

We Do What We Must

by HogwartsHoney

In the aftermath of Dumbledore's death, Harry must set his life in order before setting off in search of Voldemort and the Horcruxes.

One

Chapter 1 of 1

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Disclaimer: Jo Rowling owns the Potterverse. I simply play with her toys.

A/N: This fic was inspired by the song 'Here Without You' by 3 Doors Down and, although it's a prequel to 'The Crossroads', it may be read on its own.

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"Everything I know, and anywhere I go

It gets hard but it won't take away my love

And when the last one falls

When it's all said and done

*It gets hard but it won't take away my love"*3 Doors Down

After the fall of Dumbledore that fateful night, Harry realized that his world had once again shifted around him with unmistakable finality. As the full realization of this began to sink beneath his numbness, a desperately cold and sucking emptiness pulled deep within him. No longer would he be able to rely on the guidance of his mentor, and Hogwarts was no longer a safe place for any of them.

Weeks later, he spoke with Hermione and Ron and detailed his plans for finding the remaining Horcruxes and the inevitable aftermath. Still, his hollowed soul could still only think of one person.

Ginny.

Ginny was a liability to him – an easy target for the Dark Lord and his followers. It was imperative that his friends understand this and respect his wishes for total anonymity as he set upon his task. Both Ron and Hermione tried to rationalize with him that their combined forces were greater than that of the one, but he would have none of it. They tried begging him, pleading with him, even attempting to blackmail him, but he stood firm. Ginny's safety was paramount to him, as was theirs.

He must go it alone.

Harry had decided to wait until after Fleur and Bill's wedding, knowing that to disappear any earlier would only be a cause for concern and query. He was quietly determined and resolutely convinced that his forays with Dumbledore in his study and during their final (failed) outing had furnished him with enough information to begin his quest. He would not be swayed from that line of thinking. He would fulfil the prophecy, not because he had to, but because he *wanted to*. To rid the world of Voldemort and all that he represented was, in Harry's mind, the only way to begin the way back to sanity.

In retrospect, Harry's determination could have been attributed to one thing: control. With his world falling apart around him at every turn, he subconsciously focused his attention and his control upon one thing: to keep himself away from those he loved in an attempt to secure their safety.

The revellers waved to Fleur and Bill as they sat upon a magical flying carpet and set off for a honeymoon in Egypt while Harry looked around at the remains of his life. There was Arthur Weasley, his red hair tinged with grey, waving and hugging his wife Molly, who alternated between wiping her teary eyes and laughing as she blew kisses to the departing couple. Charlie Weasley stood in between the twins, their arms wrapped around each others' shoulders as they sang loudly off-key. Ron stood a little to one side, his arm curling protectively around Hermione's waist as they waved happily. Harry could see from their profiles that they were smiling and laughing as Fred and George attempted to lift Charlie up onto their shoulders. Tonks and Remus sat at a table with other members of the Order, and as Harry scanned the crowd, he could see Seamus and Dean laughing with the Patil twins and several other faces, too many to see. Wearily, Harry removed his glasses and rubbed his eyes and the bridge of his nose. As he replaced his glasses and blinked, he still searched for one person.

Ginny.

She had kept her distance from him during the wedding preparations, partly due to her involvement as a bridesmaid and partly, Harry secretly thought, because she didn't know what to say to him. He had become distant and quiet, preferring to ponder his plan of action uninterrupted by others. The few times that they actually met or were in close proximity to each other, Harry was affected most by her sadness. She was resolutely strong on the outside, presenting to the world an image of someone who would rather die than give up, but inside, sensed intuitively by Harry, was the true demon of desperation. Their bond had grown strong in their relatively short time together as intimates, but it was undeniable, palpable and, unfortunately, irreversible by anyone but Harry.

He glanced at a small thicket of low bushes off to the side of the tents and mentally itemized the contents of his travelling cases. He had narrowed down his possessions to the barest essentials and had carefully packed and re-packed them the previous night as Ron sat in the semi-shadows of his bedroom at the Burrow. Looking up, Harry had seen Ron's question in his eyes before it had spilled from his lips.

'Are you *sure*, Harry? I mean, *really* sure?' his friend had queried.

'Yes, Ron, it *has* to be soon. Tomorrow. Things are happening every day, and the longer I delay, the better Voldemort's position becomes.'

It was a credit to Ron that he didn't flinch at the mention of that dreaded name; that he had finally understood that Harry -- his friend, Harry -- was going off to do battle with a most powerful wizard. At that moment Ron had been struck by the sudden dawning knowledge that Harry too was an extremely powerful wizard, and although young and relatively inexperienced, was more than capable of using what he knew to defend himself. Sighing, Ron had finally, painfully accepted that his friend must leave.

Alone.

Harry's final talk with Hermione had not been as smooth nor had she been as willing to accept his decision, but they had hugged; she had cried and wished him well. As she had turned to leave she had pressed something small and hard into his hand. He had waited until he was back in Ron's room to open his hand. In his warm palm lay a brown-gold stone with rippling bands of light in gold and copper-colours gleaming confidently in the moonlight. Harry had recognized it as a Tiger Eye, used for focusing the mind and offering protection during travel while strengthening convictions and confidence. The very warm stone was known to be beneficial to the weak and sick and was believed to have magical properties of courage and patience. Harry had smiled and, closing his eyes, acknowledged Hermione's silent nod to all things Gryffindor.

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As his mind swept back to the present, Harry again scanned the crowd for Ginny. He suspected that she was still trying to avoid him, but he could not, *would not* leave without seeing her one last time. He walked closer to the large tent under which Fred and George were now dancing a high-spirited jig and, again scanning the throng, spotted Ginny sitting with Remus and Tonks. He circled around the laughing and shouting crowd, approaching Ginny from the side opposite the lycanthrope and his giggling partner.

'... not that I mind you know, but it's a bit much when they*insist* they know what's good for you.' Tonks was making pointed gestures to Remus, who tried unsuccessfully to hide his huge grin.

They all looked up in surprise as Harry appeared, as if by magic, at Ginny's side.

'Speaking of which...' Ginny muttered to no-one and everyone.

'Hello, everyone.' Harry tried to make his voice sound lighter than he felt; he almost couldn't breathe.

'Wotcher, Harry, you all right?' Tonks asked, needlessly. She could see the expressions on the faces of the two young people and used the opportunity to coax Remus in the direction of the dance floor. He mouthed 'Help me' in mock horror, and Harry spared them a genuine smile as he knew Lupin was only posturing. His love for Tonks was as plain as the sun as it marched across the sky. Harry's love for Ginny burned a hole in his heart and set fire to his mind, made worse by his proximity to her. *That* was why he had to leave her behind.

'Might I have a word, Gin?' he asked the redhead quietly.

Unable to continue her charade of indifference, she placed her hand in his extended one and they left the table. They walked slowly away from the crowd towards a small copse. Harry noticed again how very beautiful she had become, a young girl on the edge of womanhood, her pale skin glowing against the soft fabric of her simple and elegant dress robes. The blue of the material perfectly matched the spray of miniature periwinkles that was tucked behind her left ear and offset her bright brown eyes. He sighed inwardly -- this would be difficult.

He struggled to find the right words to begin.

'Gin, I know that you don't need to hear this anymore, but I hope you understand why I have to say it again.' He hesitated as he saw the faintest flicker of something akin to anger in her eyes, but pushed on. He *had* to make her understand. He locked her eyes with his own and continued.

'The future is uncertain, my *life* is uncertain, but I must follow this path to its end if we are ever to have a chance at happiness. It's not about the big things, Gin. It's not about Voldemort, or the Death Eaters, or even the War. It's about all those who have fallen, who have either given their lives or had them taken as part of this evil. It's about Bill and all the others like him whose lives have been forever damaged by the will of one man, and it's about us, Gin, all of us who will be forever changed by the battles we have yet to fight.'

He could see her eyes shining as she listened to him, *really* listened to him and acknowledged her own growing fears at what this War would cost her and those she loved.

'I have no way of knowing what I may need to do, or what I may need to become in order to defeat him, but *will* defeat him. Dumbledore had started me on the right path.' Harry's voice wavered slightly here, but he continued resolutely. 'I won't waste those lessons nor allow his sacrifice to be in vain. You *do* understand that, don't you?'

She slowly nodded her assent, unable to speak.

He kissed her then, fully and deeply with every emotion in his wounded heart. He could feel her trembling as her fear faded, and her love flowed over both of them like a cleansing wave. They melted together, hearts beating in unison, souls entwined in a moment that seemed to expand and encapsulate them, sheltering and protecting them from everyone and everything.

They slowly broke apart, and Harry finally acknowledged that he loved this girl, this woman with an intensity that was felt at his very core. He hugged her tightly as she nestled her head against his chest.

'I love you, Gin. Right here, right now, in this moment and forever, I love you.'

Ginny's eyes finally spilled the tears that had been building since their kiss began, and she nodded into his chest, knowing that she too, absolutely and completely, loved Harry, and would forever.

'I love you too, Harry, and always will. Every minute of every day of my life,' she said in a voice unsteady with emotion.

Harry closed eyes and pulled her closer with deep regret in his heart for having to do what he knew he must.

'*Obliviate*,' he murmured, not even needing his wand.

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