

# A Destiny in Time

*by Gmariam*

Harry Potter has fulfilled his destiny, and survived his final confrontation with Voldemort; the Dark Lord has been vanquished, but at a terrible price. Dozens are dead, including some of those closest to Harry, and he blames only himself for failing them. Desperate, he returns to Hogwarts hoping to change what has happened and save those he loves. In doing so he unknowingly saves himself, but the consequences require great sacrifice.

This short story is complete. It begins on the battlefield just after Harry's duel with Voldemort, and follows Harry as he tries desperately to right the mistakes of the past, only to rewrite his own future.

## Chapter One: Failure

*Chapter 1 of 6*

Harry Potter has fulfilled his destiny, and survived his final confrontation with Voldemort; the Dark Lord has been vanquished, but at a terrible price. Dozens are dead, including some of those closest to Harry, and he blames only himself for failing them. Desperate, he returns to Hogwarts hoping to change what has happened and save those he loves. In doing so he unknowingly saves himself, but the consequences require great sacrifice.

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### Chapter One Failure

Harry Potter was lying face down in the dirt, his body tired and sore, his mind blank. He heard keen wailing all around him, interspersed with the sounds of shouting and the loud cracks of Apparating. He smelled the acrid odor of smoke and a coming hint of rain. He felt someone shaking him, and groaned.

"Harry! Harry, wake up! Are yeh all right?" Harry recognized the voice but couldn't remember who it belonged to. He couldn't remember where he was, how he had gotten there, or why he was lying on the ground, bruised and battered. He only knew pain.

"Harry, it's over. It's time to wake up now. It's time to go." A second voice Harry didn't recognize was speaking gently.

What was over? What had happened? Who was shaking him? Harry wanted more than anything to lie where he was until the pain went away. He felt strong arms lifting him up, and a whiskery chin tickled his face.

With a sudden flash of insight, Harry realized he was in Hagrid's arms. The other voice he had heard was Remus Lupin. Opening his eyes, Harry saw Hagrid's pale face staring down at him as Lupin walked beside them, cradling an injured arm.

"Harry!" Lupin exclaimed, and Hagrid let out a strangled sob. "Are you all right?"

Harry looked around, confused. "I'm okay. You can set me down." Hagrid shook his head, and Harry almost laughed at the giant's overprotectiveness. "Really, Hagrid, I'm all right. Put me down."

Hagrid set Harry gently on the ground, and Harry felt his legs give out from underneath him. Lupin grabbed his arm and helped him stand. Waves of nausea washed over him, and Harry closed his eyes until the dizzy spell passed. Lupin looked concerned.

"Come on, Harry. We need to get you to the castle or St. Mungo's." Lupin began to lead Harry away, but Harry held him back; he still didn't understand what had happened. Turning, he gazed across a vast field. The sun had set, and the blood-red tint on the horizon cast ghastly shadows over a scene of chaos.

The field was covered in smoke, as trees and even the very grass beneath burned away the last marks of a fierce battle. There were bodies everywhere, some crying out in pain, some contorted in silence. It was a vision from hell, and with a realization that shook him to his very core, Harry collapsed on the ground, unable to stand under the crushing weight of the horrifying scene.

He had failed.

Harry retched, and felt Lupin's arm around his shoulder, rubbing his back in an empty gesture of comfort. He glanced at the charred remains of the horrific battle with Voldemort and retched again, his eyes streaming tears as he desperately tried to remember what had happened. . .

*Ron had been brutally struck by a powerful curse from Bellatrix Lestrange. Hermione had fired back, then fallen to the ground from a curse thrown by Voldemort. They had been captured, and Harry had been forced to surrender his wand in order to save them. . .*

*He had been bound, and remembered the devastating effects of the Cruciatius Curse as Voldemort had tortured him. Something or someone unseen had ended the curse, and Voldemort had furiously prepared to kill Ron and Hermione in retaliation. . .*

*Harry had tried to stop him, but had been hit by a jet of red light and had collapsed. Ron had been killed by the horrible green light, and Hermione had fallen next to him. When he awoke, Dementors were swarming around him, and Severus Snape was lying next to him, dead. All he could think about was Ron and Hermione, falling to the ground, and all the others lost to the Death Eaters and the Dementors. He had started to lose consciousness again as hope was drained from the very air he breathed. . .*

*Then a beautiful song had filled the air, and an enormous silvery Patronus had appeared, a great phoenix whose wings had filled the sky and driven off the Dementors. Harry remembered struggling to his feet. Voldemort had been facing the other way, and Harry had cast the spell that had vanquished Voldemort once and for all in a violent explosion, before collapsing in exhaustion on the devastated field of battle. . .*

Yet even then, he had failed.

Ron was dead, and Harry couldn't imagine how many others; he had seen so many struck down. If the Death Eaters hadn't killed them, surely the Dementors had sucked out their souls. He had tried to save them, to vanquish Voldemort as the prophecy had foretold. He hadn't been quick enough, strong enough; for though the war was won, the battle was certainly a draw, and he was left broken among the survivors, mourning the bitter losses.

Harry felt a sudden surge of anger course through his body. He was angry at Voldemort, for winning even in defeat; he was angry at Ron, for dying in vain; but most of all he was angry at himself, for failing his friends. He felt his heart harden and tried to stand up, but Remus Lupin held him fast.

"Get off me," snarled Harry, his fury boiling over as he strained against the strong arms that kept him from standing, from running. "Let me go!"

"Harry!" Lupin's voice was ragged and torn. "It's over! It's finished!"

"NO!" Harry shouted, and with a lunge he ripped away from his former professor and stood. He stared at the scene, his face wild. He struggled for breath, his lungs burning with the sobs he struggled to hold inside. His eyes stung, but not from the smoke that hung over the scene like a shroud.

"It's not over. I can't fail!" Harry whirled around, but all he saw were the still, lifeless forms draped across the bleak landscape that spelled the sad end of the tragic battle. "No," he whispered desperately.

"Harry, you didn't fail...you've won!" Harry spun away, but Lupin grabbed him again, turning him around. "Look! He's gone, Harry. You've done it...Voldemort is dead."

Harry took in great gasping breaths and shook his head. "No! I failed. I failed them, all of them." And he gestured miserably at the bodies lying around him: men, women, students. Charlie Weasley. Luna Lovegood.

Ron.

He couldn't stand it, it was too much. Voldemort was gone, but the price paid for the victory was far too high. It was not supposed to happen this way: he was supposed to save the world, not lose it. He had been willing to sacrifice everything, even his own life, but not all of these other lives. They were supposed to survive, to live in a world free of Voldemort's evil.

"Harry," Lupin began, but he couldn't go on. Harry knew the pain he was feeling because he felt it with each stabbing breath he took; his heart felt as if it would break from it. Lupin made to grasp him again and hold him, but Harry ran.

He ran past the bodies, the friends he had failed. He ran past Hermione, sobbing next to Ron. He ran past Mr. Lovegood, tenderly cradling his daughter. He ran past Fred and George, gently carrying Charlie from the field. He could not run fast enough to escape the misery that threatened to engulf him.

He felt his own sobs ripping out of him as he ran. He stumbled but kept going. He heard people shouting his name but ignored them. Hagrid. Ginny. Mr. Weasley. He ran until he couldn't run anymore.

He was in a dark forest on the edge of the field when he sank down to the earth and howled out his grief until his throat felt raw. He could not go on, not this time. He had defeated Voldemort, but at such a cost how could he possibly continue living?

It wasn't fair! He had struggled for so long, fought so hard. Why did it have to end like this? Why did he have to suffer such a devastating loss to win such a bitter victory? He did not think he could live knowing how many had died; he could not carry this final burden.

In his grief, Harry remembered other losses he had suffered and survived. Cedric. Sirius. Professor Dumbledore. Yet still he did not know how he would survive this. Nothing could compare to the empty hole in his soul he felt with the loss of Ron. Of so many others...all his responsibility, all his fault.

They were with Sirius now, behind the veil. Harry pounded the ground, furious with the world. Why wasn't he with them? Why hadn't he gone beyond the veil, to be with Sirius and his parents? Why had he survived? How could he endure, alone, without them?

Thinking of Sirius led Harry's thoughts back to his third year, the year he had found his godfather. He had almost lost Sirius then, when the Ministry of Magic had captured him and prepared to perform the Dementor's Kiss. If it hadn't been for Dumbledore's suggestion that Sirius escape on Buckbeak, Harry would not have had what little time he did have with Sirius. Harry and Hermione had used Hermione's Time-Turner to go back in time and save Buckbeak, allowing Sirius to win his freedom.

Harry had also saved himself that night.

Harry was startled by the sound of someone crashing through the woods. Standing up, he pulled out his wand, his eyes searching frantically for whomever was running

toward him. Suddenly a body staggered through the trees, landing face first and unconscious on the ground in the clearing. It was a man, but it was not a Death Eater; he looked familiar, though he was covered in dirt and blood. Hardly daring to breathe, dreading what he might find, Harry walked over to the still body and gently turned the injured man over.

It was as if a spotlight had illuminated the clearing: Harry suddenly understood everything that had happened on the field. He knew what to do next. Taking several deep breaths, he willed his body and his mind to focus. He watched the unconscious form at his feet, but the man was gravely wounded and did not awake. Harry sighed, but this time with determination. Turning quickly, he Apparated out of the forest. He would fix everything: he would not fail again.

\* \* \*

**A/N:** Many thanks to myownmuggle for her wonderful beta work on this story! And thank you to J.K.Rowling for the opportunity to write Harry's final battle, no matter how heartbreaking it may be.

This short story is complete and will be posted as each chapter is validated. I appreciate your comments and reviews!

## Chapter Two: Found

### Chapter 2 of 6

Harry Potter has fulfilled his destiny and survived his final confrontation with Voldemort; the Dark Lord has been vanquished, but at a terrible price. Dozens are dead, including some of those closest to Harry, and he blames only himself for failing them. Desperate, he returns to Hogwarts hoping to change what has happened and save those he loves. In doing so he unknowingly saves himself, but the consequences require great sacrifice.

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### Chapter Two Found

Harry reappeared outside the gates to Hogwarts Castle and shook off the uncomfortable sensation of Apparation. He had to focus. With grim determination he entered the grounds and walked up to the great oak doors. No one stopped him; taking a deep breath, he went into the castle.

He had thought he would never return.

The castle was dark and empty. The school was closed for the holiday, and its silent halls felt sad and lifeless after all that had happened over the summer. As he hurried through the corridors, Harry was glad there was no one around, because he couldn't stand the thought of telling anyone what had happened or what he was about to do. He heard the portraits whispering; several tried to speak to him, but he ignored them. He concentrated on placing one foot in front of the other, his wand illuminating the dim hallways, until he reached Professor McGonagall's office in the Transfiguration department. He saw no one...not Filch, not even Peeves.

The door was locked. Harry raised his wand and without a second thought blasted it open. He entered the neat and tidy office and began to tear it apart, heedless of its owner. He was looking for the one thing that could help him now: the Time-Turner that Hermione had returned at the end of their third year. He knew there was only a slim chance that Professor McGonagall had kept it, instead of returning it to the Ministry, but it was his only chance, and he had to try.

It was nowhere to be found. Harry felt his shoulders slump and a wave of despair wash over him. Then he remembered that Professor McGonagall was Headmistress as well; she had moved into the Headmaster's office over a year ago.

Harry hurried to the seventh floor. When he reached the stone gargoyle, he panicked; he did not know the password anymore. Professor Dumbledore had liked to use sweets as his password, and for a while Professor McGonagall had continued the tradition. Yet after throwing every confectionary word he could think of at the door and failing, Harry leveled his wand and began throwing every spell he could think of instead.

They all bounced harmlessly off the stone walls.

Harry shouted at the gargoyle in frustrated desperation. He had to get in and find the Time-Turner. He pounded the wall and then slid down to the floor. He hid his head in his hands, overcome with inconsolable grief and the frantic need to get in so that he could fix what had happened.

He heard a sound in the corridor and looked up. The castle wasn't completely empty: the ghosts had not left, and Nearly Headless Nick was floating down the corridor toward him. Harry stood up, a small shoot of hope blossoming in his chest.

"Nick!" he called down the empty hallway.

"Harry Potter!" said the ghost, looking at him with sad eyes. "You've come back. There is no one here. The school is closed for the summer, and those who stayed have gone to the battle."

"I know, Nick," replied Harry, almost breathless. "It's just that I have to get into Professor McGonagall's office. I need something."

Sir Nick looked at him very seriously with ghostly eyes. "It is over then? The battle?"

Harry glanced away, not wanting to remember the grim scene he had just left behind. He swallowed and told him the truth. "Yes, Voldemort is gone...but it's not over, not for me. I need your help, Nick."

Sir Nick shook his head sadly and sighed. "You cannot bring back the dead, Harry. I've told you that before."

Harry shook his head in return, irritated. "No, it's not that." *Not exactly*, he told himself. "I need something from Professor McGonagall's office."

Sir Nick studied him closely. "What is it you want?" he finally asked.

"I need . . . I need to talk to Professor Dumbledore, to his portrait." It wasn't true, but Harry couldn't tell him about the Time-Turner, not yet. "Do you know the password?"

Sir Nick was silent as he looked thoughtfully at Harry.

"Please, Nick! It's a matter of life and death. I need your help!"

After a long wait, during which Harry felt his anxiety rise until it was almost unbearable, Sir Nick indicated that he did know the password. "The last time Professor McGonagall was here, it was 'bollocks.'"

Harry almost laughed at the absurdness of it. Turning to the stone gargoyle, he shouted, "Bollocks!" and waited impatiently. To his immense relief, the gargoyle opened, and Harry found himself on the familiar stone staircase that led to the Headmistress's office.

Bursting through the door, he was surprised to find it still very much like the office Professor Dumbledore had kept; Professor McGonagall had not made many changes over the year. The glaring exception, of course, was that there was no phoenix perched near the door: Fawkes had left the castle upon Dumbledore's death. Glancing around, Harry saw the portraits of past Headmasters beginning to stir as he walked in. Sir Nick floated into the circular room behind him.

Harry swallowed hard again and began searching for the Time-Turner. He turned the office inside out searching for it, ignoring Nick's protests and the cries from the portraits, but he came up empty-handed again. In his frustration he pulled out his wand; he was just about to blow up a chair when he heard a soft cough behind him.

"I daresay Professor McGonagall could use more comfortable chairs," began the portrait hanging behind the desk, "but I believe she is rather fond of that one."

Harry whirled around and stared at the portrait of Professor Dumbledore on the wall behind the large desk. He had not spoken with the headmaster's portrait since he had left Hogwarts many months ago, but now all Harry wanted to do was run away again. He didn't think he could bear telling the late headmaster what had happened, what he had done and yet still needed to do. He started toward the door, the horrible sense of failure in his heart threatening to overwhelm him.

"Harry." There was an edge in Dumbledore's voice that Harry had rarely heard; yet when he did, it always stopped him, and he came back to the portrait. He tried to glare, to be angry: hadn't Dumbledore been the one to share the prophecy with him, to name him murderer or victim? Hadn't Dumbledore sent him after Tom Riddle's Horcruxes? And hadn't the headmaster abandoned him then, leaving him to fight Voldemort alone? Yet it wasn't Dumbledore's fault, and Harry felt his face crumple as the tears he couldn't hold back any longer began to fall.

"What has happened, Harry? Tell me." Despite the urgency in his voice, Dumbledore calmly arranged himself at the desk in the picture, peering over his half-moon spectacles at Harry exactly the same way he would if he had been sitting right there in the room.

"It's over," whispered Harry, collapsing onto the chair he had been about to hex and wiping his eyes. "The Horcruxes are gone. Voldemort's dead." He took a deep breath and let it out as a strangled sob. "It's finally over."

Dumbledore closed his eyes, and Harry thought he saw the smallest smile appear on his face; but when the man in the portrait opened his eyes, the smile was gone, replaced by a look of heartbreaking sorrow. "You have done it, then. I am very proud of you, Harry. However, I sense there is more." He waited patiently for Harry to continue.

"They're dead...so many of them," he whispered. He screwed up his eyes as the faces of the fallen flashed through his mind and his heart. "I failed! They're dead because of me...because I couldn't do it right; I couldn't do it fast enough!" Harry felt the howls of grief struggling to escape, but he ruthlessly suppressed them as he wiped his stinging eyes; he had done enough ranting in the headmaster's office over the years. "I have to save them."

Dumbledore looked at him sadly. "I see. Who has been lost?"

Harry told him; by the end he was spitting out names as if accusing the headmaster himself of ending their short lives.

"Harry, I am sorry." Dumbledore stood up and walked around his desk as if he wanted to reach out to Harry. He watched Harry with an expression of pity and grief that ripped Harry's heart out all over again. "I am so sorry. I can only imagine the sorrow you must feel at this moment. Know that they fought bravely and that their sacrifice has brought peace to the world. They..."

"...didn't want to die!" interrupted Harry, his voice breaking. "They didn't deserve to die! They only died because of me, but I should have been the one to die!" He stood up, too exhausted to yell, too devastated to argue. He remembered a time when he would have raged against the pain he was feeling, but now he only felt a cold numbness, along with a grim determination to do what was necessary. "Where's the Time-Turner?"

"Ah," sighed Dumbledore. He passed a hand over his eyes, and Harry felt the same wave of irritation pass over him as he sometimes did when the headmaster showed any sign of weakness or emotion. "So that is what you are looking for. I confess I had not even thought of it."

"Is it here?" Harry demanded. "Did Professor McGonagall keep it?"

Dumbledore nodded slowly. "She did, at my insistence. I did not think to use it again, but felt it would be wise to have one, just in case. As the others were destroyed at the Ministry two years ago, I am glad I did."

"Where is it?" asked Harry bluntly. "I need it."

"Harry, they are gone! You must let them go. Going back won't save them!"

"You're wrong," snapped Harry. "It saved Sirius and Buckbeak. I can change this too, I can save them. I have to." Harry did not tell him about the man he had encountered in the clearing. He gave into his pain for a moment and kicked the offensive chair, knocking it over. "This isn't how it was supposed to end!"

"Yet it has ended, Harry!" said Dumbledore earnestly. "You have fulfilled the prophecy and saved the world from a great evil. Going back won't necessarily change what's happened and save who has died. It could make things worse. You know the rules, Harry. Time travel is a dangerous thing."

Harry shrugged. "I have nothing to lose," he said, feeling reckless. "It can't be worse. Nothing could be worse than what I saw today." He couldn't help himself and started shouting as he paced the office. "You don't know. You weren't there! Let me go! LET ME SAVE THEM!"

Harry didn't think Dumbledore was going to tell him anything, for the late headmaster was quiet so long. He seemed to be debating with himself. He sat down at his desk again and gazed at Harry for a very long time. Finally Dumbledore pulled a shiny gold chain from around his neck. Harry saw a tiny hourglass dangling from the end.

Harry was stunned. Had Dumbledore died and taken the Time-Turner to his grave? How was he going to get it? Had he come all this way only to fail again?

Dumbledore took the chain from around his neck and placed it in the top drawer of his desk. "Look in the drawer, Harry," he said very quietly.

Skeptical, Harry stomped behind the desk and opened the drawer. He had already searched the desk, but to his surprise the Time-Turner was lying in the drawer on top of a pile of blank parchment. Astounded at the magic he had just witnessed, Harry looked up at the headmaster's portrait in speechless amazement. He was moved by the fact that Dumbledore had given him the Time-Turner and didn't know what to say.

"I am trusting you, Harry...like I have before...to do the right thing. I would first suggest a Disillusionment Charm: you must not be seen." He paused. "And, Harry, you must not be killed. The consequences would be too dire to imagine, should you die in the past."

Harry nodded. He was suddenly nervous: he was really going to go back and change the past. He was breaking one of the most important wizarding rules. The last time he had used the Time-Turner, Hermione had been with him, and she had guided them much of the way. This time Harry would be alone, and he would be fighting for far more than the life of a hippogriff and the freedom of an escaped convict.

"Thank you." His voice breaking, Harry turned to leave. Just before he reached the door, he glanced at the portrait one last time. Dumbledore had his head in his hands. "I won't fail, Professor," Harry promised softly. "Not this time."

Dumbledore looked up and smiled wistfully. "I know. Good luck, Harry."

Harry nodded, his throat tight as he left the office. Quickly he poked his head back in, muttered, "*Scourgify!*" and watched as the mess he had made quickly righted itself. If he were going to fix his mistakes, he would right even the smallest wrongs.

"Thank you, Harry," said the portrait. The great oak door closed. "I hope I've done the right thing," whispered Dumbledore to the empty room.

No one answered.

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**A/N:** My continued thanks to myownmuggle for all her help on this story! And to J.K.Rowling for the inspired use of the Time-Turner.

## Chapter Three: Fight

*Chapter 3 of 6*

Harry Potter has fulfilled his destiny, and survived his final confrontation with Voldemort; the Dark Lord has been vanquished, but at a terrible price. Dozens are dead, including some of those closest to Harry, and he blames only himself for failing them. Desperate, he returns to Hogwarts hoping to change what has happened and save those he loves. In doing so he unknowingly saves himself, but the consequences require great sacrifice.

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### Chapter Three: Fight

Harry ran through the castle, the Time-Turner tucked around his neck. He reached the large doors leading out to the castle grounds and flew down the steps several at a time. He slowed to catch his breath as he passed through the castle gates; gathering his thoughts, he then stepped around and Apparated.

Within moments Harry found himself back in the woods where he had run following the battle. It was now dark, and from somewhere nearby he could hear the tragic aftermath of the horrific battle: sharp keening and sobbing that tore his heart out.

*It's okay, he told himself. You're going to fix this. They are not going to die.* He took the Time-Turner from around his neck and studied it carefully with the light of his wand. He would go back two turns, to the beginning of the battle. Just as he was about to start, Harry heard footsteps running through the woods toward him. Quickly he made the first turn.

"Harry! Harry, where are you?" It was Remus Lupin. Harry couldn't let anyone find out what he was about to do; he made the second turn as Lupin rushed into the clearing where he stood. Time began to flow quickly backward, and Lupin disappeared, looking confused. Harry was now standing alone in the clearing. It was quiet, and the sun was low in the sky as clouds began to gather overhead: the battle hadn't begun yet.

Harry immediately cast a Disillusionment Charm over himself. Glancing down at his hand, he saw that he blended in perfectly with his surroundings. He was well hidden; he knew how important it was to remain unseen. Yet during his only other experience with a Time-Turner he had in fact seen himself and had ended up saving both him and Sirius. He shook his head, confused when it came to the intricacies of time travel.

Setting out at a brisk walk, Harry tried to calm his racing mind by taking deep, slow breaths. He had to remain focused; he knew what he had to do, and he would not fail.

Not this time.

Harry made his way toward a small hill in an open field not far from the outskirts of Godric's Hollow. To the right was a dense forest, and down the hill was the village itself. Harry had chosen this location for his final confrontation with Voldemort, for he felt it appropriate that the Dark Lord finally be vanquished in the village where he had murdered Harry's parents and set the prophecy ruling their fate in motion.

As Harry walked through the field, he saw his past self on top of the hill. Grey clouds ringed the hilltop as the sun began to set, and a brisk wind kicked up loose dirt, swirling it about the dry summer grass. Voldemort arrived, alone, and Harry remembered their conversation . . .

*"Good evening, Harry!" Voldemort said smoothly. "Imagine finding you here, of all places. Returning home to die? I believe dogs do the same thing when they sense the end is near."*

*Harry gritted his teeth, refusing to allow Voldemort to bait him. "I'm not here to die. I'm here to destroy you." He tried to put all of the confidence he felt into his voice, but it still sounded weak, because he was terrified that he was indeed going to die. He only hoped to take Voldemort with him if he did.*

*Voldemort clearly sensed Harry's uncertainty. "Really, Harry?" he laughed. "I realize you are the Chosen One, but even you don't believe you have the power to defeat me."*

*He was right: Harry did not know how he could possibly succeed in a duel with one of the most powerful wizards the world had ever seen. He had destroyed Voldemort's Horcruxes, and found the spell he hoped would kill the Dark Lord's mortal body. Dumbledore had claimed that would finally defeat Voldemort, but Harry still did not understand how love could kill a man and questioned the late headmaster's faith in such a power.*

*"I can still try," he said quietly, in spite of his doubts and fears. Voldemort's taunting reawakened his determination to succeed. His heart swelled as he thought about Ron and Hermione, Ginny and the rest of the Weasleys, and the Order of the Phoenix: they all depended on him. He was the one who was destined to kill Voldemort, and until he did they were all in danger. He would not let them suffer because he failed. He would give them a world that was safe from Voldemort's Dark Magic. . .*

Harry watched as his past self verbally duelled with Voldemort. He made his way toward the hill, knowing what would happen next.

Voldemort gave Harry's past self a twisted smile as he raised his wand into the air and cried, *Morsmordre!* A sickly green skull and serpent appeared in the gathering clouds. Voldemort was not only summoning his followers, but declaring his victory by marking the area with the sign of death: Harry's death.

The wind picked up as Death Eaters began appearing. They Apparated with loud pops and cracks, their dark robes swirling in the cool air as they surrounded their master. Bellatrix Lestrange was the first to appear, unmasked; her heavily-lidded eyes were filled with evil malice as she stepped to Voldemort's side. Harry saw Snape appear near the Dark Lord and felt a silent surge of anger. The former Potions master had failed to give up any of his secrets during the hunt for Voldemort's Horcruxes, and Harry still questioned where the man's loyalties were truly placed.

Harry watched as his past self faced Voldemort and dozens of his followers, alone but resolute. He saw how overmatched he had truly been and realized how fortunate he was that Ron and Hermione had once again ignored his directions and refused to stay behind.

They appeared on the hill next to Harry, looking grim and determined. Others arrived with them: the Weasleys were all there, standing by Harry as if he were their own son. Ginny appeared with several students from the D.A., and the Order of the Phoenix arrived as well. They were still dreadfully outmatched, but stood confidently with Harry, their wands raised against the overwhelming number of Death Eaters facing them.

Harry felt his throat tighten and his heart fill with emotion as he watched so many of those he loved come to his aide, ready to fight by his side; but he knew now that they would suffer and die, and his heart was heavy with grief as well. A dogged determination to save them no matter the cost took hold of him, and he quickened his pace as he neared the top of the hill.

Harry watched grimly as the final battle began. The verbal sparring between the two unequal opponents ended when Bellatrix Lestrange shook her head impatiently and cast the first curse with a violent shriek. A vicious stream of purple light raced from her wand toward Ron. Ron staggered as he deflected the curse, and Hermione instinctively fired back. Immediately dozens of bolts of light erupted from the Death Eaters, and chaos reigned as jets of red, green, purple, and blue beams flew across the field. Trees caught fire, and a smoky haze filled the air under the repulsive green Dark Mark. Shouts, curses, and screams of pain could soon be heard all around.

The battle quickly broke up into pockets of fighting. Fred and George Weasley began dueling the Carrows. Bill Weasley, looking grimly resolute, stalked the field like a ghost; Harry knew he was looking for Fenrir Greyback, the werewolf who had attacked Bill at Hogwarts the previous year. Charlie Weasley contended with a large blond Death Eater, while Ginny was fighting back to back with Luna Lovegood. Ron and Hermione were battling furiously with Bellatrix Lestrange, who was cackling in wicked enjoyment, her eyes glittering brightly.

Harry watched as his past self began casting curses at Snape and the other Death Eaters still surrounding Voldemort, who was watching the battle with a look of evil satisfaction. Snape was firing curses in return, but Harry frowned: Snape was a powerful wizard and could have easily killed his past self. Watching as a bystander, Harry realized that Snape had been holding back. He shook off a nagging thought forming in the back of his mind, concentrating instead on finding an opening in which he could get closer to Voldemort and end the battle once and for all.

The fighting spread beyond the hill as witches and wizards sought shelter from the curses and hexes flying through the air among the trees and rocks scattered across the landscape. Harry wanted desperately to join in the battle, for the Disillusionment Charm would lend him an incredible advantage. Though he longed more than anything to start cursing Death Eaters, he knew that once he began using his wand the chances of being discovered would become even greater. He needed to remain hidden until he could get to Voldemort.

On the hilltop, Bellatrix Lestrange cast a brutal curse at Hermione, sending her flying backwards with a powerful jet of blue light. Ron ran to her side, and Harry saw his past self pause in his duel with Snape to fire a Stunning Spell at Bellatrix in retaliation. She parried the curse easily and cast one of her own at Harry's past self. Harry couldn't help it when his instincts took over and he fired an Impedimenta Curse at Bellatrix from behind her. The red stream of light from her wand went astray, missing his past self completely. She fell hard to the ground, looking around in angry astonishment for the person who had cast the curse.

Harry saw Snape narrow his eyes in his direction. He knew he had to be careful or someone would figure out he was there; Voldemort might even sense him. Yet when he saw Charlie Weasley go down not far away, hit by a violent stream of purple light, Harry threw caution to the wind and began firing curses as he made his way through the battle. He knocked out the large blond Death Eater Charlie had been battling with a powerful Reductor Curse. He ducked several jets of light aimed randomly in his direction as he continued to take out Death Eaters, unseen as he haunted the lengthening shadows, searching for the opening he needed to end the fight.

Fred and George were dueling frantically nearby with Amycus and Alecko Carrow. Fred had a large cut on the side of his head, which was bleeding profusely, and George was limping painfully on one leg. Without warning Fred was hit by a Stunning Spell in the chest; as he fell, Amycus began to cry, "*Avada...*" Harry hit the lumpy man in the back, sending him face down to the dirt with a well placed Body-Bind Curse. When the Death Eater's sister turned around to see what had happened, George hit her with a Stunning Spell of his own, and she toppled over to land on her brother. George ran over to help Fred, and Harry continued to stalk through the battle, lending what unseen aid he could.

He found Ginny locked in a fierce fight with a tall, dark haired woman. Ginny held her left arm awkwardly at her side, as if it were broken, but continued to fire hexes and curses at the Death Eater. Luna still guarded Ginny's back, holding off a short man who laughed cruelly as he fought. As Harry ran by, he shot a Stunning Spell at the dark haired woman. Ginny glanced around in surprise for the unseen assailant who had just cursed her opponent. Luna, distracted as well, was quickly hit by a nasty curse that sent her toppling. Ginny fired a powerful Bat Bogey Hex in return at the short man who had felled Luna; Harry couldn't help but grin tightly as the Death Eater ran off with his own bogeys chasing after him. Ginny bent down to help Luna, her wand still trained on the battle, which had moved away. Harry was confident that she would be all right and made his way back toward the hilltop.

He came to the hill where Ron and Hermione were dueling Bellatrix Lestrange. Bellatrix cast a hex at Hermione, who was doubled over in pain from a previous curse; Ron threw up a Shield Charm to protect her. Harry hit Bellatrix from behind again, sending her flying through the air with a violent Reductor Curse. He saw the surprised look on Ron's face and smiled grimly to himself.

Suddenly a cold icy wind blew across the field, and Harry felt his heart drop into his stomach: the Dementors had arrived. Like a black storm cloud, they swarmed the Order, weakening their resolve. The battle immediately began to falter as Harry saw numerous witches and wizards struggle to cast their protective Patronus.

Several Dementors made their way to the hilltop and closed in on Ron and Hermione. Ron cried, "*Expecto Patronum!*" and a feisty terrier began chasing the gloomy specters away. As Ron turned back to Hermione, the battle took another horrific turn.

Bellatrix Lestrange stood, furiously shaking the dirt from her robes. She cried, "*Sectumsempra!*" and Ron was slashed viciously across the face and neck. He fell to the ground bleeding profusely, a stunned look on his pale face. Before Harry could react Hermione raised her wand and cried, "*Relashio!*" The older woman was hit by a jet of fiery sparks and shrieked as her robes caught fire. Hermione looked horrified at what she had done and stood in shocked stillness, staring at the screaming woman with her wand hanging limply at her side.

Voldemort entered the fight then and retaliated by sending an ugly stream of red light at Hermione, knocking her to the ground next to Ron in with a Body-Bind Curse. Harry watched his past self round on Voldemort, his breathing hard and his face livid. The Dark Lord leveled his wand at Ron and Hermione, stopping Harry's past self with an evil smile and flick of his wrist.

Voldemort waved his wand again and white ropes flew out, binding Ron and Hermione tightly around the arms and legs. Harry saw his past self take a step forward, furious; Voldemort motioned him back with his wand once more. He waved his arm and Harry's two friends floated upright, moving over the ground toward the Dark Lord, Ron's head lolling against his chest as he struggled to stay conscious.

"And so the great Harry Potter is neutralized," said Voldemort, his voice silky and his face ugly with victory. "By love for his friends, no less. So much for love's great power." He casually ran a long finger down Hermione's face; she stared at him with a mixture of hatred and fear, and Harry felt his heart stop all over again at the horrible position his friends were in, all because of him. "Surrender, and they live. Fight me, and they die." With another flick of his wrist, the ropes binding Ron and Hermione tightened, and Hermione grimaced as they cut into her skin.

Harry saw his past self glaring daggers at Voldemort and remembered the empty gut-wrenching feeling of defeat he had felt at that moment. "What do you want?" his past self ground out.

"I want you," hissed Voldemort. "I want the Chosen One." Harry saw Snape glance sideways at Voldemort and then narrow his eyes at Harry's past self. The nagging thought in his head grew; was it possible that Snape was having doubts? Around them the battle had slowed, as those fighting both Death Eaters and Dementors saw the confrontation on the hill and began to lose hope. Bellatrix Lestrange stood, her robes burned and smoking, and stared at Hermione with murderous hatred.

"Then I'm yours," spat Harry's past self. "Let them go."

Voldemort inclined his head. "Your wand, first."

Harry watched as his past self struggled with his resolve. The ropes on Ron and Hermione tightened; Ron weakly shook his head, but Hermione cried out in pain. Harry's past self threw his wand to the ground at Voldemort's feet; he wasn't going to let Ron and Hermione die if there was something he could do.

Snape walked over and picked up the wand. Harry saw the former Potions professor give his past self a mysterious look; at the time he had been too infuriated to recognize it for anything but an acknowledgement of failure. Observing from a distance, Harry realized that Snape was trying to communicate something.

"Let them go," Harry's past self demanded again, his voice heavy with hate.

Voldemort stepped closer to his past self, red eyes flashing with victory. "In a moment. *Incarcerous!*" he cried, and white ropes flew from the tip of his wand to bind Harry's past self hand and foot. Hermione's eyes went wide as Voldemort shouted, "*Crucio!*" Harry's past self screamed as he was hit with the Cruciatius Curse; he fell to the ground, writhing in pain.

Harry decided it was time to act, whether he was discovered or not. He fired a powerful Stinging Hex at Voldemort, and the Cruciatius Curse was lifted; his past self collapsed, eyes closed, breathing heavy. Voldemort turned with a cry of fury and aimed a curse in the direction where Harry had been standing. Harry had already moved away and fired a second curse from behind Voldemort, hitting him hard in the back; he saw the Dark Lord stagger forward and fall to his knees. Bellatrix Lestrange turned and shot at him, but again Harry was gone, moving toward Ron and Hermione.

Voldemort recovered quickly; he stood and brandished his wand, squeezing the ropes that bound Ron and Hermione tighter still. Hermione cried out again, and Ron finally lost consciousness. "Come out, come out, wherever you are," Voldemort called softly. Bellatrix Lestrange stalked the hilltop, gazing about suspiciously. Harry saw Snape edge closer to his past self, who was still lying on the ground, catching his breath.

"For that, your invisible friend gets to watch you suffer some more," Voldemort declared, turning back to Harry's past self. Before Harry could stop him, Voldemort cast the Cruciatius Curse at his past self once again. Though he wanted to fire back and stop the curse, Harry held still, instinctively knowing that if he revealed himself anymore than he had already, Ron, Hermione, and possibly his past self might die for it. He bit his lip in frustration as he watched the torture, remembered the pain, and wondered when to act.

"That's better," Voldemort spoke to the empty air as he lifted the curse. "No more playing hero. It's time to end this."

"You said you'd release them," grated Harry's past self from the ground, struggling to rise.

Voldemort raised his eyebrows. "So I did...but I've changed my mind, thanks to your invisible friend. I'd like him to see just what his interference has wrought." He flung Ron and Hermione away from him, and they fell to the ground, landing hard with silent groans. Voldemort raised his wand, his face full of malevolent joy. "Say goodbye, Harry."

Voldemort began the curse that would end their lives. Without thinking, Harry aimed a spell of his own at Ron and Hermione, blasting them out of the way as Voldemort's jet of green light flew toward them. At the same time, his past self struggled to his feet, crying out as he hurled himself in front of Ron and Hermione, trying to intercept the deadly curse. Harry was shocked to see Snape fire a Stunning Spell, stopping Harry's past self and sending him crashing to the ground instead. The green light went off into the gathering darkness without hitting its mark: Ron, Hermione and Harry's past self were all alive, but unconscious.

Voldemort whirled furiously on Snape and raised his wand in angry preparation. Severus Snape now faced the Dark Lord's icy wrath as Harry watched from the unseen shadows.

\* \* \*

**A/N:** Many thanks to myownmuggle for her wonderful beta work on this daunting chapter! Time-travel is an incredibly tricky thing to write. And a second thank you to Gryffinpuff for her encouragement as well.

## Chapter Four: Faith

*Chapter 4 of 6*

Harry Potter has fulfilled his destiny, and survived his final confrontation with Voldemort; the Dark Lord has been vanquished, but at a terrible price. Dozens are dead, including some of those closest to Harry, and he blames only himself for failing them. Desperate, he returns to Hogwarts hoping to change what has happened and save those he loves. In doing so he unknowingly saves himself, but the consequences require great sacrifice.

This short story is complete. It begins on the battlefield just after Harry's duel with Voldemort, and follows Harry as he tries desperately to right the mistakes of the past, only to rewrite his own future.

Chapter Four: Faith

Voldemort trained his wand on Snape's heart, his face twisted in fury. Harry watched the confrontation in shocked disbelief, forgetting about his defenses. Without warning, he felt an excruciating bolt of purple light slash hotly across his chest and heard Bellatrix Lestrange laugh maniacally. Harry couldn't help but cry out in pain as he fell to his knees. He felt blood begin to soak his robes; looking down, he realized that he was no longer under the protection of the Disillusionment Charm. He could see an appalling gash in his chest and, glancing up in horror, he knew that everyone else could see him as well.

Bellatrix shrieked in triumph, drawing Voldemort's attention from Snape. Harry saw Snape's eyes widen in surprise as the former Potions master moved closer to Harry's past self, unconscious on the ground. Voldemort ignored Snape as he advanced on Harry instead, red eyes glowing with renewed malice. Harry struggled to stand and

face Voldemort yet again.

"Harry! How remarkable!" Voldemort looked back and forth between Harry and his past self. "I don't know how you managed it, but I'm most impressed." He narrowed his eyes. "Seeing as your other self is currently unconscious, I'll have to make do with you now." He aimed his wand at Harry, and before Harry could even try to disarm him, he felt the Cruciatus Curse for the third time that night.

The pain was worse than ever. It felt as if a thousand tiny knives were slicing into his skin and ripping the gash in his chest open even more. Harry heard himself screaming and feared it was all over. Then he realized that he had saved Ron and Hermione; he had done what he had come back to do, only Voldemort had not been vanquished yet. He couldn't give up now, or everything could still change in the swirling eddies of time. Eyes watering, Harry raised his wand hand and cried, "*Expelliarmus!*" with as much force as he could.

It was enough. Voldemort's wand flew out of his hands, settling nearby, and the Cruciatus Curse lifted immediately. Harry threw himself on top of the wand, landing on his stomach, struggling for breath, and desperately wondering what to do next as he felt the strength begin to seep from his body. Out of the corner of his eye he glimpsed Snape edge closer to his past self. No one else saw Snape drop a wand next to the unconscious form of Harry's past self. Bellatrix was staring at Harry with satisfied glee.

Voldemort watched his wand disappear under Harry's battered body and laughed. "Harry! So, you have my wand. I have other weapons at hand, you know." He raised his arm, and within moments several Dementors floated over, hovering above him as if waiting for orders. The air grew cold, and Harry felt the happiness and hope begin to drain from him as it always did in the presence of Dementors.

"This is most unexpected," said Voldemort, his red eyes glowing dangerously. "I really only wanted one Chosen One, but I'll certainly take two...and gladly." He motioned at three of the Dementors, clearly unaffected by their arrival. "Take him, he's yours."

The Dementors rushed at Harry, and he frantically flipped over on his back. "*Expecto Patronum!*" he cried, but to his dismay only a filmy silver mist came from his wand. He was too weak from his wound, or too overwhelmed. Gathering his courage and searching for the happy memory he needed, he tried again. "*Expecto Patronum!*" The silvery shield grew substantially, but there was still no stag to run down the Dementors. Panic began to consume Harry's thoughts: Dumbledore had said he could not die in the past, that the consequences would be unimaginable. Harry heard screaming and saw Ron's pale face in his mind, alive but fading. He felt the iciness envelop him as the Dementors lowered their hoods, scabbed hands reaching out for him. . .

Abruptly the cold became less intense, and as Harry's vision began to focus, he saw the Dementors backing off. A large silver raven was darting across the hilltop, driving them away. Shaking his head to clear it, Harry struggled to his knees. He watched as Voldemort turned on Snape, who was standing over Harry's past self, conjuring the brilliant silver bird. Bellatrix raised her wand toward the former Potions professor, but Voldemort stopped her.

"No, Bella. He is mine." His voice was deadly, and Harry knew then that Snape was a dead man. Harry fought to stand, to raise his wand, but he was weak and fell back to his knees. He didn't realize that he had left Voldemort's wand unprotected. The Dark Lord Summoned it easily into his hands and pointed it toward Snape's heart once more.

"So you reveal your true allegiance at last," said Voldemort softly. Harry watched in disbelief as Voldemort advanced on Snape again; the former Potions master still refused to lower his guard. "Protecting the Chosen One, as you always have. I should have known. You have betrayed me at last, Severus." He raised his wand, ready to end Snape's life.

"No!" shouted Harry, aiming a weak curse at Voldemort from where he still struggled to stand. It hit the Dark Lord's shoulder and sent the green jet of light off into the clouds.

Bellatrix turned on Harry, wand raised. Her face was a mask of manic fury as she cried, "*Sectumsempra!*" and slashed out at Harry. Her curse went wide when she was hit by a stream of green light from Snape's wand and sank to the ground, dead.

Harry stared at Snape in stunned shock; the former professor had saved his life for the third time since the battle had begun. Before either of them could react, a bolt of evil green light struck the older man square in the chest. Snape fell limply to the grass next to Harry's past self, a look of surprise on his pale, lifeless face.

Once more, Harry faced Voldemort alone.

"Harry Potter," whispered Voldemort, his voice deadly with anger. "You will die, both of you. No one can save you now." He advanced on Harry, firing a stream of blue light. Harry barely parried it and cast a weak hex back in return. Voldemort laughed. "Give in, Harry! You are alone! Everyone who is still alive will be dead within moments. Why prolong your suffering?" He cast another curse at Harry, who couldn't block it in time; he fell to the ground again, his body wracked with pain.

Once more Voldemort called the Dementors, and they swarmed the hilltop, swirling around Harry and Voldemort like a filmy snake coiling around its final victim. The field grew cold as all the hope and love was sucked from the air, and Harry felt the familiar bleakness and despair begin to fill his heart. He struggled to cast his Patronus as he heard the screams and a ringing laughter in his ears. Voldemort was going to win, Ron was going to die. . . Harry had come back only to fail again . . .

Through the dim mist clouding his mind, Harry heard a distant sound. It reminded him of a something he had heard years ago in the Chamber of Secrets. Harry's eyes flew open when he realized it was phoenix song, and as it filled him with warmth, Harry found the strength to pull himself to his knees once more. He was astonished at what he saw.

A great red and gold bird had appeared on the ground next to Severus Snape and was calling out a mournful song to the night. The song spoke of faith, love, and loyalty; Fawkes was singing about Ron and Hermione, Charlie Weasley and Luna Lovegood, and all the others who had stood with Harry against Voldemort, even Snape. For a moment the Dementors retreated from the powerful music, until Voldemort shook himself out of the bird's enchanting spell and fired a Killing Curse at the beautiful animal.

Fawkes swallowed the curse, green light exploding into a hundred sparks of red and gold. Harry expected to see a tiny baby phoenix fall to the ground, as he had once before in the Ministry of Magic. He was heartbroken when no hatchling appeared: Fawkes was gone. Voldemort laughed triumphantly and called the Dementors back toward Harry for a third time, plunging him once more into a nightmare of screams and laughter and sharp sobs. . .

As Harry felt their cold presence surround him again, he searched desperately for help; but there was no one left standing nearby, no one to save him. He was alone, badly injured, and surrounded by death, darkness and despair. How could the power of love save him now?

With a sudden flash of fire, a single red feather floated to the ground in front of him, and Harry heard the echoes of an otherworldly song resonate across the bleak field. It sent shivers down his spine and brought tears to his eyes. It also filled him with the liquid warmth of undying love. Thoughts of Ron, Hermione, and all the others he cared about and fought for came rushing back to him; he had come back to save them, and he would not fail now. He could not fail them now. Raising his wand, he stood and cried, "*Expecto Patronum!*" with all his might.

Harry staggered as a dazzling silver Patronus shot from the tip of his wand. Yet instead of a stag, the shape that floated over the hilltop was that of a bird: a great shimmering phoenix whose wings filled half the sky. It began to chase away the Dementors as Harry stood breathing heavily, his wand pointed toward the darkening clouds, all his strength, hope, and love poured into the shining phoenix.

Voldemort cried out in rage and raised his wand toward Harry. Harry's eyes widened in panic and then surprise as behind the Dark Lord a shape slowly rose and leveled its own wand at Voldemort. Harry saw his past self stand, shake off the ropes that had bound him, and cry, "*Exsequor fatum cum dilectio!*" Voldemort reeled around, but he was not fast enough to block the powerful spell that raced toward him. Harry knew he would not have been able to do so regardless; this was the spell destined to destroy the Dark Lord, just as he had been the one destined to cast it.

With a sound like the shattering of a hundred glass orbs, a brilliant yellow light tore through the air toward Voldemort and hit him in the chest as he turned. It struck him in



the heart, and Harry watched in astonishment as Voldemort screamed in fury, clawing at the bright light that was spreading like blood through his thin fingers. The golden luminescence grew until it completely enveloped the shrieking Dark Lord. With a violent release, the light exploded into a thousand tiny sparks, scattering frantically through the air and blowing a keen wind across the field. Harry was knocked to the ground and saw his past self fall backward as well. The explosion rolled over the hilltop and across the field with a deafening sound and a powerful shockwave. Dirt and dust flew into the sky and finally settled on a scene of deadly quiet.

Voldemort was gone, vanquished forever.

The survivors lay scattered about the field, unconscious. Harry clawed his way back to reality, knowing he had to get up and get away before he was discovered. He opened his eyes to a scene much like the one he remembered: bodies lying everywhere, some forever silent, some moaning quietly. Harry saw his past self lying unconscious nearby, Snape's body not far away. Beyond that lay Ron and Hermione, alive but gravely injured. He had saved them, just as he had intended.

And just as he had during his third year, he had saved himself as well.

Harry forced himself to his feet in spite of the unbearable pain and weakness that wracked his entire body. Deep down Harry knew that he was gravely wounded and weak. He had suffered a gruesome injury and several Unforgivable Curses; more importantly he had drained himself of much of his strength when he had cast the startling new Patronus. It was almost impossible, the simple act of standing, but he knew that he could not be seen because his journey back in time wasn't over yet. He had to make it back to the clearing in the forest.

Absently, Harry reached for the Time-Turner tucked around his neck. When he pulled it from his robes, he saw that the curse that had struck his chest had also smashed the tiny silver instrument. The hourglass was shattered, and the sand had run out: the Time-Turner was destroyed. There would be no more going back.

Harry quietly made his way toward Ron and Hermione. Ron was hurt badly, but was still alive. Hermione fluttered her eyes as Harry checked her pulse, and he knew she would be all right as well. Gently, Harry placed the shattered Time-Turner in the pocket of Hermione's robes; she would figure it out and help Ron understand what had happened. Hearing a sound, Harry saw other survivors beginning to stir. He left the hill, moving toward the forest on weak legs, forcing himself to stay upright in spite of the exhaustion that threatened to overwhelm him.

Harry's breathing was becoming harder and harder. He coughed, trying to draw more air into his struggling lungs, and was alarmed when he saw blood in his hand. He began to walk faster, though he felt his strength failing.

Fred and George were awake and crawling painfully toward Charlie. Harry had seen Charlie go down and hoped he was alive. He moved past them, looking for other survivors. Ginny lay next to Luna, her body half on top of the blond girl, as if protecting her from the final blast of Voldemort's death. His heart jumped into his throat as he gently turned Ginny over, and he was relieved to tears when he felt her steady breathing. She had a terrible gash on her head, and her arm was clearly broken, but Harry knew she would survive. Quietly he summoned what little strength he had and conjured a wooden board that would set her arm and ease the pain. He leaned down to kiss her forehead, and then continued through the waking field of battle. Harry checked on more friends, forcing himself to keep moving after finding them alive, in spite of the pain that promised to topple him at any moment.

The setting sun cast its blood red tinge over the horrific aftermath of the battle. Harry knew now that his friends and loved ones had survived. He had saved them, just as he had promised; his task was over. He made his way toward the clearing in the forest, ready for time to catch up with itself.

Harry walked painfully through the trees, his strength beginning to fail him at last. He felt the blood in his lungs and coughed again. His steps grew slower as his limbs grew heavier. Finally he pushed his way into the clearing and collapsed on the ground in exhaustion. The last thing he saw was his past self, jumping up in shock and pointing his wand in stunned surprise at the strange bloody man who had wandered into the forest.

Harry wanted to tell his past self that it would be okay, that the power of love would truly save his friends and win the battle. Yet darkness closed around him, and he couldn't see or speak any longer. He heard a deep sigh, followed by the loud crack of Apparation. Then the pain disappeared, and Harry knew no more.

\* \* \*

**A/N:** Another wonderful thank you to myownmuggle for her great beta work and her help with the final spell. I wanted to use Aramaic, but had a hard time finding the right words so I turned to Latin. I wanted it to very loosely mean: "I fulfill my destiny with love." I must also credit the wonderful editorials at Mugglenet, particularly those of Lady Lupin, for their influence on this story.

## Chapter Five: Fate

### *Chapter 5 of 6*

Harry Potter has fulfilled his destiny, and survived his final confrontation with Voldemort; the Dark Lord has been vanquished, but at a terrible price. Dozens are dead, including some of those closest to Harry, and he blames only himself for failing them. Desperate, he returns to Hogwarts hoping to change what has happened and save those he loves. In doing so he unknowingly saves himself, but the consequences require great sacrifice.

This short story is complete. It begins on the battlefield just after Harry's duel with Voldemort, and follows Harry as he tries desperately to right the mistakes of the past, only to rewrite his own future.

### Chapter Five: Fate

Ron slowly made his way back toward consciousness, desperate to find Harry and Hermione and continue the fight. He felt a sharp stinging pain across his face and heard the wracking sobs of Hermione next to him. When he opened his dry eyes, he saw the concerned face of his brother Bill, set against a darkening night sky obscured by smoke and clouds.

He sat up abruptly, gasping as pain flashed through his nerves. Bill fell backwards while Hermione threw her arms around him.

"What happened?" demanded Ron, looking around wildly through a tangle of bushy brown hair and finally focusing on Bill. "Where's Harry?"

"It's over, Ron," said Bill, sounding tired and kneeling next to Ron. "It's finally over. YouKnow-Who is gone." He didn't say anything about Harry, and Ron noticed immediately.

"Then where is Harry?" he asked again, fear gripping his chest. Hermione was clutching him even harder. He peeled her off his neck, grabbing her shoulders as he gazed

into her red-rimmed eyes. "Tell me!"

Hermione shook her head, wide-eyed. "I don't know, Ron! I didn't see anything...I lost consciousness."

Ron immediately regretted acting so rough with her and tilted her chin up toward him. "I'm sorry," he said softly, wiping a streak of dirt from her face and kissing her forehead. "I'm just worried about him. Are you okay?" She nodded wordlessly, and Ron let out a sigh of relief. He put his arms around her and let her lay her head on his shoulder again. He closed his eyes, fighting back tears. When he opened them, Bill was watching him anxiously.

"Are you alright?" his brother asked. "You took some nasty curses there."

"I'm okay," Ron nodded, somewhat amazed that he had survived after all that had happened. He touched the gruesome cut across his face and neck, wincing in pain as he remembered the brutal curse that Bellatrix had cast. The bleeding had stopped, but he was tired, sore, and still deathly worried about Harry. "What about you? Did you get him?" He knew Bill had come to the battle with the sole purpose of defeating Fenrir Greyback.

Bill grinned somewhat wolfishly in spite of his obvious exhaustion. "Yeah, we did...me and Remus fought him together. Greyback won't be biting any more children, ever again."

Ron took his brother's arm, his throat tight with emotion. "Good for you. What about the others? Who's hurt?" He didn't want to ask who had died; he didn't want to know because he didn't think he could bear it.

Bill took a deep breath, his face darkening. "We did surprisingly well, considering the odds. Fred has some nasty cuts, George is limping, and Ginny broke her arm. Mom and Dad are okay, but Charlie was hurt pretty seriously."

Ron stood up slowly, his body stiff. Hermione rose with him, her hand entangled tightly with his own. "What about Harry?" he asked again. "What happened to Harry?"

"I'm sorry," Bill replied quietly. "I don't know either. No one knows. He just ran toward the forest without stopping."

Ron turned to Hermione, whose eyes were very wide. "We have to find him," he told her, determined to locate Harry. "He might still need our help. Are you sure you're all right?"

"Yes, as long as you are," Hermione replied, reaching up to touch his face. Ron took her hand and kissed it gently. He was glad for her concern, but more worried for Harry. Why had he run? Was he being pursued? Was he injured?

"I'll be fine," said Ron, ignoring the dark thoughts that floated into his mind. "Red sparks for help, green for safety?" he asked, referring to the system they had used during their hunt for the Horcruxes. Hermione nodded, but her face betrayed the deep fear Ron felt as well.

"Be careful," she whispered in his ear as she kissed his uninjured cheek. She moved off to the right, while Ron walked to the left. He strode through a scorched landscape that was littered with bodies. He saw several Order members being treated for their injuries; he saw more Death Eaters, silent and unmoving. Bellatrix Black was lying nearby, dead eyes staring into the sky, and Ron couldn't help but smile with grim satisfaction. Not far from her lay Severus Snape. Ron wondered how the spy and former professor had been killed, and which side he finally chose to die for.

Ron marveled at how well the Order had fared in what had seemed a very overwhelming battle. In spite of being outnumbered by both Death Eaters and Dementors, the Order had somehow managed to hold their own in the terrible fight. He saw Fred helping Ginny, her broken arm set in a wooden splint. George stood nearby with Nymphadora Tonks, who appeared relatively unscathed. Hagrid was speaking with Professor McGonagall, gesturing wildly toward the forest. Ron did not see Harry, nor did he see Charlie, and his anxiety increased as he continued walking through the aftermath of the battle.

Ron finally found his father sitting on a large rock; his head was in his hands, and his shoulders were slumped in exhaustion. He was covered in dirt and blood and looked ten years older.

"Dad?" Ron whispered, suddenly fearing that his father was hurt, or that someone else was hurt, even dead. He hurried up to his father and knelt down in front of him. "Are you okay? What's wrong? Where's Charlie?" Bill had said Charlie was injured badly, and Ron suddenly imagined the worst as his mind started racing with visions of his brother, dead.

Arthur Weasley looked up, his face pale and tired. He stood and without a word grasped Ron close, holding him tightly. Ron felt his panic increase as they stood there holding each other, not speaking.

"Dad," he rasped out, finally pulling back. "What happened? Where's Charlie? Bill said he was hurt seriously is he okay?"

His father stepped back, taking off his glasses and wiping his eyes as he nodded. "Yes, he'll be all right. He's with your mother. They went to St. Mungo's."

Ron released the breath he didn't know he had been holding. "Then what's wrong? Dad, it's over, and we're all okay. What's wrong?"

Arthur Weasley looked at his son with tears in his eyes. "I can't believe we all made it. I'm just so relieved no one was..." he broke off and clasped Ron tightly again.

Ron felt a ridiculous grin on his face. "All right, Dad. Don't squeeze too hard or I won't make it after all." His father stepped back, smiling in return. Together they gazed across the bleak battlefield, and Ron felt his worry return.

"Dad, what happened at the end?" he asked quietly. "What happened to Harry? Did you see him?"

"I don't know what happened, Ron," his father replied sadly. "I only know that he did it, that Harry finally vanquished You-Know-Who. He ran that way...I think Remus went after him." He pointed toward the forest. With a nod of understanding, Ron took off, hope replacing the worry that had enveloped him as he realized Harry had left the battlefield alive.

As he entered the forest, Ron slowed down. "*Lumos*," he muttered, casting a light to lead him through the dark trees. He spotted a clearing ahead and saw a shadowy form on the ground. He made his way through the underbrush, not caring that it ripped at his robes and scratched at his arms. He felt his chest clench in panic as a sudden dread about what he might find destroyed the small hope he had experienced just moments earlier.

Ron burst into the clearing upon a scene he would never forget for its heartbreaking stillness: Remus Lupin, kneeling sadly next to the body of a young man. His back shook with silent sobs, and Ron felt the terrible truth, deep down in his soul, ripping his heart in two: Harry had not survived the final battle. The Boy Who Lived had finally died.

Lupin glanced up with bright eyes as Ron stumbled into the clearing and fell to the ground next to Harry. He felt his face screw up with the terrific effort of holding in the desperate sobs in his chest. All he could do was shake his head, refusing to believe the awful reality. He took Harry's hand and found that it was cold. The shock of it broke his silence; like a dam bursting, he cried out in pain for the loss of his best friend.

How long he wept, he did not know. He did not think that he would ever be free of the dull ache in his chest or the hole in his heart. Lupin finally placed a hand on his shoulder, looking at him with dead grey eyes, and together they rose. For a long moment they stood in silence, not knowing what to say or what to do.

"What happened?" Ron asked wearily, for what felt like the tenth time that night. No one had answered him yet, and he needed to know how Harry had died.

"I don't know," replied Lupin softly. "He ran after the battle. When I arrived here, I thought I saw . . . well, I thought I saw something I didn't. Harry was lying here, unconscious, and he never woke up." Lupin frowned as he looked down at Harry, and Ron glanced at him questioningly.

"What is it? What aren't you saying?" he demanded, desperate to understand.

Lupin shook his head. "I don't know. I didn't think Harry was that gravely injured at first. Yet when I found him here, he was gone. I don't know what happened." His face crumpled as he looked at Ron with an expression of pain and grief. "I'm so sorry, Ron."

"I can't believe it," Ron murmured, closing his eyes as more tears fell. He was overwhelmed with shock, frustration, and confusion. "I just can't believe he's gone. What do we do now?"

Remus took a deep breath and passed his hand over his eyes before answering. "I think we should regroup at Hogwarts...everyone that doesn't need St. Mungo's. It will be safest. Let's take him there." He bent down to pick up Harry's body, but Ron put his hand on Lupin's shoulder and stopped him.

"No, I'll do it. I should be the one." Ron took a deep breath and, without another word, he picked up Harry's lifeless form. He couldn't bear to look into his friend's pale face and turned his head away with a choked sob. With a final nod to Lupin, he stepped around and Apparated out of the forest.

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The castle grounds were dark and deathly quiet as a Ron strode purposefully toward the black lake. He carried a heavy bundle, stumbling in sorrowful haste, as he made his way toward the white marble tomb that stood on the banks.

He gently set down his sad burden: the body of his best friend. He stepped back, and the mask of grief he wore turned to sudden rage.

"He's dead!" Ron shouted at the tomb, his cries echoing out into the dark night. "He's dead and it's your fault! You left us here, to fight alone, and now he's gone. How could you leave us?"

He sank to his knees on the soft earth, inconsolable, and his head fell to his heaving chest. "We fought so hard," he whispered, desperately trying to hold back hot tears. "We followed the clues; we found the Horcruxes. We destroyed them all and went after..." He paused, chasing away the wetness in his eyes with the back of his hand as he prepared to finally say it. "...after Voldemort. He's gone now, vanquished forever. The world is safe."

Ron stood up and took a deep breath. He felt the anger return. "But the only one who really mattered is gone. He's dead! How could you leave him to die? What are we going to do now, without him?" He placed a shaking hand on the tomb as the loss finally overwhelmed him. He wasn't furious after all: he was devastated. "What am I going to do?" he whispered to the silent tomb, but no one answered.

How long he stood there, his heart breaking, he did not know. He was not aware of the pain from his injuries or the cold night air. He only felt the keen sorrow of unbearable loss, an empty hollow feeling deep in his soul. Soon a small hand found his, steady and warm. Ron looked into a face as grief-struck as his own, but also full of compassion and love.

"Come on," said Hermione quietly, her voice gentle and sad as tears flowed down her cheeks. "Let's bring him home."

Ron nodded as the tears began to run down his face again. He couldn't hold them back any longer. He wanted to stay and rage at the stoic marble tomb, but he knew that deep down he wasn't angry. The anguish he felt wasn't the pain of rage; it was grief for a life lost, a friend cruelly taken. He didn't know how he would go on without Harry.

Bending down, Ron smoothed his friend's dark hair one last time. He picked up the body, surprised at how light his burden now felt. Slowly he made his way back up to the castle with Hermione at his side, crying silently.

A dozen witches and wizards met them at the entrance to the castle, their wands lighting the way. Fred and George were there, eyes bright in the dim light, and Bill stood with his arm around Ginny, who looked pale and shocked. Remus Lupin waited silently next to Professor McGonagall as she dabbed at her eyes with a handkerchief. Hagrid wailed, and Arthur Weasley patted him sadly on the arm. Others lined the way as well, survivors of the long hard battle, come to pay their final respects. They all showed signs of the harsh fight and watched with weary eyes as Ron and Hermione walked slowly between them bearing the body of the boy who had saved them all.

The battle was over, the war was won; but the victory was bittersweet.

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**A/N:** Many thanks to myownmuggle for her beta work on this sad chapter. Thanks also to ProfPosky for some last minute support as well. This story will conclude in Chapter Six: Farewell.

## Chapter Six: Farewell

### *Chapter 6 of 6*

Harry Potter has fulfilled his destiny, and survived his final confrontation with Voldemort; the Dark Lord has been vanquished, but at a terrible price. Dozens are dead, including some of those closest to Harry, and he blames only himself for failing them. Desperate, he returns to Hogwarts hoping to change what has happened and save those he loves. In doing so he unknowingly saves himself, but the consequences require great sacrifice.

This short story is complete. It begins on the battlefield just after Harry's duel with Voldemort, and follows Harry as he tries desperately to right the mistakes of the past, only to rewrite his own future.

### Chapter Six: Farewell

The bright summer sun reflected off the dark water, throwing its sparkling reflection onto the gathering of witches and wizards who mingled on the grassy banks of the black lake. It was a somber gathering, for they had come together to recognize and mourn those lost in the war with Voldemort. Some wept openly, while others were silent, still unable to grieve for the devastating loss of a loved one. Some gathered in small groups and quietly remembered friends and family now gone, while others remained apart with their private memories of those lost to the war.

Ron Weasley stood alone under the beech tree where he had sat for many long and happy hours with his friends. He absently tossed small stones into the lake, remembering the lazy days he had spent with Harry doing the same thing. It was yet another sad reminder of all that he had lost, of all that had changed, and finally he stopped, unable to continue. He stared across the water as tears stung his eyes. He wiped them away, angry once more at the heartbreaking outcome of the final battle.

"I can't believe you're gone," he whispered to the water, letting his head fall to his chest and taking deep breaths to stop the sobs threatening to overwhelm him yet again.

He felt a small hand take his own and glanced down into his sister's pale face. Ginny's broken arm had been mended, but the emotional toll of the battle was written plainly across her features. Her eyes were red, her cheeks drawn, and her eyes dull. She looked, Ron thought, exactly like he felt: devastated.

"Hi," she said, leaning on his shoulder. He put his arm around her and held her close. She did not cry. "Harry would have hated that speech," she said softly, her voice hinting at a gentle laugh.

Ron nodded, a small smile coming to his lips as he considered what Harry would have thought about the funeral. "Absolutely," he agreed, forcing his own voice to sound light. "It was terrible; he would have been horrified." Ron knew it was true: Harry would have been embarrassed to hear the grand and heroic things people had said about him, no matter how right they were. Harry would not have wanted such a grand farewell.

"I liked it," said Ginny as she sighed sadly. "We needed it," she added. "It's important for us to remember him and say good bye."

"I still can't believe it," Ron said quietly. "I just don't understand what happened."

"He saved us," said a soft voice behind them. Ron turned and saw Hermione walking down the bank toward them. She looked sad and tired, but Ron noticed a strange light in her eyes, the kind she always got when she had discovered something important. "I think I know how," she added breathlessly.

Ron and Ginny stared at her, mouths open. "What?" asked Ron in disbelief. "How?"

"I found something in my robes that night, something I think Harry put there." She reached into her pocket and pulled out a long thin chain. Hanging from the end was a tiny silver hourglass, broken and empty of sand.

"It's a Time-Turner!" exclaimed Ginny, taking it from Hermione's hands. "How did you get it?"

"I told you...I think Harry put it there before he. . ." she trailed off, unable to finish. Hermione swallowed hard before continuing. "I think he used it to go back in time. It explains everything! Lupin said when he first saw Harry on the field, he wasn't hurt that badly; but later in the forest, he was gravely injured. I think Harry went back in time and fought the battle again."

Ron stared at Hermione as if she were speaking another language; Ginny looked back and forth from Hermione to the Time-Turner and sighed again.

"It doesn't matter...he's still gone," she said quietly, handing it back to Hermione. "And the Time-Turner is broken, so we can't go back and save him." Hermione gave her a look of compassion and impulsively embraced the younger girl.

"I'm so sorry, Ginny," she whispered. "I know it doesn't make it any easier. But I think that's what Harry did...he went back in time to save us. That means he's even more of a hero than anyone knows."

"She's right," said a deep voice from beside them. They jumped and turned to see Remus Lupin standing quietly, staring out across the lake. He was as rumpled and graying as ever; his face had more lines, and he looked more tired than any of them.

"I am?" whispered Hermione. "How do you know?"

Lupin sighed, and looked at them sorrowfully. "I just found out, from . . . well, come with me. I was asked to find you." Lupin turned and led the way back to the castle. Ron took Hermione's hand and followed, his arm still around Ginny's shoulders.

They walked through the dark, silent halls without a word, each wrapped up in their own bleak thoughts of the funeral. Lupin led them to the seventh floor corridor, to the stone gargoyle that guarded the passage to the Headmistress's office. "Bollocks," he said, and the gargoyle moved aside. The four of them stepped onto the moving staircase and made their way to the oak doors that led into the Headmistress's office. The door was slightly ajar, but Lupin knocked anyway.

"Come in," said a familiar voice, and they entered.

Professor McGonagall was not seated behind the large wooden desk, but in front of it. She stood and turned toward them as they walked into the circular room, their mouths hanging open. Behind her over the desk hung the portrait of Professor Dumbledore, but he was no longer alone in the painting. He was smiling at them, yet it was not the late headmaster that they stared at.

It was Harry.

He was examining the sword of Godric Gryffindor on the shelf behind Professor Dumbledore's desk. Dumbledore cleared his throat, and Harry turned around. He gave them a big grin; Hermione gasped and Ginny's hands flew to her mouth.

"Hi," he said, still smiling.

"Harry," breathed Hermione. "How is this possible? You're..."

"Yes, I know," replied Harry, not finishing her sentence. "And I'm sorry. I know it must be hard."

Ginny gave a choked sob; Ron just continued gaping at the portrait. "But how did you get into Professor Dumbledore's portrait?" Hermione asked, obviously grasping at hard facts to ground her.

Harry actually laughed. "Dobby painted my picture during our fifth year not an official portrait, but it was good enough."

Ron couldn't help but snort as he thought about the red and green blob that Dobby had painted for Harry. He suddenly wanted to find the house-elf and thank him with a hundred pairs of socks for this chance to see his best friend one more time. "It's good to see you, mate," he said, grinning as well. "Now tell us what happened."

Harry looked at Professor Dumbledore, who nodded serenely. Harry sighed and came around the portrait desk to face them. "It's complicated," he began. He started from the beginning, remembering how he had woken on the battlefield and believed Ron was dead, along with so many others. He told them how he had run into the forest, only to see himself come crashing into the clearing. He related how he had come back to Hogwarts and retrieved the Time-Turner from Professor Dumbledore. Hermione interrupted him.

"You kept it?" she asked Professor Dumbledore curiously. "After I turned it in at the end of my third year?"

The late headmaster nodded. "I did, as a precaution. Even then I felt relations with the Ministry were not going well and that it might be best to keep one, just in case. In some ways I am glad I did, in others I am not."

Harry looked at Professor Dumbledore again and swallowed, then continued. He told them that he had used the Time-Turner to go back to the beginning of the battle, hiding his presence under a Disillusionment Charm. He recounted the moment he had finally entered the battle, firing at Bellatrix Black after she had hit Hermione. He revealed how he then had stalked the field, taking out Death Eaters from behind, including the woman who had broken Ginny's arm.

"That was you?" Ginny asked, surprised, and Harry nodded. "Why didn't you say anything?"

"I couldn't," Harry replied, looking sheepish. "I couldn't let anyone know there were two of me there that day. I'm sorry, Ginny...I wanted to, but I just couldn't." Ginny looked away, and Harry continued with another sigh.

He told them how he had stepped in again after Ron had been injured and Hermione had cursed Bellatrix Lestrange. He remembered how Voldemort had captured Ron and Hermione and forced Harry's past self to surrender his wand. Harry paused and took a deep breath before going on.

"I stopped Voldemort from torturing my past self, but Voldemort decided to kill you because I had interfered. He used the Killing Curse. I jinxed you out of the way at the same time my past self jumped in front of you."

Ron was stunned: he had been unconscious and remembered nothing about the Killing Curse. "Is that how you. . . " He couldn't finish the horrible thought.

Harry shook his head. "No, Snape blasted my past self out of the path of the curse. Voldemort was furious. He turned on Snape, and he probably would have killed him then if I hadn't screwed up."

"What do you mean?" asked Ginny, curious now. "What happened next?"

Harry told them how he had dropped his guard and allowed Bellatrix Black to wound him. "Voldemort turned on me. He used the Cruciatus Curse before I finally got his wand, but then he called in the Dementors. I didn't think I was going to make it; I couldn't do the Patronus Spell."

Hermione looked horrified. "They didn't . . . " Once more the question was left unasked, too horrible to even think about. Again Harry shook his head.

"No, they didn't perform the Kiss. Snape saved me." Harry revealed Snape's Patronus and told them how it had chased the Dementors away. He told them how Voldemort had called for his wand and prepared to fire on Snape. "I threw a curse at Voldemort, and he missed. Bellatrix Lestrange fired at me, but Snape killed her first. And then Voldemort killed Snape."

"I don't believe it," said Ron, shocked. He had assumed Snape had been killed fighting as a Death Eater, not fighting for Harry.

"Snape died to save me," Harry said simply. "He made his choice at the end. He died a hero as much as anyone else did."

"Severus was always loyal to the Order," added Dumbledore from behind Harry. "There was never any reason to doubt him."

"But then why did he ..." began Hermione.

"That is another story," said Dumbledore firmly. "Please continue, Harry."

Harry glanced at the former headmaster again before turning back to the others in the office. "Voldemort was really angry then and called the Dementors back. I thought for sure that would be it, until I heard it."

"Heard what?" asked Ginny.

"Fawkes," replied Harry, and Hermione gasped again. "Fawkes appeared next to Snape, singing. Voldemort killed him too, but somehow the song was enough. I was finally able to cast a Patronus and drive the Dementors away."

"Tell them about your Patronus, Harry," suggested Dumbledore, his eyes twinkling.

"It was a phoenix," said Harry with a lopsided grin. Dumbledore looked at him proudly, while Ginny simply nodded in amazement and Ron stared, dumbfounded.

"How did you kill Voldemort, then?" asked Hermione, her brows knit together and her voice puzzled. "If you were casting a Patronus, you couldn't use the spell we found."

"I didn't," replied Harry, frowning. "At least, the one of me casting the Patronus didn't. It was my past self, the one Snape had knocked out. Snape had dropped my wand next to me...or him...and so I...I mean, he ...stood and cast the final spell. It worked: Voldemort was vanquished."

For a moment everyone was silent, too stunned to speak. Harry had risked everything to go back to the past in order to save them all, and he had accomplished the near impossible in his final duel with Voldemort. It was Lupin who finally broke the silence.

"I found Harry on the field, but he ran into the forest. I followed, and for a moment I thought I saw two of him. That's when I found his future self in the clearing, mortally injured." Lupin's voice sounded rough, and his eyes gazed sadly at the boy in the portrait.

"Yes," said Harry, nodding to Lupin. "I knew I had to make it back there so I would see myself and know what to do."

Hermione was shaking her head, her eyes bright. "I can't believe you did all that, Harry."

Harry grinned. "Like I said, it was complicated."

"It was brilliant," said Ron, grinning back.

"Did you put the Time-Turner in my pocket?" asked Hermione, wiping her eyes and taking the shattered hourglass from her robes.

"I hoped you would figure it out," Harry replied. "I knew things would seem confusing, but if anyone could figure it out, you would."

"She did," said Ginny quietly, smiling at Hermione. Hermione returned the smile but did not say anything. Everyone was silent for a long moment, until Dumbledore finally stood.

"It is almost time, Harry," said Dumbledore softly, coming around the desk and placing his hand on Harry's shoulder. Ron felt a sudden rush of panic.

"Time for what?" he demanded. "You're not leaving, are you? We just found you. You can't go!"

"I'm sorry, Ron," said Harry, looking down at Ron from the portrait. "Dobby's magic isn't strong enough to keep me here. I'm not sure I understand it myself, but I can't stay."

"Magic works in mysterious ways," said Dumbledore, his voice wise with compassion. Harry turned to face him, and the late headmaster gazed at him for a very long time. "And yet magic has its reasons...and its rewards." He clasped Harry close to him in a rare show of emotion. Ron saw the headmaster say something quietly to Harry, his eyes bright behind his spectacles, and Harry nodded in response. Then Harry turned back toward the room and, with one last glance back at Dumbledore, he stepped out of the portrait.

Ginny and Hermione cried out, and even Professor McGonagall gasped. Harry now stood in front of the great wooden desk, a pale, ghostly figure of his former self. He looked down at his shimmering form, at his indistinct hands and feet, and then glanced up at Ron and grinned.

"This must be what Professors Binns feels like when he gets up in the morning," he said with a wink. "It's very weird." He took a deep breath, and his expression grew serious as he walked toward Ginny.

Ginny's face was wet with fresh tears. "What's happening?" she whispered. She held her hand up to Harry's face, but it passed through his ethereal form, and she dropped her arm with a sob.

"I'm so sorry, Ginny," said Harry, and his voice sounded rough. "I have to go now." He took a step closer, reaching toward her face. He ran his ghostly hand across her cheek, and Ginny's eyes went wide at his otherworldly touch. Harry leaned in to kiss her one last time. She gasped, tears spilling down her face, and touched her lips where

Harry had kissed her. Harry whispered something in her ear, then pulled away with a sad smile and turned to Ron and Hermione.

Hermione was clutching Ron's arm tightly, her shoulders shaking silently. Harry stepped in front of her and reached down for her hand. She held it up to him, and he grasped it with ashen fingers. He put his other pale hand on her shoulder and brought his head to rest on her forehead. "Hermione," he said softly as she wept. "I don't know what I would have done without you all these years. You are the best friend anyone could possibly hope for." He kissed her on the cheek and backed away, leaving Hermione with her hand to her face, crying quietly.

Ron swallowed hard as Harry finally turned to him. He felt his eyes begin to sting and saw that Harry's eyes were bright as well. They both laughed nervously as they blinked away tears. Hermione was now sobbing into Lupin's robes, while Ginny stood with Professor McGonagall's arm gently draped around her shoulders.

"I thought you were dead," began Harry, his voice thick with emotion. "I couldn't bear it. I had to go back and change what happened. I had to save you." Ron nodded, his throat too tight to speak. "I'm glad I did, Ron, but I'm so sorry you have to bear this burden now."

"Harry, I..." Ron croaked, but Harry held up a hand and smiled.

"It's okay...I know," he said simply. He stepped closer and moved to embrace his best friend. Ron felt a ghostly chill surround him, but then to his shock he felt the solid living warmth of Harry's arms. With a gasp he returned the embrace, openly weeping into Harry's shoulder; he felt Harry's back heaving with sobs as well. Ron knew that as hard as it was to watch Harry go, his friend felt exactly the same way about leaving. It was a parting that was devastating in all its finality; Ron did not want to ever release his hold on Harry and lose his best friend again.

Harry finally stepped back, ghostly once more. He wiped his eyes with the back of his hand and grinned, and Ron couldn't help but grin back. "Take care of them," Harry said, inclining his head to both Ginny and Hermione. Ron nodded wordlessly. Hermione appeared by his side once more, her fingers entwined tightly in his, and Ginny stepped to his right, silently taking his other hand.

Harry nodded toward Professor McGonagall and Remus Lupin, before turning back to Professor Dumbledore in the portrait. "I'm ready," he said, his voice finally breaking.

"Good-bye, Harry," said Dumbledore softly, and there was a muffled sniff from Professor McGonagall.

Harry blew out a long breath and nodded. He glanced over his shoulder one last time at his friends and smiled, then turned back as if he had heard something. Ron thought there was a ghostly murmur in the air.

"Mum? Dad?" whispered Harry, his eyes suddenly bright. A tremendous smile came over his face as he opened his arms wide and slowly disappeared. The sound of joyful laughter filled the office even as his friends wept with grief.

Ron, Hermione, and Ginny enveloped each other in a fierce hug. Harry was truly gone now, but they took comfort from the knowledge that he was finally with his parents. He had fulfilled his destiny and moved on to a place full of love and happiness. Those left behind would mourn his passing in a peaceful world because of his selfless sacrifice.

With a dull ache in his heart that he knew would always be there, Ron finally pulled back from the embrace. He took a deep breath as he kissed Hermione's forehead and wrapped his arm around Ginny's shoulders once more. "Come on," he said quietly. "Let's go home." Quietly he led them from the office, to return to the friends and family waiting for them by the banks of the lake. Professor McGonagall and Remus Lupin followed silently.

As the door closed behind them, Professor Dumbledore returned to his desk in the portrait on the wall. He closed his eyes and a small tear trickled down his face. "Farewell, Harry," he whispered to the empty room.

The only answer was the ghostly laughter that lingered joyously in the air.

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**A/N:** I would like to once more thank myownmuggle for her wonderful beta work on this story, as well as J.K. Rowling for the opportunity to reunite Harry with his parents, however sad it has been for those of us left behind. I would also like to thank everyone who has read and reviewed this story: I appreciate your kind words and hope you have enjoyed this tale of Harry's final journey.