

# **Things Much Worse Than Death**

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## **“Things Much Worse Than Death”**

Ron raced through the door of the Shrieking Shack and spotted Bellatrix Lestrange and Lord Voldemort huddled in the corner of the room, facing Harry and Hermione.

The Dark Lord was staring, stunned and horrified, at all of his defeated Death Eaters who were wallowing and cursing, hogtied on the filthy floor.

Harry, facing his lifelong enemy at last, roared "*Accio Wands!*" and both wands flew neatly to his outstretched hand. He snapped them firmly over his knee, then turned wearily to Hermione, and asked her "What should we do with these two?"

Neville thundered down the stairs and panted, "You can do him, Harry, but let me kill her, please!"

But Hermione stared pensively at Bellatrix, who had thrown her arms around the frozen Voldemort and was sobbing passionately into his skeletal shoulder, as he patted her back automatically. After a long silence, Hermione smiled....

Two weeks later Harry, Hermione, Ron and Neville were huddled under the Invisibility Cloak in the entry of a bustling Wal-Mart Superstore somewhere in south Florida. They gazed on in delight as the former Dark Lord, dressed in a shabby nylon windbreaker with a smiley face on the lapel, shuffled out through driving rain to the shopping cart corral to fetch the carts back into the store. An immense SUV raced by and drenched him in muddy water.

Harry sighed contentedly, and they turned toward the interior of the store.

A woman in a red vest, with a fixed and horrible smile on her haggard face, mutter nastily, "Welcome to Wal-Mart! I hope your shopping today will be delightful." She shoved a dripping cart violently toward a white-haired couple that cringed away from her.

Following this performance with a keen eye, a heavysset supervisor bustled up to her, snarling, "I wanna see cheerful! And friendly! If you can't even welcome our guests right after a whole week on the job, you're

gonna be outta here, honey! And Belle, you gotta dry off those carts before you give 'em to customers."

Bellatrix scowled, her wand hand twitching convulsively, but through clenched teeth she humbly replied, "I'll try to do better, DeWanda."

A loud metallic crash made them both turn to watch a long train of dripping carts clang through the center door. It was followed by a jaunty You-Know-Who, who smiled ingratiatingly toward them.

DeWanda beamed at him. "Tom, you're a sweetheart! The best entry level employee that's ever applied to this Superstore!"

She stumped toward him; sighing, and said confidentially, "I wish your wife could give us some of your can-do attitude, Tommy. I know you both need these jobs to make the rent on your doublewide, but she's just not showin' us her Wal-Mart team spirit. Can you talk to her for me?"

Voldemort flinched, then sidled reluctantly toward the fuming Bellatrix and wheedled in his high, cold voice, "Bella, my angel! It was this or the Dementor's Kiss for us. You said that you loved me, and that this way we could have a life together, as Muggles. There's no going back now, so let's make the best of it, all right, Sweetums? Love monkey? Let's see that glorious smile, Bellatrix, it's not so bad."

Bellatrix stood rigid, insane fury blazing in her narrowed eyes, and a more intelligent man would have known better than to continue.

Voldemort continued jauntily, "We'll do amazing things in this Muggle world, you'll see! We're off to a marvelous start here at Wal-Mart, and if things work out, in six months I shall begin assistant manager training, and you'll be promoted to the Customer Service desk. We'll both get a substantial raise then and don't forget, we get a discount too, Muffin, ten percent off!"

He smacked her bottom affectionately, and hurried off to suck up some more to his supervisor, ever the ambitious Slytherin in action.

As Harry, Ron and Hermione were sliding out the door, ready to Apparate back home, Bella's passionate howl echoed through the doors into the weeping skies. "I'm ready for the Dementor! I CHANGED MY MIND!"

"You know Hermione," Ron said thoughtfully, "I really believed that having them groom show poodles for the rest of their lives was a better career, but you were right. This is bloody perfect!"

