The Battle for Hogwarts is long over, the school mostly rebuilt. Hermione Granger is returning to school for her seventh and final year as a Hogwarts student. Today is her first defense Against the Dark Arts class, taught by the first Muggle professor in Hogwarts history, John Constantine.
In Which Hermione Granger meets Professor John Constantine

Hermione Granger eased herself into her seat beside Ginny Weasley. It was the very first Defense Against the Dark Arts class since Hogwarts school of Witchcraft and Wizardry had reopened. Hermione thought of Harry and Ron, both working with the Ministry of Magic to rebuild after the war. She missed them terribly, but she needed to finish her education.

She'd been scandalized when she heard a Muggle would be teaching the class, then mystified when the Daily Prophet reported it was a Muggle who could do magic, had been targeted by Umbridge's malevolent racial purity program, and escaped 10 dementors and 5 Death Eaters, killing most the dementors in the process. She looked up at the chalkboard.

Welcome Class

Lesson 1: Surviving the Killing Curse

1. Be Harry Potter, that bastard's harder to kill than a certain frigin' Plant Elemental.
2. Duck.
3. Dodge. (These are different actions)
4. Roll. (Still different)
5. Using arcane blood magic to make an amulet to connect you to the protective powers of the amulet of Yendor.
6. Steal the Amulet of Yendor. (Coming back from the dead is easier)

Lesson 2: Reviving Someone hit by the Killing Curse

1. Reverse the potassium binding effect of Avada Kedavra and restarting neural activity with and without magic.
2. Bring back the Dead. (Will be covered by guest lecturer Harry Dresden after Christmas)

"Is that supposed to be a joke?" she whispered to Ginny.

"I don't know," Ginny replied. "This guy got into the thick of the war and probably took out more Death Eaters than any two wizards or witches combined before the Battle for Hogwarts. Think of how many times the killing curse must have been lobed at him."

The bell rang, signaling the start of class. A few seconds later a door on the far wall opened and a man walked in. He ground out a still smouldering cigarette in an ash tray on his desk, looked up at the class and smiled. His hair was short and dirty-blond and he wore a battered trench coat.

"Afternoon," he said. "You can call me professor Constantine. Let's get started. You lot know a lot already, else you'd be dead, but this old dog's still got a few tricks to teach."
Professor John Constantine had just introduced himself to his first Defense Against the Dark Arts class. Hermione Granger was in the front row.

"Right, let's get started then. To save time, let's start with what you lot know about the Killing Curse."

Hermione Granger raised her hand. When she was younger this was an eager, almost desperate gesture, a chance to talk about the fascinating things she’d been learning from her books. In the last few years that bubbly, fascinated eagerness has been replaced by the cool, calm, collected demeanor of quiet, and well deserved confidence. Hers was not the only hand that went up, but when others noticed Hermione Granger was raising her hand to answer a question about Avada Kedavra, they all lowered theirs.

"Well then," Professor Constantine said with an appraising air. "I suppose everyone wants you to be the one what answers. Your name is…?"

"Hermione Granger."

Constantine raised an eyebrow and pointed at the chalkboard where he'd written the name "Harry Potter" and said, "As in the brains behind this bloke?"

Hermione glared. "Harry Potter is a very capable and skilled wizard, one of the best. I would thank you to not disparage my friends by insinuating I think for them."

Constantine let out a low whistle. "Sorry love, didn't mean-"

"And before I answer your question, I have one of my own. What do you know about me?"

Constantine smirked, leaned against the desk and lit a fresh cigarette. "Well, there's the trick love, there's two questions in that one. The surface question, what do I know about you, and the implied one, who the Hell do I think I am teaching at a magic school. I'll level with you on the second one. I'm here because nobody else had time to take the job, and I have a few, heh, special skills unknown to the Wizarding world as you know it. As for what do I know about you, I know you were at the top of the short list for teaching this class, and I'm near the bottom of the long one."

He blew out a stream of cigarette smoke, and it was drawn to the ash tray on his desk. He noticed the eyes of some of the students following the smoke. "Wonderful device that. Bloke named Flitwick whips them up. Met him the other day. Grand chap. Course he's a teacher here so you've all known him for years. Now, Miss Granger, I believe I asked you a question."

"Avada Kedavra, also known as the Killing Curse, is one of the three unforgivable curses. The spell was originally created during the Bubonic Plague to kill the plague pathogens. An incomplete comprehension of germ theory lead to the accidental discovery that it could also be used to kill the patient. Muggles still have a cultural memory of Avada Kedavra in the word "Abracadabra," a nonsense word employed by illusionists as part of the distraction phase of their act. The killing curse kills instantly. The only known counter-curse involves someone willingly dying to protect you."

"Anyone else got something to add?" Constantine said.
Ginny Weasley raised her hand.

"Yes? Name, rank and serial number."

Ginny stood, smirked, and said, "Ginny Weasley, founding member of Dumbeldore's army and like most the students here, veteran of the Battle for Hogwarts." The open challenge in her tone was unmistakable. "I wanted to add that the healing version of the spell adds the words "Ala kazam."

She sat down. Hermione nodded to her approvingly.

Constantine blew out a stream of smoke then said, "Right, that's 'bout what most folks know about it. Bit more than I knew about. I first saw it in action during the orgy of violence when your 'Ministry of Magic' fell to that Voldemort arse." He paused for a moment for the round of gasps from the students who were still afraid of the name. "Oh come off it," he said. "Bastard's dead. Not just dead but so splintered up 'es not coming back without Hell itself rising up to put him back together, and believe me, he's nowhere near bad or dangerous enough to get that kind 'o attention. Be easier to train up a new 'Dark Lord' than put that miserable failure like that back together."

"With all due respect-" Hermione began.

"Yes, a failure. He spent less time in power than the Prime Minister who porked a pig, ran his 'Death Eaters' like a grade school bully and the only reason he got giants, werewolves and a few other creatures on his side was because you lot were treating them like such doss to begin with. He even got himself fixated on a way of keeping alive that ripped him up and cost him the ability to do whole reams of magic he never bothered to care 'bout because it doesn't need a wand."

"The killing curse?" Ginny asked.

"Right, so I was nosing around the rubble of a bridge collapse. The whole thing smelled off to me, and given the access I was granted to the site, someone in the 'Muggle' government who knew my reputation thought the same. I'd just found some bits 'o ragged cloak when I heard some nutter yell 'Obliviate!' Instinct told me to duck. Good thing I did too because a man in a black cloak and a golden mask landed, pointed his wand in the direction of the 'Obliviate' I'd heard and yelled 'Avada Kedavra' before skittering off. Well, I knew right then this was a Teacup war."

He paused for a moment, savoring the looks of confusion on the faces before him. "What, never wondered what other magic users called you lot? It's a play on the old phrase 'My cup runneth over.' See, you don't need to learn how to harness magical energy. Your bodies spit out enough of it that half of you start leaking power before all your teeth come in. Your cups run over, but being human and not a Phoenix or an elemental, that cup's not too big. It's a teacup, and most of you never learn how to refill it from a reserve other than your own flesh."

Constantine took another draw on his cigarette and continued. "I know most the medical examiners in the London area. Most tolerate me, a few hate me. Luck was on my side because the fresh corpse was autopsied by a lady I've worked with before. Body was spirited away in the night, I assume by teacups, but not before she'd gotten what she needed out of it. Now, who can tell me HOW the killing curse kills?"

Nobody answered. "Anyone?"

A Hufflepuff boy raised his hand.

"Go on," Constantine said.

"Well, it just does. It kills you right away. Stone dead."
"Yes, but how?"

"Magic?"

"No such thing as killing by magic," Constantine said, visibly annoyed. "If a troll clubs you in the head, you don't just die, you were killed by major head trauma. Someone lobs a ball of flame at you you don't die from magic, you die from being roasted like a boar on a spit. What does the killing curse actually DO to kill you?"

He waited a moment, then said causally, "Didn't expect any of you to know. Nobody did until those tests came back."

"So you know how it kills, so what?" Said one of the students.

Constantine opened his trench coat and took out a pre-packaged syringe. The needle, visible through the sterile packaging, was long and evil looking. He set the package on the table, looked up at the class and said, "That there's a cardiac needle. Use it right and you can revive most blokes hit by the killing curse, assuming you get to them fast enough. I know it works, because I've used it twice to save me mates and it's been used to save my life once."

He leaned back and crossed his arms, the cigarette dangling from the corner of his mouth.

Hermione raised her hand.

Constantine smiled and said, "No surprise there. Go on."

"You're claiming," she said, "That the syringe contains something that counteracts the effect of the killing curse at a chemical level. You inject it into the heart? I assume you need to do CPR for a period afterwards, as the heart is stopped by the killing curse."

"Potassium," Constantine said. "The curse binds up all the potassium in the brain stem and knocks your natural pacemaker offline. End result's your brain's cut off from oxygen and the rest of the body. The first thing we tried was injecting potassium ions in saline and doing CPR to get it from the heart to the brain, but that wasn't enough. It wasn't working. It was a friend of mine with an insulin pump who showed us the missing ingredient."

"Insulin pump?" several students asked, confused.

"Oh honestly," Hermione said, "It's covered in the Muggle Studies class."

Constantine briefly, and with great exasperation, explained what an insulin pump was and continued.

"Anyway, he'd rigged his pump to inject the potassium if his heart stopped. He screwed up. Instead of potassium from a separate chamber he also got an insulin overdose. Two for one. Caused a seizure during CPR. That's what kick-started his brain again. As the war waged the next few months, those of us on what you'd call the 'Muggle' front lines proved you can bring someone back from the killing curse if you jab a needle in their heart, break their ribs with CPR and give them a seizure. It's brutal, but it works about 80% of the time."

He paused for a moment for the effect to sink in. "Course, you still have a 20% chance of staying dead, and that's if there's someone next to you with the right tools and training. Not getting hit is even better. That's why we're going to spend the rest of class practicing how to get out of the way of someone trying to hit you with a spell. Given what you've all survived I expect this to be pretty quick. No mats, and keep your robes on. You lot use too much stone in your buildings to practice on anything else."
Ginny and Hermione left the class bruised and sore. Over the course of the day an increasing number of Hogwarts students began moving with the same tender aspects of someone who'd badly bruised their bodies. A few disappeared into the hospital wing for dislocated shoulders. Even the first years got Constantine's evasion lessons.

That evening in the common room, Hermione sat nursing her bruises, writing a letter to Ron.

"What you up to?" Asked Neville Longbottom. He too, had returned to Hogwarts for a final year, seeing as how his previous seventh year had been spent largely in the Room of Requirement, operating an underground resistance to the Death Eaters.

"I'm asking Ron to look into this Constantine character. I want to know if his potassium and insulin cocktail really CAN save a killing curse victim. If not, we need to get him out of here fast."

Ron's answer arrived by express owl during lunch the next day. It read, "He's for real. Heard rumors about him when I was separated from you and Harry last year. Thought them a load of dross. Learned to other day Mundungus was one of the wizards he saved with it, so Constantine's got that against him. CPR training is going to be mandatory for Aurors and a couple of those damn syringes are being added to the standard equipment kit. Harry's talking about vests with built-in de-frb-u-somethings and some other kit to automate it."

Hermione sighed heavily and quickly jotted off a reply. "A defibrillator won't help because a stopped heart isn't a dysrhythmias or ventricular fibrillation. Contact the healers at Saint Mungo's and ask about spells to restart a stopped heart or amulets that can keep a heart beating normally. In muggle science it's called a 'pacemaker.' If your natural one fails they can implant a mechanical one to do the job for you, but it's nowhere near as good as a healthy natural pacemaker."

She paused for a moment and could almost hear Ron's response upon reading the letter. "How 'bout that? Not even a 'thank you,' just telling me how I'm wrong again."

"I need to work on this," she said under her breath and added to the letter. "Thank you very much Ron. I know you're busy. I just wanted to save you and Harry some research time. Love and kisses, Hermione."

She was waiting a moment for the parchment to dry when she heard Ginny's voice beside her. "Did you just sign a letter to my bother 'Love and Kisses?'" She sounded scandalized.

Hermione blushed and it occurred to her cheeks were probably as red as Ron's hair. "What of it?" Hermione said, feeling a bit sly.

"Well first, gross, that's my brother," she said, "And second, you REALLY need to work on your flirting skills."

"I would but there are no decent books about it in the library."

Ginny rolled her eyes as they left the great hall. "Anyone else would have meant that as a joke."

"Hmmm?" Hermione said, pretending not to hear.
The Many Deaths of Professor Constantine

Chapter Summary

Professor Constantine finds himself in the department of mysteries facing entities that shoot common men through with terror and dread. By his side are two members of the Order of the Phoenix and a mysterious old man whose spent his life in the Death Room.

The new Defense Against the Dark Arts professor had continued the physical spell avoidance drills. Ginny had proven exceedingly adept, something she attributed to her Quidditch training. "When you get down to the brass tacks, dodging a spell isn't that different than dodging a bludger."

Hermione had nearly taken over charms from Flitwick. He'd started class with defensive charms and Hermione, thanks to her heavy and frequent use of them during her time on the run the previous year, had some insight into useful ways some of them interacted and stacked.

"Oh My!" Flitwick had cheered. "Why, Carsen's Worry Charm is rarely used for anything other than repelling Muggles! Whatever prompted you to combine it with the Renoir Blood Churn curse?"

Hermione had blushed slightly and admitted, "Well, most my combinations were the result of careful study and analysis of how they worked, combined with some trial and error. That particular combination, I, er, I got that idea from an incident a friend had told me about in the American South. It was a tragic love story and well, the spells were defensive ones I knew well and they shared names with the two star crossed lovers."

"Ho, ho!" Flitwick had laughed. "So you managed to extend the effect of the Carsen Worry Charm to magical beings AND enhance the urgency of the worry as an homage to lost love?"

After class Ginny had cornered Hermione. "You tried that after Ron left you guys, didn't you?"

Hermione had looked at Ginny with a lost expression, her eyes moist. "Yeah. Victor had told me the story during that whole fiasco with the goblet. I hadn't believed it, I mean, it involved vampires and a Muggle who fought magic, but when Ron left, I just, I just thought a lot about lost loves, and how Renoir had died. I guess I really identified with Carsen just then."

"I'd like to hear the story," Ginny had said.

That's how Saturday morning found Hermione telling a love story about a librarian and a vampire to Ginny and several other Gryffindor girls. Being Hermione, she'd brought supplemental research on the Judas Chalice and vampire lore.

That same Saturday found Professor Constantine in London using a secret elevator hidden in a phone booth.

"Cell phones are going to make this damn conspicuous," he said as the elevator began to descend. "In a few years this is going to be harder to miss than that damn blue police call box."

The witch in the phone booth with him eyed him suspiciously. "What blue call box?"

"Oh, nothing love," he said, flashing her a smile. "Another world, one as hidden from yours as yours
is from the Muggles."

"Are you implying there are secrets beyond the wizarding world?" The witch asked, incredulous and haughty.

Constantine laughed good naturally. "Implying Love? ’el no. I'm stating it plainly."

Before long Constantine was marching into the Department of Mysteries. An elderly wizard with a purple robe had greeted him in the room of doors. "This way," the man had said, "This way Professor." He was surprisingly spry for his age, and Constantine wondered if it was a disguise, or a side effect of the surpassing longevity some of these old buggers seemed to manage. Constantine noted wryly that his battered trench coat seemed to fit in comfortably with the eclectic assortment of wizard robes on the people he passed in the hallways. There was something about a battered trench coat that let you blend into the background just about anywhere. This was very useful in Constantine’s usual line of work.

"My name is Edgar Dearborn," the elderly wizard said. "Been working at the Ministry for a long time now."

"Name rings a bell," Constantine said.

"I had family in the thick of the last Wizard war," he said, "You might have heard of them. Me, I've been tending the death room for so long..." he drifted off and Constantine got the feeling he didn't want to say any more.

He was lead into a stone room. The floor was cut into descending steps focused on a stone dais. On the dais was a cracked, fragile looking stone archway hung with a ragged cloth. Sitting on the edge of the dais were two dour looking men. One was middle aged, the other quite young. They both had red hair. They looked up at him as he entered and watched as he descended the steps towards them.

"Well then," Constantine said, "I haven't seen a death door in years."

The two men looked over their shoulders at the archway.

"You're awfully casual about it," the middle aged man said.

"Not at all, I'm impressed. These things are rare."

"What do you know about them?" Edgar said from behind him.

Constantine spoke as he walked. "To start, this whole place was probably build around it. The odds of happening to find one right where you happen to be building a secret magic stronghold are, well, it's not going to happen. Some folks can see death, or personifications of death, moving though, so they find where it starts and build something to honor the spot. Sometimes it's a pool, sometimes it's a bridge, whatever it is, it's where death dwells. The Greeks went so far as to route an underground river past one. It's a spot where this world and the next run thin and makes a convenient place for death to come and go to collect souls."

He turned his head, as if following someone walking the other way. "G'day love."

"You can see her too?" Edgar Dearborn said, shocked.

"Yep. She's my favorite death. Hope when my time comes again she's the one to collect me. Make the impending damnation a bit softer if my hand's held by a lovely lass, eh?"
Constantine stopped and stepped back, letting someone pass. Edgar did the same.

Constantine looked up and said to a point further up the aisle, "Sir."

"You talk to them," Edger said, amazed. "And they answer! How?"

"With their mouths," Constantine said. "What, you never tried chatting with Death? It doesn't boost you up in the queue. If you can SEE death walking about might as well strike up a conversation. Fascinating folks, death and reapers."

The younger of the red haired men spoke, "Are you saying Death and the Grim Reaper are different people?"

"You can't see them, can you?" Constantine said.

"No, they can't, Bless them," The old man said. "The curse of seeing death is thankfully rare. It's why tending this room is one of the few jobs I can get."

"Curse? Why, some of my best blokes are reapers. Nice chaps, always ready to lend a hand, get bored on Earth, like to liven things up. Why, when I was in the Americas last I met up with this lovely reaper named George. She'd just been put in charge of her group and was piss all about it. Can't say as I could blame her. One was a useless bloke spent most his time getting high. I know what it's like to have to rely on someone like that. Another was so up in her own arse with her ego she couldn't reap without checking her makeup. She had this other woman with her though, a cop, and I tell you she was a spitfire, lots of fun to work with."

The younger red haired man put his face in his hands and quietly swore, "Merlin's Balls."

The older red haired man clapped the younger on the back. "Look on the bright side, He's far better than most the people who've taught Defense Against the Dark Arts in YEARS. Why, I'd wager Constantine here is in the same class as Lupin and Snape."

Constantine had reached the dais. "Ron" he said, holding his hand out to the younger man. They shook. "Arthur," he said, offering his hand to the other. Ron's handshake had been perfunctory, but Arthur's was an engulfing double-fisted enthusiasm. "I must admit, this was something of a test. We'd heard about some of the things you'd discussed with other teachers at Hogwarts and needed to see how you reacted to seeing, well, this." He pulled a hand away from the handshake to gesture at the stone arch. He looked over Constantine's shoulder and said, "How did he do Edgar?"

Edgar wasn't paying attention. He was watching an invisible something approach them from the edge of the room. "Excuse me," he said, "Miss, yes, you with the ankh on your neck."

Edgar heard the reply, "Yes?"

"Well, it's just, I've worked here for decades, seeing you come and go, and we never struck up a conversation. We never chatted."

She smiled. "I have a bit of time. What did you want to chat about?"

"Oh, well, to tell the truth I didn't have a topic in mind. I just, it's just that, it gets terribly lonely down here and I've spent my career afraid to talk to the, well, I suppose 'people I see the most' may not be quite right."

Death sat down on one of the stone benches and smiled. The paleness of her skin was accented by black lipstick and eyeliner. Her dress was also black, the tattered garb of an urban goth. "I would
"love to chat Edgar," she said.

"You know my name?"

"Well, yes. I was there when you were born and I'll be there when you die. I take you in and out of this world. It's my function."

"How did you become death?"

"I'm one of the Endless, one of the oldest. I've always been death. Constantine over there knows quite a bit about us. He was at my brother's wake."

"Death can die?"

"My brother Dream."

"Dreams are dead?"

"No, not as long as there are dreamers. A personification can die. The first Despair died, but a new Despair came in her place. It was the same when Dream died. It wasn't easy, carrying my brother to the Sunless lands."

"I... What is something you've always wanted to tell the living?"

Ron turned to his father. "Has Edgar cracked?"

"Nah," Constantine interjected. "Just talking to Death."

"He's blushing."

"Well this Death is really cute." Constantine looked over at a spot on the bench in front of Edgar. "What? You are."

Edgar asked, "Are you trying to flatter death?"

"Just statin' the bleedin' obvious."

"Well thank you John," Death replied, her voice unheard to Ron and Arthur. "It's a shame about your soul. I would have put in a good word for you with Dream. You'd have made an excellent Raven."

"Well, that chapter's not closed quite yet love," Constantine said, pulling a cigarette in his mouth.

"This is a no smoking facility," Arthur Wesley said. "Sorry, not even pipes."

"But I brought this," Constantine said, pulling Flitwick's ashtray out of another pocket.

"I swear," Arthur said, "You and Hagrid must get your coats from the same tailor."

"Eh?" Constantine replied.

Constantine and Edgar both looked towards the spot Death was sitting and listened a moment. Constantine chuckled, Edgar just looked confused.

“She's talking about 'The Hobbit,' a fiction book aboot magic. Very famous among the Muggles."

“But what's a 'pocketeses'?”
“The character she’s quoting has a friggin weird accent.”

A moment of silence later Edgar said, “Oh well then, I do hope we can chat again when you’re a bit less busy.” Both the men who could see death watched her head up the aisle to the door.

Edgar turned to Constantine and said, “Is the book worth reading?”

Constantine, who had lit a cigarette and was blowing out the first, satisfying billow of smoke replied, “Bit overrated if you ask me. Reads more like a comedy to folks what know about real trolls and wizards. Decent story though. Underdog saves the day and all that. The sequel, ‘Lord of the Rings,’ is more ambitious.”

Edgar thought a moment and asked, “Is there a version of Death in it?”

The chat with Death the Endless must have loosened the tongues of the other deaths, because Edgar was startled by a booming laugh from right behind him. He turned and saw a looming figure much taller than he, cloaked in black, a massive scythe clutched in fingers of bone.

“Not in that series, not one that walks around, but the Elves, who can’t die, just reincarnate in their native lands, make it clear they see death as a gift given to men. The men, seeing immortals all about, see me more as a doom.”

Edgar had been staring at the face under the cowl. He spoke, still obviously distracted by what he was seeing. “I expect it causes a lot of trouble in the book, like it does in the real world, trying to escape Death.”

“Ringwraiths are worse than Horcruxes,” the looming Death replied. “I know, I’ve had to collect them in my world.”

“Wait, your world?”

Constantine spoke, “Most world’s only have a few kinds of death. Sometimes a death from another world has to cross over to collect a soul that jumped realities. In general, your soul tends to go back where it came from, one way or another.”

The looming Death grumbled to himself saying something that sounded like “Damn Hel.”

“Pardon sir, what was that?” Edgar asked.

The looming Death seemed to smile somehow, despite his lack of lips. “I like you,” he said. “Most people are too scared of me to talk. It made it very difficult when I had to substitute for the Hogfather.”

Constantine slapped his leg. “Ah Ha! I THOUGHT I knew where you were from. Chasing Rincewind again?”

Death sighed. “No, no. An explorer tried to dangle off the edge of the disc to see the Great A’Tuin and fell. He’d prepared a spell to yank him back home, but it misfired and shot him to this weird, abnormal ‘round’ world instead. He got himself mixed up with a band of librarians and is expected to die heroically in about an hour.”

“Librarians?” Edgar asked.

“The kind where there used to only be one?” Constantine asked.
Death sighed again. “It’s like he’s franchising. Did you know he and his guardian showed up in my realm, iced a troll and got her to work out some equation for subduing a magic pearl in this world?”

“Wait, how would killing a troll-” Edgar began.

Death interrupted. “Trolls, and this is true all over, not just in my world, trolls are actually very intelligent, probably the smartest beings on any world, but their brains are very temperature sensitive. Why,” and the change in the tone of his voice showed he was building up to what he thought was a grand joke, “Why, if trolls built an Antarctic research base here they’d crack cold fusion in a week!” He chuckled, which had an unsurprising, yet still unsettling, clank and rattle to it.

Edgar, still examining Death’s face, said, “Sir, was that a joke, or a truth wrapped in a pun?”

“The latter.”

Edgar chuckled. “I might just cast some freezing charms on a few forest trolls on my next vacation and have a chat.”

“It’s a shame I won’t be the one to collect you when your time comes. I would enjoy a long chat with you.”

“I work here,” Edgar said, “Feel free to visit anytime.”

“I won’t be intruding?”

“Oh no,” Edgar said. “My job is to watch Death and keep the room tidy. Since it’s all stone and very dry, there’s not much tidying to do!”

“I would very much like to bring my granddaughter to meet you.”

“That would be lovely!” Edgar exclaimed.

Death reached into his cloak and pulled out a large watch that emitted puffs of steam. It was covered by a dizzying array of dials and hands. “Tea-time next Tuesday?”

Arthur and Ron stared, mouths agape, at Constantine and Edgar clearly having a natter with something they could neither see nor hear. They could however see perplexing puffs of steam emerging from where they presumed the invisible conversant was standing. Discussing the matter later, Ron would confide to his Father that the steam just made the whole scene even creepier.

“Have they gone mad?” Arthur asked.

“Don’t think so,” Ron replied. “Think I’ve seen enough madness in my time to know what it looks like. That looks like, well...” Ron’s voice drifted off.

“A chat with new friends?” Arthur primpred.

“Yes, that’s exactly it.” Ron said with some finality.

“I think someone’s leaving.”

They watched Edgar and Constantine watch someone walk out the door.

“Lot of deaths leaving, not many coming.” Ron said ominously.

They watched as Edgar seemed to be approaching yet another death when Constantine grabbed his
arm and roughly pulled him to his side. Constantine whispered furiously to Edgar and the both bowed stiffly to someone, or something, that was passing. They stayed bowed for quite a while before Constantine, peaking towards the door, sighed and said, “A Norse Death doesn’t come to London lightly. I hope she’s not after the same bloke as the Discworld Death. Hel is a very jealous death, and it’s well nigh impossible to get her to respect the convention of returning souls to their native worlds. She’d go to war with the regular Hell to get a soul she wa-” Constantine smiled and took a long drag on his cigarette. “Well now, I’d have to impress her something mighty, but that might be a workable backup plan.”

“You know, those things cause cancer,” Ron said, annoyed at how the day was going and how clueless and out of touch he felt.

“Yeah, I know,” Constantine said. Oddly, he was smiling as he said this.

“They’ll kill you dead, and even if you get help, it might come at a cost you’ll find yourself spending the rest of your life trying to settle.”

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