

Death Among Friends: Yule Edition

by silverdoe

Harry receives a letter from his cousin just before the holidays.

~

Chapter 1 of 1

Harry receives a letter from his cousin just before the holidays.

A/N: A companion piece to 'Death Among Friends.' Please read it first.

~*~

The weeks since Marge Dursley's funeral had flown by, and Christmas was steadily approaching. Harry could scarcely believe the way his life had changed since then. He thought back and remembered all the wizards and witches who had come out to the funeral just to thank him for defeating Voldemort. He was honored and amazed at some of the friends he had made that day.

The two Ministers had come, not only to thank him, but to offer him a job as well, which he happily accepted. He was going to be working closely with the Muggle Prime Minister. His duties ranged from secretary to security. His main job was to act as a liaison between the Muggles and the Ministry of Magic, someone who could be there to answer all of the man's questions about the magical world. He would also be able to act as extra security from magical attack by any Death Eaters still at large.

After the Prime Minister had discovered how Harry had been treated by his Muggle relatives, he had assumed it was likely that there were other Muggle-born children in similar situations. So Harry would work closely with both Ministries to seek out these children and offer them any support they might need, whether it be counseling the family on having a magical child, or in more dire circumstances, removing the child and finding placement for them within the magical community.

When he was finished with his N.E.W.T.s, he planned to spend a few months training with the Aurors before starting his new position. Harry would essentially be acting as the Prime Minister's assistant, so he was spending his free time before school started back up, studying Muggle politics and computers. After Professor Snape caught him practicing defense hexes, he offered to help teach him some in preparation for his new career.

Harry was amazed at how far he and the professor had come in their friendship. He now found himself enjoying the time he spent with the man. Harry had lost nearly all of the adult figures in his life that he had trusted in the last few years. It was nice to have someone older that he could talk to about things, even if the man still made him nervous from time to time.

Harry had not heard from his relatives since the funeral, so it came as a surprise when an owl delivered him a letter from Dudley one morning as he sat at breakfast with the headmistress and Professor Snape. Harry had been happy that he and his cousin had moved past their differences and become somewhat friendly that day he had gone to the funeral. He had even shared a few laughs with his cousin. It had been probably the first time Harry could remember Dudley laughing at something other than Harry.

The gathering at the Dursleys', after the funeral, had been extremely amusing for Harry and Severus. Uncle Vernon had been adamantly claiming he had seen the Prime

Minister and Lord Freddie in the church, but then that tall, scary fellow waved his stick, and they were gone. Petunia had been running around behind him, making excuses for him by saying he was distraught over the death of his sister. Most of those in attendance had seemed to understand and ignored Vernon's rants.

The highlight had come when some neighbors were discussing their favorite football teams. They had all seemed to agree that Dursley was lucky his nephew was friends with the famous footballer. When Vernon had heard them talking, he had blown up, yelling that he was in no way connected to that 'freak,' and anyone who dared to say otherwise could kindly leave. Well, Mr. Number Nine had taken exception to Vernon calling his favorite player a freak and promptly punched him in the face. Vernon had flown back on impact and had upset Mrs. Number Twelve's tea onto her lap. Mr. Number Twelve had then turned and hit Mr. Number Nine in the nose for ruining his wife's dress. Before an all-out brawl could get started, Harry, Dudley, and Professor Snape had stepped in and separated the men. It had been decided soon after that Vernon was too emotional for visitors, and everyone had left quickly.

Harry held the letter for a few moments before realizing that he was very eager to learn how his cousin had been. Something that he had never cared about before. He found he was just as eager to read this letter as he was to read one from Ron or Hermione.

"Fan mail again, Potter?" the man next to him asked.

"Severus, must you ask him that every time he receives a letter?"

"Well, since you refuse to verbally spar with me, I must antagonize someone. He is the only other person here at the moment, and I quite enjoy making him squirm," Snape said with a hint of a smile.

Harry laughed at his two professors before opening the letter to read.

Harry,

I bet you are surprised to be receiving a letter from me. I understand that you may not want to have anything to do with my family or me after all we have done to you over the years. I know that apologies cannot take back our treatment of you. I only hope that by telling you I am sorry, you will forgive me.

I am still amazed that you and your friends would even consider my family's safety last summer. I want to thank you for that. The house was amazing. It was so big that I managed to get lost a few times. Dedalus told me it was yours. I never knew you owned a house. Daddy was so mad. He ranted on for days that he should have been given the house since we took you in when you were younger.

Harry was baffled by that. He was completely unaware that he even owned a house other than Grimmauld Place and the ruins at Godric's Hollow. He made a mental note to check into it as soon as possible. He also made a note to find out just why Dudley and Dedalus were on a first name basis.

Joking aside, that house kept us safe from people I am sure would have killed us just because of our relationship with you.

During those months living there, I became friends with many of the people in your Order. At first, someone would come by every few days to check on us and make sure we had everything we needed. After a few weeks, I began to talk to a few of them. Dedalus was, and still is, quite the fan of yours. A fact which drove Dad crazy.

Harry couldn't help but laugh at that. He remembered the few times he had met the man and how he acted towards him. If this man was telling the Dursleys how great an honor it was to meet him, Harry could imagine his uncle's reaction to that.

He told me the most amazing stories about your world. It was then I realized I knew nothing about who you really are.

Your friends were also kind enough to gather my schoolwork and return it so I would not fall behind the rest of my classmates. A few even helped me learn the material. Mr. Lupin was especially helpful when it came to mathematics. I managed to improve my marks and finish school with their help. I was sorry to hear of his death. Dedalus told me the two of you were close and that he knew your parents.

Harry felt a pain in his chest at the mention of the last Marauder. The last link to his parents and godfather. His face must have betrayed his thoughts, as both of his breakfast companions were now staring at him. McGonagall's face showed concern and possibly pity while Snape had his customarily blank mask on. Pushing his feelings of Remus aside for the moment, he continued to read the rest of his letter.

I am sure you are wondering just how I managed to send this via owl. I am living with Dedalus. My parents and I had sort of an argument about my plans for my life. They, of course, wanted me to follow in Daddy's footsteps and work my way up through Grunnings, just like he did. This was their plan for me even when I was younger, and Daddy had already secured me a supervisory position in the factory. During the last year, I came to see them for the prejudiced people they are. I don't want to be like them. I want to make my own way. In January I will be starting at the University in London to study computer programming.

When I told them of my plans, they refused any help with tuition or housing. Dedalus was kind enough to offer me a place to live, and I have found a job to help with my schooling costs. He was one of the first people who took the time to know me, and I appreciate that about him.

I have learned a lot about witches and wizards in the last month. I have even visited Diagon Alley and the Leaky Cauldron. Dedalus introduced me to a niece of his a few weeks ago. She is really nice. We have gone out on a few dates. She went to school with you. She said you would probably not know her, since the two of you were in different houses at school. She said she was a Slytherin.

Harry had just taken a sip of his coffee when he read the last line. He tried his best not to spit it out all over and instead managed to make it go down the wrong pipe. As he sat there choking and sputtering coffee, he decided it was a good thing he had let it cool while reading.

"Honestly, Potter. I would have thought that you would be capable of eating with some sort of manners by now," Snape said.

Harry looked over and noticed that they were both staring at him with concern. Snape wasn't even trying to hide it under some mask.

"I am sorry, Professors. I just read... I was just startled by something my cousin wrote me."

"Families tend to write each other often, Potter. It is not an excuse for spitting food and drink into other people's meals."

Harry grinned and wondered if he waited to just the right moment, whether he could make Snape spit out his food. He knew the man would be just as startled by this. After all, it was one of his precious Slytherins dating his magic-hating cousin.

Harry looked over at him and saw that he had gone back to his meal.

"Headmistress, do you know if Dedalus Diggle has a niece my age?"

"I believe he does. If my memory is correct, it would be Tracey Davis from Slytherin."

"I was unaware Diggle and Davis are related. They must be distant relations, considering she is nothing like the man," Snape said.

"No. I think her mother is Dedalus' sister. She married a Muggle if I remember correctly."

"She's a half-blood. But she's in Slytherin and I know she hung around some of the Death Eaters' kids."

"Potter. By now you should know that a person's choice of friends does not always make them evil. You should also remember there are quite a few half-bloods in my house."

"Of course. You're right. I apologize."

He waited a moment for Snape to nod and return to his tea before continuing, while keeping his eyes on Snape's face.

"I just didn't figure her for the type to be dating my cousin."

Harry's efforts were rewarded when Snape spit his tea across the table.

"Honestly, Professor. I would have thought that you would be capable of eating with some sort of manners by now."

McGonagall laughed at the look of murder that spread across the Potion master's face.

"You did that on purpose."

"Of course I did. I thought you wanted to spar with someone this morning," Harry said, reminding him of his earlier comments.

"So I did." The man went back to eating his now soggy toast and eggs while Harry finished his letter.

I was hoping that maybe we can get together and do something during the holidays. I would like you to meet my girlfriend. We have talked a lot about our past, and she knows how I used to feel about magic. She has told me that while she never resented us regular people, what did she call us... Muggles, I think, she just hung around with people who did. She seems to think you will hate her for what she and her friends did in the past. I told her if you and I can move past our differences, than I am sure the two of you will get along.

Please write back. I do mean it when I say I would like us to be friends.

Dudley

Harry put down the letter and went back to his breakfast. His cousin wanted the two of them to be friends. He would have to think about that later; right now he wanted answers about a few of the things Dudley had said in his letter.

"Professors, do either of you know about the house my relatives stayed in during the war?"

"What brought this on, Potter?" Snape asked.

"Dudley mentioned in his letter that he and my relatives stayed at my house during the war. He said it was huge. So that means they were not staying at Grimmauld Place. I was just wondering how the Order knew about a house of mine and I did not."

"I can assure you the Order would not have put them in a house belonging to you. If they put them..."

"Harry," McGonagall said, interrupting Snape, "you do own another house. It belonged to your father's family. After your parents' death, Professor Dumbledore put it under the Fidelius. He made me the Secret-Keeper. He didn't want you to know until after the war was over."

"Even after his death, he is keeping things from me. I thought we had agreed he wouldn't keep things from me."

"Harry..."

"No, it's all right, Professor. I understand why he did what he did, and there is no point in holding it against him now. Is there anything else I should know?"

"Nothing he has told me. Perhaps it would be best if you visited Gringotts and spoke with the goblins. They could help you figure out your estate."

Harry groaned. The last thing he wanted to do was make an appearance in Diagon Alley. There were still people camped out in Hogsmeade waiting for him to make an appearance.

"Perhaps Professor Snape will escort you again, to help keep control of the masses," she said with a smile.

Both Harry and Snape glared at her.

"Perhaps not. So, what else did your cousin have to say?"

"Aside from his new girlfriend, he has moved out of my aunt and uncle's house and is now living with Dedalus. Which is just weird. He also wants to get together with me for the holidays."

"Are you going to go?" Snape asked.

"I would like to. I just don't think I am ready to be out among all those people yet. I like it here. No one tries to grab me or take my picture or asks me to sign autographs. I understand their need to make me a hero, but I just want to be left alone."

"Why not invite him here for the holidays?" the headmistress asked.

"I... I didn't think he could come here. He's a Muggle."

"We have had them here before. It is not all that uncommon for Muggle-borns to invite their parents to the castle occasionally. There are ways for families to visit their children. I am sure the Headmistress will make an exception for you and allow your cousin to visit."

"Honestly, Severus, the way you talk to him, one would think the two of you still hate each other."

"No, Professor McGonagall, he just likes to see if he can still make me angry. He forgets his sarcasm and sneers haven't worked on me in months." Harry turned to smirk at Snape as he said this. Looking back at the headmistress, he asked, "It's really all right if I invite Dudley here for the holidays? I am sure either Dedalus or his girlfriend can help him get here."

"Harry, it's fine. I would very much like the chance to meet some of your family."

"You're not going to hex him, are you? I really meant it when I said I would like to get to know him."

McGonagall and Snape laughed. Well, Snape cracked a small smile, which in Snape-speak means he was laughing.

"I'll just go send him a letter inviting him."

"Harry, make sure to invite them to stay over. It will be more convenient for them."

"Yes, Professor. Thank you."

Harry went to his room to write a letter inviting his cousin to come to Hogwarts for the holidays. He sent it off with a school owl after lunch. The next morning, Dudley sent a reply. He and his girlfriend would be arriving on the train the morning before Christmas. Harry was surprised to feel excited that he would be spending a real Christmas celebration with his family.

~*~

A/N: I wrote this for the Potter Place Yule 2008 Challenge and never posted it. When I first wrote 'Death Among Friends,' I discovered I really enjoyed writing my version of Dudley. This extension of that story allowed me to revisit his character some more.

Thanks to sunnythirty3 and ladyinthecloak for looking this over for me.

Prompt used: 3. Revisiting Friends: If you have an established story, give us a one-shot tale to compliment it so we know what your characters are up to for Christmas.