

Snape's Original Miscellany

by scaranda

When Severus Snape retired from Hogwarts, after teaching Potions for ninety-two years, he expected to live in a house he had inherited from an old uncle. However, retirement being just another orbit around planet shite for our Severus, what he actually inherited was large gambling debt and a shack which had been re-mortgaged so many times to the Goblins that Severus had to go into hiding for some years. It is unclear just how Snape spent that time, but he recently resurfaced in a retirement home for bewildered wizards in Scotland, accompanied by a large black dog. His successor in the post of Potions Master found his diaries in some papers hidden beneath a hairbrush which didn't appear to have been moved for some decades. He read them and quit his post a week later. The position remains vacant.

One: The Sword of Damocles

Chapter 1 of 2

When Severus Snape retired from Hogwarts, after teaching Potions for ninety-two years, he expected to live in a house he had inherited from an old uncle. However, retirement being just another orbit around planet shite for our Severus, what he actually inherited was large gambling debt and a shack which had been re-mortgaged so many times to the Goblins that Severus had to go into hiding for some years. It is unclear just how Snape spent that time, but he recently resurfaced in a retirement home for bewildered wizards in Scotland, accompanied by a large black dog. His successor in the post of Potions Master found his diaries in some papers hidden beneath a hairbrush which didn't appear to have been moved for some decades. He read them and quit his post a week later. The position remains vacant.

Monday

Oh joy, three weeks to go until the end of term, and I am struggling to work out which is the greater of the twin evils of my life, term time or holiday time. The annual invitation to spend the summer holidays at Malfoy Manor arrived this morning. The tasteless confection of gilt and black, designed, I can only assume, to give the reader indigestion, stands on my mantle piece in pride of place, alongside a bill from Madame Malkin's and a rather stropic "pay up or else" letter from my turf accountant (I shall never ever again listen to anything Black says. What that man knows about Unicorn racing can be written on the back of a match box).

I notice that the invitation is signed only by Lucius, which rather denotes that I have in fact been invited to spend two months grappling with the aforementioned Malfoy in his ridiculous bed chamber whilst Narcissa suns herself in St Tropez, an arrangement which seems to suit both of them admirably well, but does bugger all for me. I wonder if Black can be persuaded to don his doggy suit for two months and take up residence in Lucius's kennels.

Still ruddy Monday, but a little later.

I have just left our afternoon staff meeting and am now utterly convinced that wisdom only comes with years up to a certain point. After one hundred and thirty years, one then has to add such things as dotage and senility into the equation. I refer, of course, to our esteemed Headmaster. He has decided, in his wisdom (and dotage and senility), to increase the amount of time spent on Muggle Studies, and has therefore split the subject into three categories: Human Biology, Physical Education and

something called Joinery. He has picked the three most ill-equipped people I have ever met to teach them.

It seems that Lockhart will be unable to fulfil his duties as Defence against the Dark Arts Professor next term. Presumably our Headmaster didn't notice what was crashingly obvious to the rest of us, namely, his inability in the position last term. He is to be installed in the post of Human Biology Professor; the mind truly boggles. The titles alone on his booklist entertained the staff for the better part of an hour. It seems he wrote the lot during a week's sojourn in St Mungo's whilst yours truly re-ravelled what Weasley's wonky wand had unravelled; I hasten to add that it wasn't taxing work. I can only conclude that he wrote the books whilst his hands were firmly behind his back in a straight jacket, and he did not actually ever see them. However, "Wanking with Werewolves", "Bugging with Black", and "Shagging with Shackbolt" now appear to be obligatory reading for third years. It is only a blinding stroke of luck and an unfortunate incident at the printers (involving a printing press, an elf and a large tub of glue) that kept "Hufflepuffs with Hippogriffs" off the list, all 1913 pages of it, not all of which I have read.

Black, for some reason known only to the Headmaster, has been offered the Professorship in Physical Education. I shall have to keep a close watch on him. Remedial Physical Education with sixth-years does not sound like the kind of thing I want to happen upon in my private rooms (in which Black seems to have taken up residence) without advance warning. At least his name on the staff list saves me the thrice-daily task of sneaking food out of the Great Hall for him to eat.

As for the choice of Remus Lupin as Professor of Joinery and Arts and Crafts, I am left totally bewildered. What is Joinery anyway? I heard myself ask, and immediately regretted it. Dumbledore said it involved fixing things which were broken. Merlin's tits, we are wizards; we wave wands to fix things.

Dumbledore prattled on for the better part of the meeting about how he felt he was a good judge of character in his teaching staff, and that he looked forward to the new studies proving popular with the students. This from the man who hired a Defence Against the Dark Arts Professor who just happened to have Voldemort growing out of the back of his head ... and no, I shall not listen to any defences referring to the fact that hindsight sometimes comes in handy.

I heard Minerva muttering something under her breath to Flitwick about "Jobs for the Boys", more like Employment for the Unemployable in my opinion, not that anyone ever listens to that around here.

Apparently the new Professors are to join us for the last two weeks of term to allow them to settle in, although I have to say if Black settles any more junk into my rooms I shall have to move out.

And no matter how many times I look at my clock the grim fact remains that it's still Monday.

Wednesday (Just another name for Monday as it turned out.)

This morning began quite optimistically. I had spent the better part of the last few days cajoling the sleekly-muscled Oliver Wood to allow me a leg over, to the point of giving a pass to the worst Potions paper I have ever seen, and awarding the aforementioned Wood thirty points for Gryffindor for turning up for the final lesson on Friday past.

I fretted over what to wear. It was an outdoor liaison, and we were to meet under the Quidditch Stands ... Ahhh, the memories of a misspent youth; it had been a voyeur's paradise, all that knotty wood. Black suggested that I wear my long grey scarf, that it lent me a certain "je ne sais quoi" (which turned out to be je ne sais pas), and it would be handy for strangling the boy if things got out of hand ... or tying him up if they didn't.

I arrived early and secreted myself behind one of the uprights which held the stands, in order to see but not be seen. I caught sight of the redoubtable Wood, walking jauntily down the hill towards me. Then I noticed he was carrying a broomstick and appeared to have a Quaffle under his arm. I wasn't sure what he thought I was going to do to him with these implements, but we had all morning, and I pride myself on a very fertile imagination. Things began to go downhill at an alarming rate when I caught sight of the rest of the Gryffindor Quidditch Team. Had Christmas come early? I wondered, until I realised they were all wearing Quidditch robes and carrying broomsticks.

And that is why I found myself spending the wettest and most harrowing afternoon of my adult life, thirty feet above the ground in a howling gale ... and the only sodding thing my leg got over that day was a sodding broomstick.

Saturday

I couldn't think who I woke up next to. My eyes refused to open immediately on waking, a fact for which I grew to be profoundly grateful as the morning wore on. I made a tentative grope; one always has to be mindful of the fact that such a move could be interpreted as a willingness to recommence whatever insanity occurred the night before. Bearing this firmly in mind, I pitched my hand at the level of my own head, thanking Merlin, or whoever else was listening (it turned out that no-one was), that at least I did not encounter a foot. I did, however, encounter something which gave me even more of a nasty shock. It was cylindrically shaped, smallish and jaggy ... and there was more than one ... I had awoken next to someone in curlers.

The urge to open my eyes deserted me along with the will to live. I wondered if I could slip out of bed, find my clothes, Obliviate the memory of whatever lay next to me, and take the fireplace to my own rooms ... all without opening my eyes. I suspect that I shall live to regret not acting upon that basic survival instinct as one of the worst decisions in my life.

I opened my eyes.

Whoever my bed mate was, and it wasn't quite clear just what they were yet, they were wearing a peach-coloured eye-mask, and some unwholesome looking, white, flaky mask covered their face in jagged lumps. I began to wonder if I had taken part in some obscene ritual, and felt my own face to check it wasn't similarly encrusted.

I dared further exploration, and the chest I bravely encountered was flat and hirsute. At least I could now discount half of the population with some relief, although the jury was still out on Minerva McGonagall. There is only one thing more disturbing to a man of my proclivities than waking up next to a man in a face pack and curlers, and that would have been waking up to a woman in a face pack and curlers.

I jumped out of bed, alarmed but not surprised to find myself completely naked, and took my first good look around the room. From every picture on the walls, and there were hundreds, Gilderoy Lockhart's teeth beamed down coyly at me. My clothes, for the love of Merlin, if I could only find my clothes I could at least get away from here before the original woke ...

... Too late, the eye mask was lifted aside, and the green eyes looked up as the lips attempted to reveal those flashing teeth in what I assumed was going to be a "come hither" (not bloody likely) grin. At that small movement of his facial muscles something strange began to happen. The craggy mess he had trowelled onto his face the night before began to crack; in fact, the sound of it cracking seemed to surprise him as much as it shocked me. Behind the mask my stunned brain began to register long grey strands of what looked like coarse hair. Had the incompetent idiot put hair-restorer on his face instead of whatever other muck he had intended to spread on it?

But as my eyes left his face they happened upon his night-stand. The face pack lay upon it unopened. What lay open instead was a pack of the new Wolfsbane which I was working on. I had found it to have some alarming side effects which I wasn't even willing to inflict on Lupin, and I had slipped it into my pocket, intending to destroy it the night before ... and here I confess ... I had forgotten about it. If there is a lesson to be learnt, it is this. Whilst it may be safe enough to put your curlers in when you have your eye mask on, make sure you put your face pack on while you can see.

With one final crack the remaining wolf pack fell away from his face, and most of the photographs began to cry. Lockhart hadn't noticed; his eyes were still riveted on yours truly. I gasped, and he mistook the involuntary intake of breath as something quite different, and flashed what he presumed to be his usual pearly smile. The effect was stunning ... two rows of sharply pointed fangs smiled encouragingly at me from the grey-haired face ... this was no were-wolf, this was a sodding here and now one.

Needless to say I took the only option open to a sane man of my breeding, integrity and courage. I couldn't find my underwear, so I grabbed the rest of my clothes and

legged it ... and needless to say, Black reckons I should have stayed ... which all leads me to how I came to be there in the first place.

I confess to having been impressed by the fact that Lockhart wanted to discuss Potions with me; it led me to believe that perhaps he had some taste and sense after all, that perhaps he really intended to take his post seriously this year and infuse some real knowledge into the empty heads he would be presented with at the start of term. With all this in mind, I accepted an invitation to go to Rosmerta's for a drink and a chat. I gathered whatever books on Potions I had which were written in words of less than three syllables and made my way to Hogsmeade.

The minute I walked into the Three Broomsticks I should have known; it is my own fault that I did not. The place was so packed with women that it was only with much standing on tiptoes and jostling that I eventually managed to locate Lockhart's red-blond curls bobbing in the distance. I fought my way through to him, and he stood to greet me ... I should have noticed then, but I didn't. He seemed to encompass a wider audience as he greeted me effusively.

In my defence I say this: I am the Potions Master at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry (and Home for all Assorted Waifs, Strays and ex-Cons), and when someone asks me for a chat about Potions, it is fairly reasonable for me to expect to spend some time in conversation about my subject. What I did not expect was what greeted my eyes. I should have run; I possibly still had the chance, but they were closing around me, blocking all escape routes.

I found myself taken into a good-humoured (his, not mine) embrace as the new Human Biology Professor introduced me ... as the assistant who was to lend him advice on some of the more complex Potions he was going to add to his range.

I looked in blind panic at the backdrop screen he had fashioned behind the table which had been laid out with his trash. The pink header screamed at me "GET LUSCIOUS LOCKS WITH LOCKHART'S LOTIONS".

The idiot was still talking into the hush of two hundred Molly Weasleys of assorted ages, sizes and dubious vintages. 'Professor Snape has kindly agreed to help with some of my more complex Potions.'

I gazed in horror and sat down weakly, more because I was finding the twin acts of thinking and standing too taxing for my stunned brain.

'He has agreed to help,' he went on, tapping the side of his nose in a secretive gesture, 'with my newest product.' He smiled like an moron, and whipped a pink silk scarf from whatever it was covering, like some fourth rate conjurer who has turned a rabbit into a pencil. 'For you ladies who have trouble with stiffening,' he said, pausing only to allow the ripple of nauseating titters to die down, 'we are going to produce nothing short of a miracle cure.' He grinned inanely. 'If you need stiffening results just apply "Lockhart's Straightening Serum Wax" ... or why not Gild your lily with "Gilderoy's Hot Oil"?'

If I had died at that point it wouldn't have been a moment too soon. He was on a roll though, and laying aside an Unforgivable Curse, which to be fair would probably have been forgiven, considering the circumstances, I didn't know how to stop him.

He tossed his head. 'This, Ladies, is the Crowning Glory of my Career.' He tossed his head again in such a fashion as to dislodge his own crowning glory; it seemed to land ever so slightly askew.

I couldn't breathe. What insanity had led me to believe that this prattling popinjay had anything remotely sensible in his head, I really cannot say. I stood to leave, but it was too late; he held me in an awful brotherly embrace, and his teeth dazzled me. It is one thing to have your face reflected back at you from a lover's eyes, but quite another to have it reflected back from someone's teeth. He sat down behind the table of his rubbish and I remained standing, searching for a way to make a gracious exit. The audience misunderstood the gesture as my taking a curtain call and began to applaud ... I was caught ... like a rat in a trap, as the flash bulbs popped and the quills scribbled.

If Rita Skeeter prints even one word of this I shall make personally sure that her Quick Quotes Quill goes straight up her ... well, never mind, but suffice it to say she wouldn't be seeing it for a while.

I endured the awful hours in the only way a man of my sensibilities could, by getting rat-arsed drunk ... and ended up in Lockhart's bed.

Monday again.

I am beginning to suspect Black of infidelity in a way more alarming than I had contemplated before. Twice in this last week I have seen Rosmerta's brown-eyed floozy of a Doberman happening out of the far end of the Forbidden Forest. That, coupled with the fact that Rosmerta herself never seems to be around when the aforementioned coiffured bitch is, causes me more than a little suspicion. Black became surly when I questioned him.

I resolved to ask the Headmaster next dinner time if he knew whether or not Rosmerta was Animagus. Why, I don't know, in view of the fact that he failed to notice that almost the entire class of Gryffindors in my year were Animagi. His vague, 'I'm not sure... I don't think so, Severus,' did little to persuade me that Black has not been dallying with the Doberman ... the man has no shame. I shall follow him tonight; I need to pick up some nasty bits and pieces which I can only find in the Forest anyway.

Lord help me, I need to brew something to stupefy my senses from whatever insanity beckons ominously closer from Malfoy Manor.

Chapter Two: Open House Day

Chapter 2 of 2

Severus arrives at the manor to find all as he expected, which only confirms his dread.

Tuesday

The last day of term is always a bad one, and this year proved to be no different. After an inauspicious start, the day proceeded to go downhill quickly.

This morning at breakfast the Headmaster spent the whole meal humming some awful tune through his cornflakes, stopping every now and again to regale us with the catch line, "Viva Espana". Perhaps he is planning some type of military action against the French; I find that little surprises me these days.

I noticed that Lockhart has appeared back in the Great Hall. He gave me an extremely wide berth (thank Merlin for small mercies), and kept casting flitting glances towards Lupin, coy flitting glances.

I need to lie down, undisturbed in a dark room, and think about this; I am becoming extremely concerned about the Lockhart situation. Only last night Black handed me a book in which he had discovered what he thought was a fascinating observation. It read more like the crack of doom to me. The writer, some mediaeval witch of uncertain bloodlines, scribbled some gibberish to the effect that if a disappearing spell were cast on a subject which had already disappeared, the reverse effect would happen. Black went on to apply this logic to my fiasco with the Wolfsbane Potion and the aforementioned Lockhart ... my mind refuses to contemplate what he was getting at. I did notice Lockhart casting worried looks at the sky though. I must let the idiot know that the moon is the white one which comes out at night.

All morning Malfoy Manor has beckoned ominously; the thought of the holidays hangs over me like the ruddy Sword of Damocles ... and I haven't a thing to wear. In the absence of any other colour, excepting black, in my wardrobe (apart from a nifty little number in leopard skin), I shall pack black for the holiday. Lucius likes me in black (please note the lower case letter 'b'; he has yet to give his opinion on the canine version). But there are positives too; it is a forgiving colour, and saves me pulling my gut in every time I stand in profile.

Hopefully Lucius will have decided against the wigwams after last summer's fiasco when Draco, his first and last born (so he would have us believe), severed the guy ropes, and the live totem pole suffocated before it could be cut free. I am also hopeful that we shall be spared the catering disasters which we were subjected to last year, when we had to contend with the twin gastronomic delights of the devilled kidneys turning out to be devilled gall bladders, and Lucius's Beluga Caviar having been replaced by frogspawn, a neat trick carried out by the fruit of his loins (so he thinks everyone believes), the cursed Draco.

Black has decided to come with me, a fact for which, I confess, I was extremely grateful ... until he made passing mention of the fact that Harry would be good company for the awful Malfoy fils. He just slipped that in, hoping I wouldn't notice; I began to wish it were the first of September. He will sleep in Malfoy's ruddy kennels; in fact both of them will.

Tuesday

Narcissa was just leaving as we arrived; in fact, had I managed to be just a few minutes later I would have missed her completely. She seemed even more frosty than usual. Perhaps she still has not forgiven me for the potion which I gave to Lucius when I was doing a certain experiment. It must have come as shock to a woman of her stature to have her husband of twenty years suddenly at the door of her bedchamber demanding his conjugal rights ... especially when he is likely to require a map to point him in the required direction, never having travelled the road before. I believe her bed mate was quite put out about the whole episode too.

She glared at the dog and the two boys who accompanied me as though they were inhabitants of another planet, before the dawning of vague recollection passed over her sculpted features as she frowned at Draco. I wasn't entirely sure that she remembered who he actually was as she patted him on the head, muttering something about making sure the dog didn't go inside the house unless Lucius specifically wanted to play with it ... she knows her man, does that one.

Draco and the Potter boy disappeared quite quickly, which was good, with Black frolicking around their heels like some ridiculous great puppy, which was not so good. I was beginning to have some serious misgivings about the whole situation, and I now had to keep a steady eye on the sodding moon as well. It was one thing to leave Lupin his own Wolfsbane to attend to, but I had been loath to alert anyone to the "Lockhart Situation" ... damn, I had even given it a title now.

I was alone when the master of the house and all it contains, if one forgets about Narcissa and the sizable dowry over which she has managed to maintain total control, Draco and everything to do with him, and just about everything else, the aforementioned Narcissa having spent the last twenty years transferring the whole sodding lot into her own name ... in fact, the only person who thinks Lucius is the master of all he surveys ... is Lucius ... anyway, all that aside, he walked down the central staircase to greet me. What, in the name of all that was holy, was he wearing, I wondered.

When he reached the bottom of the grand staircase he twirled once, the effect was ... dazzling ... in fact I had to shield my eyes. He seemed to have sprayed himself with gold paint and then studded himself, presumably while the paint was still wet, with rhinestones. My mouth must have been hanging open in horror, because I felt it snap shut. He looked at me eagerly, never a pleasant sight when one is dealing with Lucius, and said, 'This will knock them flat, don't you think so?'

I swallowed hard, not daring to think who, where, what or when, they might be, but I had to acknowledge the truth ... they would be knocked flat.

It turns out that the hopelessly inbred idiot thinks that he and I are going for what he described as "a night on the town", to London ... to mix with Muggles ... to show them how to really enjoy themselves. Of course, I absolutely point blank refuse to be drawn into this lunacy, and heard myself muttering something about not having suitable clothes for such an occasion. But, Lucius, being Lucius, brushed my objections aside with aplomb, offering me the dubious delight of pillaging his wardrobe.

He glided up to me, I can only assume that he was having difficulty walking properly in the ridiculous outfit he was wearing, took my arm confidentially, and began speaking in low tones to me about the heart-stoppingly horrifying plans he had for the next two months ... I began to yearn for Narcissa's return.

Thursday

As disasters go, I made the mistake of thinking it had not been too terrifying so far. I seemed to have managed to at least delay the awful night out in London, although I suspect that it will come back to haunt me soon. My eyes felt gritty this morning, a combination of the fact that Lucius seemed to have boundless energy last night (and, I have to admit, some very novel ways of spending it), and the fact that when he did eventually nod off, in the early hours of the morning, he began to ramble on in his sleep about something or someone called "disco mania".

I was just about to drop off myself, for a well-earned kip, when I heard the clip of canine toenails on the polished wood floor. A cold wet nose nudged my reluctant arm, and suddenly we were three. I spent a slightly nervous but none the less entertaining two hours with Black. Lucius only woke once at what was, admittedly, a very lively part of the proceedings, but was put back to sleep immediately by Black, who lifted him off the bed and slammed his head against the wall. As a wizard, the man has no finesse, although I have to say the sound of the Malfoy head being cracked against a wall was even more satisfying to me than anything else the same Malfoy had done that night.

As we sat having breakfast at around lunchtime to much tutting from his elves, Lucius flicked idly through the "Daily Prophet", touching the back of his head and wincing every now and again, muttering about strange dreams. He kept frowning and flicking back through the paper, obviously looking for something ... it was obviously the same thing as I was reading in open-mouthed horror across the table. The banner headline on the front page of his open paper read, "MALFOY MANOR OPENS TO THE PUBLIC".

What, for the love of Merlin, was he playing at? I tried to think, just as a troop of children in brightly coloured robes filed through the dining room, led by one of Lucius's elves. Lucius let the paper drop slightly and gazed over the top of it with something akin to horrified fascination as one of them carefully but deliberately began to unscrew a very expensive metal sculpture.

'Stop them,' he hissed at me. 'This isn't what I meant at all.' The house-elf made an attempt to screw the sculpture back together again, not terribly successfully, and ushered the children away to another part of the house.

I listened with growing concern for his sanity as he explained that he had paid for a small but discreet article in the "Social and Personal" column of the "Daily Prophet", as

he wanted to allow access to Malfoy Manor to the upper echelons of wizarding society, to allow those who had not visited the manor socially to enjoy the art and architecture and good taste of the great house. I took this to mean that he wanted to show off his vulgar excesses and couldn't be bothered to entertain. He shied away violently when I asked if Narcissa knew of this little escapade.

We were still arguing over the finer points of the matter when Draco put in an appearance; he was with the Potter boy and the Black dog. 'Father,' he started, looking at a space about halfway between Lucius and myself (it seems Narcissa's discretion has been wavering somewhat over recent years), 'what is the Knight Bus doing spewing people all over the front lawns?'

Lucius stumbled to his feet as an owl swept in through the dining room window and dropped a scroll on the table. He picked it up, ripped it open, read it with what appeared to be some degree of consternation, and flung it at me. It came from the agent he had engaged to market the opening of Malfoy Manor. It seemed that the Puddlemere United Quidditch team had arranged to come to the manor for a fortnight's stay whilst they were playing in a tournament nearby, and would he please arrange to have fourteen rooms ready by two o'clock this afternoon. Three meals per day would be required.

Lucius was, of course, apoplectic by this time. 'Stop this insanity,' he hissed, pointing at me accusingly as the Knight Bus passengers began to troop through the dining room in threes and fours, stopping to touch things. The elves had by this time spelled a large buffet table along the back wall of the dining room, and to Lucius's greater chagrin began serving the masses with a picnic lunch to carry out into the grounds.

It all came to a tearful end as Lucius began to hurl hexes at his visitors, whilst kicking the offending elves hither and thither. I felt quite at a loss as I tried to quieten him down, but he would have none of it. He proceeded to line up his guests and submit them to a body search as Stan Shaunpike ushered them back onto the bus, which was parked in the middle of Narcissa's rose garden. Admittedly the pile of souvenirs which he confiscated was impressive.

I sent a hasty owl to his agent cancelling the booking for Puddlemere United (and all future bookings until further notice), with regret, saying that the master of the house was indisposed, and was likely to remain that way for quite some time.

The Next Friday

I suppose I should have known by the amount of owl mail which began to arrive in the early part of the week that Lucius had another plan up his sleeve, but if the truth were to be known, I was a bit loath to ask. He had been smirking in that awful anticipatory way he has when one of his grand plans is about to come to fruition. If only the fool took time to notice that they always went wrong (always, in this case, really does mean, without exception).

I gathered my courage. 'What have you got planned for this weekend, Lucius?' I asked, hoping to be struck deaf as the words tumbled from my mouth.

'I'm glad you asked.' He grinned maniacally. 'It's my birthday, and I've arranged something really special this year.'

I groaned inwardly; he arranged something "really special" every year and, as I recall, the clean up process normally involves the Magical Reversal Squad and a great deal of hush money. I have to say he had outdone himself this year though, the list of things which could (and probably would) go wrong was nothing short of titanic. He had invited his friends (you should search the dictionary under T for toadies), for a "Grand Birthday Stag Hunt and Barbeque" at Malfoy Manor. The first stag caught would be barbequed in the huge pit the elves were enthusiastically digging at that moment. I considered asking them if they would dig a six foot pit for me beside it.

As it turned out, death would have been the lesser of two evils.
