

The Search For Nirvana

Enlightenment.

It's such a strange word. It's not something I ever expected.

Yet here I am.

About to attain Nirvana.

"Harry?"

I jerk out of my trance and look down. "What?" I snarl.

"Hey," Ron says, holding up his hands.

I sigh. "I was only about to attain Nirvana," I explain.

"I didn't know you were a fan," Dean chips in. I think it's obvious: I'm surrounded by idiots.

"What do you want, Ron?" I ask.

"You've not moved all night," Ron says, looking around. "It's not natural."

"Neither are phobias," I grunt.

"Huh?" Ron asks.

"Phobias," I say again. "Did you know that you have a spider on your shoulder?"

Ron jumps, slapping his shoulder frantically, before he stops and glares at me. "That wasn't very nice."

"Neither was interrupting my search for eternal bliss," I agree. "So, apart from my habit of sitting still for hours, was there anything else?"

"Well, yeah," Neville chimes in nervously, "about that sitting..."

"What about it?"

"Most people don't do it on the ceiling."

I stare down at him. "Where else am I going to be able to sit, out of the way, and not be bothered by anyone?"

"Behind your curtains on your bed?" Seamus suggests.

"My bed is way too soft for that sort of thing," I explain. "Besides, I find it peaceful up here; it gives me a new perspective."

"Well," Ron sighs. "It's time for breakfast."

I look at my watch and nod. I stand and walk to the door. One of the problems with walking along the ceiling is that the doors aren't designed for me, so I have to literally climb through them.

"Feel like joining me?" I ask Ron.

He shakes his head wildly. "You're nutters."

"Nutters?" I muse. "Possibly. But walking on the ceiling has little to do with that."

I drift down so that I can get out of the common room and walk next to Ron. Well, my head is anyway. As the Hogwarts' ceiling is bloody high, if I walked on that, I'd never actually get anywhere at all. So I fake a floor about five feet above Ron.

I can see him fidgeting and wishing that Hermione was here. Of course she's not. She's off saving the whales, or elves, or whatever has awakened her fervour today. She was trying to talk to us about it yesterday, but I was meditating and Ron... Well, Ron was being Ron, and he was either thinking that the best way he can ask her out is by annoying the snot out of her, or he really doesn't care. Either way, he managed to annoy her more than I could, and she's gone off to prove us wrong, again.

found out later that it was the latter. He's interested in Hannah Abbott these days.

Surprisingly, we're one of the first to breakfast, so I reach down for a piece of toast and cross my legs.

I close my eyes and let myself relax. I sink deeper into myself, searching for that perfect serenity.

"Where is Potter, Mr Weasley?" A sneering voice interrupts me, and I open my eyes again.

As I look down, I see Ron pointing straight up.

Snape turns his head, and this is a really bad angle for him. Not that I've found any good angles for him, and to be honest, I don't want to try either.

"Potter!" he roars.

You know, I don't think that he's ever actually said my name. He's sneered it, shouted it, smirked it, spat it, blurted it, splurged it, and even once, in one of those memories I will need a psychologist to remove, drawled it.

"Professor?" I ask politely. In my search, I've drifted up to the ceiling, and it's actually quite a long way down.

"What on earth are you doing?"

"Trying to reach Nirvana," I explain.

He looks blank, and his face goes red. Which isn't a pretty combination.

"Get down immediately," he yells.

"Why?" I ask him.

He splutters and spits and starts to shake in rage. He's got a really short fuse.

"Twenty po..."

"Professor Snape?" Dumbledore asks.

"Headmaster?" Snape turns, managing to turn another shade of red.

"Don't you think the search for the ultimate tranquillity should be encouraged?"

Snape pales, and it's not really an improvement. "Of course," he says silkily in a way that clearly states that he'll get me later.

He walks away and sits down.

"What I would like to know, Harry," Dumbledore continues, "is exactly how you are sitting on the ceiling?"

I can see that the other students are wondering the same thing.

"By clearing your mind of all earthly thoughts and feelings, you transcend the physical and become one with your magic. What is magic but an expression of thoughts and feelings, standardised by the repetitive nature of physical action?"

The last time I saw that many blank looks was when Fudge proclaimed himself a hero. Of course, that was followed by a lot of sniggering. This is just endless blank looks.

"Of course," Dumbledore says slowly, as if he knew it all along. Which is an act. His eyes don't twinkle the same way when you're upside down. It gives you a new perspective on him.

I nod at him and continue. "I can, of course turn it off." I do, and there are plenty of shrieks as I drop like a stone. A particularly non-aerodynamic stone.

A foot before I hit the ground I turn it back on again and stop, dead. The stopping itself isn't that hard. Keeping my clothes from falling over my head – that is more difficult.

Dumbledore's mouth moves, but no sound comes out. I like him shocked, so I pull my wand out of my pocket and throw it at Ron. "Look after that for me, mate."

Ron's looking at me like he's just seen the light. I'm presuming that it's a different light to the one I am seeking. It looks like he thinks that whatever I am doing is worth it because Dumbledore is speechless, Snape is enraged, and McGonagall, well, she's pursing her lips in that way that says she thinks she should be mad, but is trying to hide a smile.

"Give me a shout when it's time for lessons," I ask Ron politely and shut my eyes again.

Once more, I start my search.

It doesn't seem like more than a second, before my search is interrupted again, but at least this time I asked for it.

I walk down, as if on upside down stairs, and then walk along next to Ron as before.

“Hermione’s going to be upset,” Ron predicts.

“Oh?” I ask, wondering if Ron has tapped into a hitherto-unknown source of knowledge and understanding.

“Yeah,” he nodded. “She hates missing things.”

Obviously not.

The first lesson of the day is Defence with Kingsley Shacklebolt. He’s the one who’s been teaching me meditation. It was supposed to be a way of allowing me to deal with my guilt. It went a little further than that, actually, and has turned into an obsession for me.

I sit comfortably above my desk and wait patiently. Hermione walks in and sits next to me, her head down, and I don’t think she actually notices me. She’s still annoyed at us.

He walks in, and I wonder if he knows he needs a shave again. He’s got some stubble on the top of his head. He stops, blinks repeatedly, and shakes his head.

“Well,” he starts, “has everyone done their homework?”

Most people nod, apart from Hermione, who’s now staring at me, her irritation forgotten. It looks like she’s itching to say something to me, but is fighting her inbuilt propriety.

“Harry,” Shacklebolt says, “why don’t you come up here and demonstrate?”

I shrug and walk over to the front and sit calmly. I close my eyes and nod.

I hear him cast a spell, but I don’t care. I let the magic hit me, using it to calm me. I feel like this is it, that this is the time, this is the moment when I will achieve my goal. I block out everything, everyone, even the sound of my heart beating, the feel of my blood pulsing through my veins, and the sensation of each breath I take.

It’s there. I can see it. It’s alive. It’s perfect.

I can see magic when I am like this, but it’s distracting to me. I need to learn to block it out. I need to stop it. I don’t think I need Kingsley’s magic anymore, so I send it back to him. I don’t think it will do him any harm; he should be able to handle his own spells.

“Harry!” Hermione screeches, and I open my eyes.

Kingsley’s shaking on the floor in agony.

I sigh and kiss Nirvana goodbye again. It’s just not my day.

“What’s wrong with him?” I ask, a little curious.

“He cast the Cruciatus curse at you,” Ron whispered, his eyes flicking between me and the fallen professor so fast that it has to hurt.

“Ahhh,” I say and wave my hand. Kingsley stops shaking. I didn’t expect him to use that. That’s illegal. “Would someone like to go and get Pomfrey?” I request.

Neville bolts like Trevor is about to be hit by a car.

“No one can block the Unforgivables,” Hermione states in that way of hers. You know, like ‘No one can Apparate into Hogwarts,’ or any sentence that contains the words ‘Hogwarts: A History’.

“Indeed,” I agree, taking the path of least resistance.

“You blocked the curse,” Hermione states again. “And sent it back to Professor Shacklebolt.”

“It’s the sound of one hand clapping,” I agree. “Two statements. Both true. Yet one is false.”

Hermione actually turns cross-eyed as she tries to decipher my comments. Good luck to her; I’ll tell her later that I’ve not got a clue what it means either, but it sounds like I do.

Neville arrives back with our wonderful nurse and the Headmaster in tow.

“What happened here?” Dumbledore asks.

Instantly, everyone starts to shout – well, apart from me, obviously. I just watch him emotionlessly. Dumbledore should know better than to ask such an open question.

“Wait,” Dumbledore says, holding his hand up. “Ms Granger?”

“Professor Shacklebolt was testing out Harry’s shield,” she starts to explain. “Harry had managed to block everything, so Professor Shacklebolt

decided that he would try to get through to Harry by casting the Cruciatus Curse.

"When he cast it, it seemed to hit Harry and bounce off, and then hit Professor Shacklebolt. We tried to help but couldn't, so we asked Harry, who stopped the curse."

"Harry?" Professor Dumbledore asked.

"I was so close to Nirvana," I sigh. I realise now that I shouldn't have turned off his magic. I should have used it.

"About Professor Shacklebolt?" Dumbledore prods.

I look at him, confused. Doesn't he realise that Nirvana is the highest state of mind one can attain?

"Yes?" I ask.

"What happened to him?"

"Oh," I sigh. "I rerouted his magic," I explain.

There's this silence in the room. If they could stay like that, I'd have no trouble meditating at all.

"You rerouted his magic?" Dumbledore asks, scratching his beard.

"Exactly," I smile at him. I'm glad that's over. I wonder if class is over as well, as the Professor is incapacitated.

We're interrupted as Snape collapses through the door, looking at Dumbledore. "The Dark Lord is calling," he gasps. This is weird because normally he wouldn't say that in front of the students. I'm guessing his cover's been blown.

"Don't worry," I say calmly. "I'll go."

I reach down and tap into the dark magic and ride it to Voldemort. I've just had an idea. I was close to Nirvana because Kingsley was cursing me. Now, Kingsley's good, but no one can beat Voldemort and the Death Eaters when it comes to a good curse.

Riding magic is a new feeling. It's exhilarating, perhaps a little too much so.

I arrive and stare at Tom.

There's another moment of perfect silence.

"Potter?" he asks. I think that's the first time I've heard him actually say my name. Who would have thought that he'd do it before Snape?

I'm guessing that the idea of his mortal enemy appearing – upside down – in the middle of his headquarters is a little farfetched.

I close my eyes and start to calm myself from the ride. It's harder this time. I lost my equilibrium.

The light is there again. It's what I've been searching for. I can tell from here that it's beautiful. It's perfection. It's calmness.

Like with Kingsley, I move toward it, but faster this time. But it's further away than I thought. And so much bigger. I thought it was small and therefore close. It just shows how far away from Nirvana I have been.

But I continue to accelerate toward it, and I presume that the other Death Eaters are now cursing me as well. They have no idea that they are pushing me forward.

I stop thinking now. I need to close down everything. I stop my heart, the beat is distracting. I stop breathing; the feel of the air in my lungs slows me down.

It's closer now. I'm almost there.

So close.

I'm slowing. Tom must have stopped them cursing me, as it wasn't working.

But it's too late for him.

I'm so close.

So very close.

...

Colour.

Sound.

Taste.

Smell.

Texture.

It's perfect.

I've never felt so calm. It's like my emotions are part of it.

I am at the Source. The Source of Nirvana. No, Nirvana is just a concept to describe the Source of all things. The Source is nothing but creation in its purest form.

I look around, and everything is the same, but different. I can see myself. I am upside down – no expression on my face. It's strange to see myself like that. I really need a haircut.

I walk over to Tom. He's cursing me, trying different ones. I reach into him and take out his magic. It's all part of the Source.

I return Tom's magic to whence it came, and there's a look of abject horror on his face. I suspect it's the same look that was on my mother's face as she watched my father die.

I move through the Death Eaters and liberate their magic as well. It's easy. They all fall to the floor, tears running down their faces.

I turn back to the Source, and I bow.

"Will I be able to come back?"

The Source doesn't answer.

"Can I stay?"

The Source doesn't answer.

And it's leaving.

I sigh and return to my body. I restart my heart, and my breathing, and everything else I shut down.

It's so far away now. Nirvana doesn't normally come so easily, and it took all the power of the Death Eaters to get me there.

And I have a decision to make.

Do I continue to search for it?

Do I dedicate my life to finding it again?

Now that I've obtained perfect bliss, do I want it again?

I open my eyes and right myself.

I don't think so. I will see it again when I die, but not before.

And so I find myself here in the middle of nowhere. Surrounded by a bunch of crying new Muggles with no idea how I can get back to Hogwarts. It's not as if I can ride the Magic back. Tom's a Muggle now.

I walk out the door and look around.

That arrogant git. Talk about hiding in plain site. He's been hiding out right next to the Weasleys'. I'll bet he's been laughing about it for ages.

I walk in through the garden and realise that things have changed. The gnomes are lining up the path and bowing towards me. This is slightly embarrassing, and I'm glad no one can see me.

I knock on the door and wait. Mrs Weasley opens the door for me.

"Harry?" she says, shocked.

"Hi," I smile. "I've just turned Voldemort into a Muggle, and I really need to get back to Hogwarts. Do you mind if I borrow your Floo?"

"Not at all," she whispered, falling back and clutching her chest.

"They're in the abandoned mansion down the street," I say casually. "You might want to let Mr Weasley know. I'm sure he would know who to tell in the Ministry."

I feel a little sorry for her, but I really want to get back to school. So I give her a quick hug. "It's over," I assure her.

I smile, walk over to the Floo and hop into it. A judicious amount of Powder, and I tumble through the network. It seems to take a lot longer than normal, before I appear in the Three Broomsticks.

"Is it true?" I'm asked immediately.

"Is what true?" I ask Madam Rosmerta as I dust myself down.

"That you've defeated Voldemort."

I blink at her. "How did you know that?"

"Molly Weasley just broadcasted it."

"She can do that?" I ask.

"Of course," she replies.

Another of those things I missed growing up as a Muggle, I guess. But at least it explains why it took me so long to get here.

"Well, I need to get back to school," I explain.

"Can I buy you a drink first?" she asks.

"Maybe at the weekend," I smile. "I need to get back to school, and I don't want to get into more trouble for drinking."

"You just defeated Voldemort," she whispers. "I don't think you'll be in any trouble."

I've just realised that she can say Voldemort. I guess the idea of Tom the Muggle isn't quite as scary as Voldemort.

I shrug and walk out the door, heading toward the school.

People are coming out of the houses and forming a path for me. Which is strange. But they aren't stopping me, so I ignore them.

I approach the gates at the entrance to the grounds of Hogwarts and walk through them. The crowd is following me now.

There's the sound of many hooves, and I can see the Thestrals running toward me, the Centaurs next to them. They stop, lining the path. As I walk past, they lower their heads and bow to me.

I've just realised that my life is never going to be the same. All I wanted was to reach Nirvana. Everything else was a by-product of that.

I don't think anyone will believe that.

The school is coming out to meet me. And there is still this silence. They spread out in front of the school, leaving me to walk to Dumbledore, Ron, and Hermione.

"I see you're the right way up," Dumbledore remarks.

I nod; his powers of observation are outstanding.

"I was wondering if you would put some rumours to rest for me?"

"I did it," I say. "I reached Nirvana."

"Congratulations," Dumbledore replies, his eyes twinkling like never before. "But I was wondering about Voldemort."

"Voldemort doesn't exist."

"Can you elaborate a little?"

"Tom Riddle, a Muggle with delusions of grandeur, is in the empty mansion near the Weasleys'."

"So it's true," Dumbledore says loudly. "Voldemort has been turned into a Muggle?"

"It is," I agree. "But I'd rather talk about the Source."

"The Source?" Dumbledore tries to ask, but he can't. There's too much noise. The students, well, most of them, a few Slytherins aren't looking too impressed, are cheering, as is the crowd. The Centaurs are bellowing, and the Thestrals are banging their hooves and neighing.

Ron rushes toward me and jumps on me. "You did it!" he screams.

"I know," I smile. "Reaching Nirvana is so amazing."

Hermione reaches out and pulls me up. "I can't believe you did it without us!" she half-scolds me, before hugging me tight.

She's over her irritation of me... brilliant!

The house-elves have started appearing, and it looks like there's going to be a killer party. The Professors are mingling with the students, and everyone is mingling with the people from Hogsmeade. The Thestrals and the Centaurs have left, which is a pity, because I would have liked to talk to them.

Ron and Hermione are still not happy with each other, but at least I know what we were arguing about now. And it really isn't that important.

"Anyway," Ron says casually, "I'm going to go and talk to the Hufflepuffs."

"Hufflepuff," I correct for him.

"Well, yeah," he grins and gives me a quick hug, in that way of his that he thinks is manly. It's not as if hugging your friend is a sign of your sexuality, but it's Ron. Maybe he can relax if he does get together with Hannah.

"What about you?" I ask Hermione.

"What about me?" she asks, as we watch the party kick into life.

"A special boy?" I'm guessing that she hasn't spent all that time in the library alone. Maybe we should have talked about it, but we didn't. The status quo is a hard thing to change, but we have changed it now and we will all benefit from that.

She smiles and nods.

"Well, go find him then," I encourage. "This is the time for fun and happiness." And not the time for someone who would prefer to talk about the Source.

"Are you sure?" she asks, looking reluctant to leave me, like the very best of friends that she is.

"Of course," I smile honestly.

She gives me a proper hug and walks off. I watch her go and sigh softly. This isn't what I expected. I let my smile turn wry as I realise that I am different.

The search has changed things for me, and I don't think they will ever be able to truly understand. Ron and Hermione are the best friends I could ask for, but I've changed, and I don't think they realise yet just how much.

They will realise, but not today.

I sigh again as Fudge, accompanied by the press and some Aurors, pushes his way through the crowd. Dumbledore has seen them and is heading this way as well.

"Harry!" Fudge says delightedly, as if he had spent the last few years helping me out instead of standing in my way.

"Fudge?" I query dryly.

"Congratulations on defeating Voldemort, my dear boy" he crows loudly, moving to put an arm around me.

I slide to one side casually and bend to brush some imaginary grass off my shoe.

Fudge overbalances slightly, before recovering and staring at me. He's trying to work out if that was deliberate on my part, or just some strange coincidence.

"Why thank you," I reply, before he can try and touch me again. "And just think, if you'd done anything proactive about it, we could have stopped this several years ago. But I'm sure the press don't want to hear about how incompetent you are. Isn't there a Death Eater you should be accepting a bribe from? The ones that donate to your retirement fund at Gringotts?" I keep my voice level as if stating a fact.

"I don't know what you mean," Fudge splutters, looking like he's been slapped in the face with a freshly-caught salmon.

Nor do I. I just made it up. But the press is now looking very interested.

Dumbledore is looking thoughtful. "I had wondered how you'd managed to pay for your new mansion, Cornelius," he says, effectively nailing shut the coffin I had created around Fudge.

I look at the press slowly. They look torn now. On one hand, they have their supposed hero, on the other, the ultimate in high level corruption, perhaps the only thing that could be bigger than interviewing me. It won't stop them from printing endless re-prints of my life, but it might get them away from me for now.

"If you want to concentrate on Fudge, I'll give you all an interview tomorrow," I lie. Obviously, I'm pretty convincing, because they surround Fudge like flies around a deep, steaming pile of...

A somewhat apt analogy, even if I do decide not to finish it.

Dumbledore's now with the press, playing his games and having fun. His eyes are twinkling at record levels.

step back quietly, forgotten, as Fudge tries to talk his way out it.

I look around at the ever-growing party. I can see the Weasleys together, and the way they're looking around for me. Ron, Hermione, and their partners are there with them, and they are searching for me as well. I can tell they want me to join in, but I can't. I can't celebrate this, because I didn't mean this to happen.

I step back silently and allow the shadows of Hogwarts to cloak me from sight.

There's a whiz and a bang, and the whole sky lights up with fireworks. Fred and George fireworks by the look of it. I'm guessing that they've been planning for Voldemort's defeat for some time.

The crowd turns to watch – well, all but one person, who is walking directly toward me.

I watch her curiously. I didn't think anyone would be able to see me.

She stops in front of me – closer than convention allows, and she tilts her head to one side and looks at me directly.

"You found what you were looking for," she says in a quiet voice.

"I did," I agree.

"And now you're alone."

"I am." This is getting a little eerie.

"Have you decided how you are going to handle it?"

I shake my head slowly.

"Can you teach me?"

I blink. I slowly start to smile. "I can," I say softly.

I take a step forward, and wrap an arm around her casually. She appears a little surprised, but doesn't pull away.

Maybe it's time I stopped searching for Nirvana internally and started searching for it externally. And if I'm going to do that, it would be fun to do it with someone who can surprise me.

"Potter?"

Snape. Another one not joining the party. Not a surprise, its outside, and all of Hogwarts knows that he is allergic to sunlight. We pause and look at him.

"Thank you, Harry," he says stiffly, before turning and walking away.

"I think that's the first time he's said my name," I muse.

She smiles, and I realise something. She's very pretty now that she's older. The wand behind her ear seems to be holding her hair up. I reach up slowly and grab it, pulling it away from her, so that her long hair falls down her back.

She watches me calmly, her silver-grey eyes not showing any fear and just a hint of nervousness.

The only other two females that I know who can hold my gaze are Hermione and McGonagall. Everyone else looks away sooner or later. She doesn't.

"Who are you?" I ask.

She looks a little sad. "I'm just me," she says softly. "Nothing special, just a loony girl."

I shake my head softly. "I don't think you are, Luna. You're just different."

She tilts her head again. "Different is bad," she says simply, with the honesty of someone who's accepted who they are.

And maybe that is what is different about her. While everyone is still searching for the people they are going to become, Luna has accepted the person she is.

She's a curious mixture of confidence and nervousness. Confidence in herself, but nervousness in everyone's reaction to her. Perhaps nervousness in my reaction to her.

But she understands. She understands what it is like to change. What it is like to be different. I may not be loony, but I am different as well.

I lean forward and kiss her.

She looks shocked, but doesn't pull away.

"What... why?" she asks.

I pause and smile at her. "Because I wanted to," I say honestly.

She looks at me slowly, and I can almost see her brain whirring. A second later, she wraps her arms around me and kisses me firmly. Her kiss is innocent. And I realise that she's never kissed before – I have. I pull back from her softly, and I can see her expression start to change.

She opens her mouth to apologise, but I reach up and touch my fingers to her lips.

"Don't," I whisper.

"I've never done it before," she explains calmly, as a matter of fact, ignoring my finger.

"I know," I smile. "Close your eyes."

She does, instantly, without a trace of worry or hesitation. But it's not trust, it's belief. She believes that if I do hurt her, that she will recover. If I do mock her, she will accept it as the price she pays for being herself.

I close my eyes and kiss her again, wrapping my arms around her. She matches me, letting me lead.

I was right.

This is a better way to find Nirvana.

And maybe this time I can bring her along as well.

I hold her close and break the kiss.

"What's it like?" she asks. "The Source, Nirvana, everything?"

"Stay with me," I whisper. "And I'll show you."

She smiles at me. A new smile, one I've not seen from her before or from anyone really. "You defeated Voldemort."

I shake my head. "I found the Source. Voldemort helped."

She nods slowly.

"Come on," I say softly, watching as that smile still plays around her lips. "Let's go talk."