



# IX

It felt like I was back in my apartment waiting to die. At some point, Jesus opened my door and said, “Steven, what are you doing?”

“I ... um, nothing, I guess.”

“Why are you hiding under the covers in your bed?”

“What do you mean?”

Pressing me, he said, “Why are you lying in bed and hiding under the covers? You were supposed to go back to talk to God. How long have you been in here?”

Devoid of all hope, I said, “For an eternity, it seems. Look, Jesus, I ... I just can’t.”

“What do you mean, ‘can’t’? You have to.”

Pulling back covers with a sigh, I said, “I can’t. Look, I’m sorry. I’m all alone up here.”

“We’re here!”

“Yeah, *great*. Sorry, Jesus, I am apparently just a waste of space and no good to the universe. And it’s hopeless, and I’ll never make it next time. Why don’t you just go on without me?”

Concerned, he asked, “Steven, why are you so down?”

Glaring sharply at him, I said, "Because. I killed a lot of people. And ... well, I killed myself. And then I get here to find out that it's *okay*, that I'm not going to be boiled in oil, that I have not caused the universe to split in two, but instead that you are just going to send me back to do it all over again. Well, that all sucks!"

"Why do you say that, Steven?"

"I ... well, why the hell don't you guys do something up here? I mean, look, get with the program! Don't you have a ray gun or something to zap me into oblivion?"

He just stood there blinking.

"Can't you throw me to some wolves?"

More of the same.

"Isn't there a cross that I can be nailed to or something?"

Putting his hands on his hips, he said firmly, "Okay, Steven, now that's personal. Stop it. Just stop it. Look. Like it or not, you are part of the universe. Your soul is eternal, and you have to go back and do what you originally set out to do."

"What did I originally set out to do?"

"I can't tell you that."

"Really?"

"No. I can't. You have to go talk to him to find out."

"But I mean, why am I not—"

"Chained to a rock at the bottom of a pit of fire?"

"Yes!"

"What good would that do?"

"Well, there's got to be some punishment for killing people, right? And for killing yourself? Come on! I feel like I'm just being buttered up for something sinister, and I can't talk to anyone else to find out how to get out of here."