"Yes, yes, Voldemort is gone and won't come back. I hope he's roasting in the depths of hell," she said, her voice carrying impatience.

The Dark Lord gone and not here... A voice who stopped her headache-inducing histrionics... Perhaps only the sixth level...

Now that her sobbing seemed to have finally ended, his headache became more bearable, if only slightly. Maybe she'd moved on to another level. But no...

She's all goody-two-shoes; why would she be here? He moved his hand to scratch his head and found he was unable. Neither his hands nor his feet. Or his head. Suddenly, he felt a hand on his forehead, a calming, warm hand stroking him the way his mother had when he'd been small and innocent and his father not around. *Maybe only the fifth level*, he thought, and hope once more washed over him.

It couldn't be his mother—she was in heaven, not hell, and besides, her touch had felt entirely different from this—and he speculated who it could be.

An angel, of course... Do they exist? he wondered. Then he realised where he was and immediately dismissed the idea of an angel.

His surroundings were blissfully quiet; he only heard a few whispers a distance away. The bite on his neck bothered him far less at last, and even the headache was subsiding.

It must be the fourth level, then... That's not too bad I guess... The hand continued soothing him.

He remembered his doe Patronus. *I was able to cast a Patronus... I wasn't a real Death Eater.* He remembered his more despicable deeds then.

I was a real Death Eater... But at least the only one able to cast a Patronus. He knew he was making excuses.

The owner of the soothing hand started to whisper at him. "You'll be fine. Soon, you'll be fine." The hand stroked his face again, imbuing hope in his black soul.

Perhaps only the third level? The memories of his worse deeds faded, and he relished the feeling of the soft, soft hand.

He noticed that she made an effort to suppress her renewed sobs, but when the comforting hand moved away from his face, he felt an acute sense of loss. His head started to pound again, too.

He heard whispers, now coming closer. "He'll hopefully wake up soon. We've managed to neutralise the venom." The female voice was that of a stranger.

His head pounded insistently, making him nauseous, until finally, he felt the proximity of the same soft, soft hand. A sigh of relief escaped him. "He'll make it; I've no doubt."

Hell? The second level at best, if that.

His bad deeds flew across his mind like a Muggle movie in fast forward mode, only adding to the pounding of his head. He groaned. *Why... Why do I need to remind myself of deeds past...*

He tried to focus his attention on his better deeds; it was difficult. When he felt the hand soothe him further, he started to remember. Saving Potter's life here and there; bringing him the Sword when he needed it; not killing *her* for setting him on fire or for stealing from his store room.

Perhaps only the first level. He drifted off to sleep.

He opened his eyes and looked at *her*. Hair bushy as ever, but her eyes reddened, as if she'd been crying—*she caused that headache from hell?*—and her usual air of a know-it-all was absent.

"Professor," she whispered, her effort to refrain from sobbing evident. "You've survived. I'm so glad."

"Why?" he croaked, and she conjured a goblet filled with water for him.

He was able to move his head now. His hands were shaking, and the goblet was heavy.

She helped hold it. He was surprised to feel the soothing hand against his chin. *Not in hell, then.*

He was back at Hogwarts teaching Potions; the Defence position could go to hell for all he cared. Nagini's bite had healed completely. He'd been awarded an Order of Merlin, First Class. Life was splendid, yet lacking.

It was time to call in a favour. A visit to Draco later, he planned the next day carefully.

When she exited the Ministry at midday Friday, she nearly tripped over him. "Professor Snape!" The smile she bestowed upon him bathed the entire universe in sunshine.

"I thought you might, perhaps, care for some lunch?"

"I'd love nothing more."

I've arrived in Heaven.

A/N: Answer to the GS100 prompt, *Nine levels of hell*. Thanks go to SouthernWitch69 and blue_paris for the beta.