

## The Tomb of the Heroes To Sleep, Perchance to Dream

She tilted her wings, spilling the wind from them, and allowed her hooves to touch the ground, taking care to make no noise. This was a quiet place, a place of rest. A place where nothing could disturb the peace, ever again.

And yet something could. Turning human, she stepped through the arched gates and looked around, savoring her last sight of this place as it was. They were planning something new here. The Tomb of the Heroes. To be built on this very spot, with an eternal flame burning atop it... to house eight bodies and the ashes of three...

The wind picked up around her again. *Eight bodies?* it murmured.

"Yes, eight," she said aloud, beginning to walk. "They feel you deserve a place of honor – why, I don't know..."

The wind seemed to growl in outrage.

Her feet carried her unerringly to the place she wanted. The grass grew thickly here, and the daffodils were just blooming. She bent them gently aside and ran her fingers across the name. "My only love, sprung from my only hate," she murmured. "How often did I swear I'd never say a civil word to you?"

*Every day*, his voice whispered on the wind, with his barking laugh behind it, threatening to break free. *Every day until James and Lily and Moony and Frank and Alice tricked us into love.*

"And how we did love." Aletha sat down at the foot of the grave. "How we all did love." She buried her fingers in the verdant growth. "It's been a busy year, love. I don't know how much you know, so I'd better give you all of it."

*I know about me. And I don't regret it.*

"Nor do I." Aletha squeezed her eyes shut, but a tear escaped anyway.

*Liar.*

"Of course I am." She brushed her fingertips over the top of the grass. "Wouldn't you be, if you were me?"

On the night of the Battle of the Department of Mysteries, Sirius had been part of the first wave of responders. He had arrived just in time to see his cousin Bellatrix's Stunner slam Harry into an obviously crumbling wall, and to hear her cry of triumph as the stones began to fall.

When Aletha had arrived, Sirius was still lying across Harry, sheltering his godson with his own body. Both of them had been badly injured, but Sirius' condition was worse. He'd be dead in a few seconds without help. But if she gave him the help he needed, she couldn't tend Harry, and he would worsen and almost certainly die. There was no time to call for help, no time to do anything but act.

She had acted. She had saved Harry.

*You did what you had to. I wasn't going to go around saving any worlds.*

"No, you just ruined mine by dying on me." Aletha picked up a small rock and tossed it at the gravestone. "Take that."

*Ow.*

"So that was you. Draco went that night too." Their Pack-son had taken a combination Stunner and Summoning Charm that had been meant for Ron. Danger had nearly been killed trying to stop Rodolphus Lestrange from getting away with him, and hadn't managed it in the end. "That was when he left us, I mean. I don't know exactly when he died."

*He died that night. His body may have lived on for a while longer, but he died when he knew he'd never come home again. You know that.*

Aletha nodded. "I do. So let me think. You and Draco. Who was next?" She knew, but she didn't want to say it. Saying it might make it less true somehow.

*It's bad, isn't it?*

"Yes."

*Just tell me. Please.*

"Neville. Neville and..." Her throat sealed up. A breeze picked up, whispering past her face, whispering the name she hadn't spoken aloud in almost a year.

*Meghan.*

She could almost hear the ringing laughter, see the tiny body moving in graceful swoops and spins, all alight with the joy of life and love..

*What happened to her? Letha, please, tell me...*

Aletha's sorrow converted irrationally to annoyance. "Well, she's not dead yet," she said acidly, bouncing another rock off the gravestone. "Wouldn't you know if she was?"

*True enough. But what did happen, then?*

The annoyance was a shield. Aletha held to it determinedly. "Dementors."

*WHAT? Oh, God, no...*

"No, they weren't Kissed." Aletha picked a dandelion from the grass and twirled it between her fingers. "They weren't Kissed."

But what the Aurors found at Fireflower House hadn't been much better. A thirteen-year-old girl, every hair on her head as white as the demiguise Patronus which held six dementors at bay, unconscious over the barely living body of a sixteen-year-old boy. Neither of them showed signs of being Kissed, and yet Neville's body held no soul, and Meghan refused to wake. They had lain side by side in St. Mungo's for several months, breathing in unison, more and more shallowly as time passed.

*What happened to the Patronus?*

"It faded when the Aurors got rid of the dementors. Why?"

The wind sighed through her hair. *Isn't it obvious? That Patronus was his soul. Or as much of it as was free from despair and fear and such. He gave everything for her. He always did.*

"And she nearly died keeping his body alive, and then had no reason to come back when she realized he was already gone." Aletha closed her eyes, feeling tangles smooth themselves out inside her head, dark places become light. But light can reveal sorrow as well as joy...

*You feel like a failure, because she didn't see you as important enough to come back for.*

Sorrow transmuted this time into anger. "Yes! I'm her *mother*, God damn it! Didn't she care about me at all? I'd already lost you – why her too? Why?"

*Do you really want an answer?*

The anger flickered and went out. "Yes."

*She knew you'd have to keep going, keep fighting, keep helping the others. You didn't need another sick and grieving child to take care of. And I think... I think she may have burned herself out trying to save Neville.*

"You mean burned out her magic?"

*Yes. And she knew that without that, she was a liability, not an asset. So she stepped away.*

"Stepped away." Aletha laughed harshly. "She stepped away. As if she'd just gone out of the room..."

*Hasn't she? It isn't forever, Letha. You know that. Nothing's forever except love. And you haven't stopped loving her, have you?*

Aletha looked down at her hands. The dandelion lay in her palm, crushed and oozing milky juice. "No," she whispered. "How could I?"

*Then you'll see her again. Just like you'll see me. Go on. What happened next?*

"Next." Aletha tried to organize her thoughts, breathing as deeply as her aching throat and chest would allow. "Next was the Weasleys. It was Christmas. They were all home, all except Ron and Ginny. They were at the Den, with Harry and Hermione and Luna. I was in the music room, practicing..."

The explosion had rattled the windows and jangled all the keys, untuning the piano in a moment. She'd leapt up and run outside, but she'd already known what she was going to see. Red light from the ground warred with green from the sky, as flames consumed what was left of the Burrow while the Dark Mark leered at them all triumphantly from above.

Remus and Danger had been able to damp the fire, but it was obvious that no one could have survived the initial explosion. Nine bodies were eventually found and identified – Fleur Delacour and Tonks had been staying with fiancé and husband respectively – and Ron and Ginny had moved into the Den permanently.

"Ron never got over it," Aletha said, winding a grass stem around her fingers. "He just couldn't grasp losing them all, in an instant, that way. He was

the one who talked Luna into spying on the Death Eaters.”

In principle, it sounded like an excellent plan – in a building full of wizards, who’d notice one more owl? But something Luna had seen had made her break her cover, and that had been her downfall. No one had known what at the time, except the three Death Eaters who had delivered Luna’s body to her father with a taunting message. Since none of them had survived the encounter, nor had Gerald, the point was somewhat moot.

*Am I allowed to guess?*

“That depends. Do you already know?”

The new leaves rustled in a faint chuckle. *I suppose I do. You’ll say it’s not fair, I’m sure.*

“Yes, I will. I thought I was telling you this story.”

*Well, I can’t help it if..*

“Don’t finish that sentence. Shall we go on?”

Yes, *go ahead.* The wind ruffled her hair in a deep sigh. *I’m listening.*

“We hardly ever saw Dumbledore during this time,” Aletha said, finger-combing out the grass, then twirling three small hanks of it together. “He was always off doing something else. Then finally, one night, he came into Headquarters looking as if he’d fallen from a cliff, and told us that he’d finished it. That Harry could kill Voldemort now. ‘He is unprotected,’ was the way he put it. And then he sat at the table and put his head down, and Fawkes perched on the arm of the chair with his head under his wing, and it wasn’t until I went to wake him for the meeting that I realized...”

*But it sounds like he did something he needed to do. Something that only he could do. And isn’t that just like him? Slip off quietly, without anything fancy or formal about it?*

“And the funeral was just as good.” Aletha began to braid the grass. “He was cremated, courtesy of Fawkes, and he has a beautiful tomb on Hogwarts grounds.”

*That’s Dumbledore all over. Unconventional as ever, his own man to the end.*

Aletha laughed openly this time. “I should have come and talked to you a long time ago,” she said. “I feel so much better about it suddenly.”

*Good. Please don’t stop. What happened last week?*

“Last week.” Aletha shook her head. “God, so soon, so soon... has it not sunk in yet, or am I just numb?”

*I think it might be something else. You’re so close now yourself that it doesn’t hurt as much, because you can sort of sense that we really haven’t gone anywhere. Or at least, nowhere you can’t go yourself.*

Aletha smiled. “True. Very true. All right. Last week.”

Last week, the remainder of Pack and Pride had gathered with the Order of the Phoenix, the forces of the Ministry, and all wizards and witches who owed allegiance to the light, to face Lord Voldemort and the Death Eaters in one great battle. One battle to decide the fate of the British Isles, and ultimately, of the world.

The first troops to take the field on the Dark side were Inferi. Remus and Danger had joined hands and held the walking dead at bay with fire, giving their own side a fair chance against the living forces of Dark magic. It was beginning to look as if they might even win, and win without losing more than half of their own forces –

When a stray green spell had slipped between the lines and found Hermione’s heart.

Remus had seen it. Aletha had watched his face, had seen realization strike him like the curse had struck his Kitten. For that moment, his only thought had been for his daughter, and he had pulled away from Danger, starting to go to Hermione, though there was nothing he could do – the flames holding the Inferi at bay had faltered –

And then Danger had screamed.

An Inferius had broken through the line of flame and was coming toward her. Aletha saw it, but could not move, for the same reason Remus, spinning back toward his love, was held helpless for one second too long.

Lord Voldemort had chosen the body to make this attack well.

It was Draco.

*But how did he – it – attack her? Inferi can’t do magic, can they?*

“No.” Why had she thought this didn’t hurt? The pain was threatening to steal her voice, to steal all of her and leave nothing behind. “But they can carry blades. It stabbed her.”

Danger’s scream had broken off abruptly. She’d looked – surprised, Aletha thought. Not afraid, not at the end. “She was dead before it pulled the

knife out. Then Remus reached out and just took the knife away from it and knocked it down and then he turned and looked at me and made a sign.”

It was one of the simplest of the Marauder signs, since it had to be remembered by people in a panic and flashed on the go as the scout dashed by the hiding place. It was the index fingers of each hand, raised and lowered once, and it meant, *Run*.

“I knew, I could feel, what he was going to do. I turned and I shouted – you know how I can do...”

*I know*

She had raised her voice to its fullest trained limit and told everyone, everyone who could hear, to get off the field, to get away. She herself had snatched up Harry and Ginny, who had pelted out of the crowd to her as people broke off their battles and Apparated away. The compressive rush of Apparition had deposited them on a hilltop overlooking the small valley where they’d battled.

Ginny had swept sweaty hair from her face and looked over her shoulder at the pitifully small group behind them. “Where’s Ron?” she’d said.

Then the valley had exploded in flames.

*He didn’t leave. He wouldn’t leave her.*

“No, he wouldn’t leave her.” They’d been found, afterwards, completely untouched by the flames. Remus had remembered that much of himself, it seemed. Ron must have died of smoke inhalation, because neither his robes nor Hermione’s were even singed. Of Remus and Danger themselves, and the Inferius which had been Draco, only ashes remained. The rest of the Inferi, and the Death Eaters who hadn’t been intelligent enough to see what the other side’s retreat meant, had undergone the same fate. “Though I don’t quite understand why he left them, and not himself.”

*You know Remus. He always hated the spotlight. This way, Ron and Hermione get all the attention – the Romeo and Juliet angle, the young lovers whose lives were blighted by the tragedy of war...*

“That makes sense.” Aletha yawned. Her eyelids were beginning to droop. “It’s a good thing there’s not much more. I don’t know how much longer I can stay awake.”

*Finish it up, then.*

They had been standing on the hilltop, dumbstruck by the inferno below, when Ginny had whirled around and screamed, shoving Aletha away with one hand and Harry with the other. Aletha had seen herself silhouetted in green as she fell, and knew before she hit the ground what she would see when she turned. What she hadn’t expected was the triumphant smile on Ginny’s face.

*What did Harry look like?*

“Quiet.” Aletha took off her cloak and bundled it up. “He had his quiet look on. The one he used to get when you and Remus would tell him about his parents, and about what he had to do someday. He walked up to Voldemort and stared him in the eye, and held out his hand. ‘Give it,’ he said. Just that. Just, ‘Give it.’ Like you might say to a dog.”

*And Voldemort gave it to him.*

Aletha nodded, laying her rolled cloak next to the gravestone, then sitting with her back against the granite slab. “He just handed over his wand. I’ve never seen anything like it. Harry took it, and he broke it over his knee, and then he took out his own wand and broke that too. ‘You don’t deserve to die by magic,’ he said. ‘You deserve to bleed.’ And he took his dagger out. ‘Come and bleed.’”

The wind picked up, whistling long and low in amazement.

“Voldemort had a dagger too. A little, wicked thing, and I could tell it was poisoned, but Harry knew that too. He was beautiful, Sirius. He was playing with Voldemort, like a wolf playing with a rabbit. And Voldemort knew it. He knew he was going to lose. Harry marked him four places before Voldemort even got close.”

*How did it end?*

Aletha closed her eyes, thinking. “Voldemort backed up, as if he was going to run. But he wasn’t. He was getting ready. He charged Harry, and faked one way and stabbed him in the arm the other. But Harry was ready for him. He got him as he went by. In the back.”

A huge gust of wind shook all the trees in the park, sending water droplets pattering to the ground in a noise very like applause.

“I held him. He knew what was happening, and he wasn’t afraid. ‘Come soon,’ he told me. ‘You’ll be the only one missing, and it won’t be right without you.’” Aletha brushed her fingers against her cheek. “He kissed me goodnight just like he used to do. And I took him and Ginny home together when it was over. I think they’d have liked that.”

*They did. Don’t worry.*

“I’m not.” Aletha yawned. “Too tired to worry. I think it’s time to sleep now.”

*It most certainly is.*

Aletha stretched out on the new grass, cushioning her head on the cloak. "I wonder if they'll turn me into a hero too?" she said sleepily. "Famous Mother and Healer Survives War and Dies of Grief?"

"Don't be silly. What do you have to grieve for?"

Aletha rolled over and smiled. "That didn't take long."

"No, it never does. Not when you're ready." Sirius reached up to her and stroked her face. "Feeling better?"

"Yes. Much."

They shared a long, lingering kiss. After all, there was no worry about time now.

After a minute, or a day, or a century, Aletha pulled away. "Well, aren't you going to show me around?" she asked sternly. "Give me the tour and tell me what's new?"

"How about what's old? Some old friends, say? The ones who got us into this whole mess in the first place?"

Aletha chuckled. "Yes, how does Harry like his parents?"

Sirius rolled his eyes. "James and Harry in the same heaven. God help us all."

"Oh, He does." Aletha accepted her husband's hand to help her to her feet, then slid her arm around his waist. "He very obviously does."

The path beneath their feet led them to a white house, with a tree growing in the front yard and two in the back, and savory smells and sweet music and laughter coming from inside it, and Meghan running out the door to meet them.

And they were expected, and it was very good.

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The Tomb of the Heroes, built from three different colors of marble, stands in Godric's Hollow to this day. Nine bodies lie within it, and the ashes of three within a golden urn, and on top burns an eternal flame for those who gave their lives in the Second War against Voldemort.

Aletha thinks it is very ugly, and in bad taste. The others tell her it is her own fault for being in such a hurry that she did not stop to tell the Ministry how to build it. It is her one regret.

"Maybe someday the blasted thing will get blown up by pranksters," she says sometimes. "And they'll have to rebuild it in white, to save money..."

James and Sirius and Fred and George have been trying to inspire small boys with this desire for years, and have a couple of very likely prospects. So if you should desire to see the Tomb of the Heroes, you had better go now. It may not be there next week, or next month, or next year.

But is that not true of us all?