

Follow The Butterflies

by Gmariam

Harry Potter sleeps restlessly the night before his final confrontation with Voldemort. An unusual vision propels him through a poignant dreamscape where he encounters all those he has loved and lost. As Harry follows a strange guide on a journey both emotional and spiritual, he learns more about the power the Dark Lord knows not and comes to finally realize how his destiny rests on the power of love.

One-Shot

Chapter 1 of 1

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Harry Potter tossed fitfully as he lay in bed, his mind an agitated jumble of thoughts and images. Tomorrow he would be facing Voldemort for the final time in a battle he could scarcely hope to win. He was anxious, scared, and couldn't sleep. Visions of Death Eaters and Dementors raced through his mind. Eventually, he fell into an exhausted half-sleep and began to dream. . .

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Harry walks through the great oak doors of the castle and is blinded by the bright warm light of the setting summer sun. It sends its golden rays across the waters of the black lake and reflects them off the windows of the castle in a rainbow of sparkling colors. As he blinks against the sudden glare, Harry is startled to see a figure standing at the base of the stone steps, a dark silhouette against the dazzling light. When Harry nears him, he is astounded to see that it is the late headmaster, Albus Dumbledore.

"Professor Dumbledore," he gasps, his heart pounding rapidly as he stops to stare at his former mentor. "I don't understand. What are you doing here? You're...well, dead."

"Hello, Harry," says Professor Dumbledore, his eyes twinkling behind his half-moon spectacles. "Indeed I am, yet did I not tell you once before that death is but the next great adventure?"

"Am I dead then as well?" whispers Harry, his heart now cold in his chest.

Dumbledore shakes his head and laughs merrily. "No, you are not, Harry...just as I am not really alive. I am merely a guide, the first of many you will meet."

"I still don't understand," says Harry, feeling lost and confused.

"You will," promises Dumbledore, and he places his hand on Harry's shoulder. "That is why you are here. Do you remember the words of the prophecy, Harry?"

Harry nods, and Dumbledore continues.

"You have a power that Voldemort does not know, does not even believe. You simply have to discover it within yourself. You must not fear it."

"You mean love?" asks Harry, his voice skeptical. He has always doubted the power of love. How can love kill a man he hates, when it cannot save those he loves?

"Yes!" replies Dumbledore earnestly. "It is love which will defeat Voldemort. You must find it within you and accept its power. You must have faith."

Harry shakes his head, discouraged. "I don't know how," he tells his mentor, searching Dumbledore's face for an answer.

"You will learn," says Dumbledore, smiling. He holds up his hand and reveals a beautiful white butterfly with translucent silver wings. "Follow the butterflies, Harry. You will understand."

Dumbledore releases the delicate creature, and it darts into the air, flitting rapidly down the hill toward the lake. Dumbledore nods farewell to Harry, and Harry follows the butterfly.

As it nears the lake, the butterfly begins to change color, and its wings turn a deep shade of crimson. It comes to land on the shoulder of thin man with glasses. He is standing at the water's edge, his arm around a short woman with red hair and a caring face.

"Hello, Harry," says Arthur Weasley, peering over his glasses at Harry. He is unfazed by the red butterfly fluttering its wings on his shoulder.

"Hi, Mr. Weasley, Mrs. Weasley," says Harry, puzzled. "What are you doing here?"

"We're your family, Harry," says Mrs. Weasley, smiling kindly at him. "We love you and want to help you." She reaches up and touches his cheek fondly, like a mother touching her son.

Harry is embarrassed and ducks his head. "I know you do, Mrs. Weasley, but I can do this by myself. I have to." He does not want anyone to get hurt; it is his battle to fight, his war to win or lose.

"We know, dear," says Mrs. Weasley. "And that's why we're here."

"But..." begins Harry, protesting.

"Harry," says Mr. Weasley, his face serious. "Part of being able to offer love is learning to accept love as well. If you hope to defeat You-Know-Who, you must not only tap the love you feel for others but also the love that those same people feel for you."

"I do love you," whispers Harry, staring at them. "You're the only family I have."

Mrs. Weasley embraces him tightly. "We will always be there for you, Harry."

Mr. Weasley shakes Harry's hand and pats his shoulder. "You are part of our family, Harry. Accept that love and you will succeed. Now follow the butterflies. You will understand."

Mrs. Weasley takes the red butterfly from her husband's shoulder and releases it into the sky. As its wings change from deep red to burnt orange, Harry follows its path around the lake. He turns and sees Mr. and Mrs. Weasley standing together on the steps of the castle with Professor Dumbledore. Mrs. Weasley waves at him and dabs her eyes with a handkerchief.

As Harry rounds the lake, he sees the butterfly darting around two tall, lanky boys with bright ginger hair. They are laughing as they skip stones across the dark water.

"Wotcher, Harry?" asks Fred, lobbing one last stone across the lake.

"How goes the Chosen One?" asks George, sinking his own large rock before turning to Harry.

"I'm okay, I guess," says Harry, even more perplexed as he watches the butterfly joyfully circle the twins.

"Sure you are, Harry," laughs George with a wink. "You look confused."

"You look like you've taken a Befuddlement Draught," adds Fred.

Harry grins at the twins' familiar teasing. "I feel like it," he says. "What's going on? Why are you here?"

"We are here," begins Fred, affecting a dramatic tone of voice, "to remind you of the power of love."

George snorts. "A love of laughter, that is. You'll get none of that sentimental stuff from us."

"Don't forget your sense of humor, Harry," says Fred, his expression suddenly sincere. "Life is hollow without those small moments of levity and laughter, cheerfulness and chuckles."

"Love is a very solemn affair, but keep it light-hearted as well, Harry." George gives him a wink. "Don't take things too seriously, including yourself."

"But this is very serious..." begins Harry, but he is interrupted.

"Follow the butterflies, Harry," says Fred with a grin. "Laugh, giggle, cackle, and snort as you do. You will understand." With a flourish he pulls out his wand and waves it at his twin. George promptly turns into a large bullfrog and croaks loudly. Harry can't help but laugh as he leaves the twins to follow the butterfly. He turns to see Fred and a fully human George standing on the stone steps of the castle with their parents and the headmaster; George is cuffing his brother on the head as everyone laughs merrily.

Harry smiles to himself as the butterfly flits away and begins to turn a pale shade of yellow. The fluttering insect lands on a small honeysuckle bush next to a couple sitting in the grass by the far side of the lake. A man with long red hair rests with his arms around a beautiful woman; they are the picture of happiness.

"Bonjour, 'Arry," says Fleur Weasley, smiling up at Harry.

"Join us," invites Bill, indicating the grass next to them.

Harry sits down on the lawn, waiting for Bill and Fleur to speak. It has become obvious to him that his guides know far more about his journey through the mysterious dreamscape than he does.

"Love is a wondrous thing, Harry," says Bill, gazing affectionately at his wife. "Don't push it away, even if you think you are protecting the one you love by doing so."

Harry looks at him, startled.

"e is right," says Fleur, nodding wisely at her husband. "When someone loves you, zey will do anything for you, no matter ze hurt or ze risk."

"Don't reject love freely given, Harry," continues Bill, watching Harry closely. "We all need companions on our journey. Don't push yours away."

Harry is speechless as he thinks not only of Ginny, but also of Ron, Hermione, and the many others he has often pushed away because he is afraid they will be hurt. He

gazes across the lake, regretting how he distances himself from those who care about him.

Bill reaches toward the yellow butterfly and cups it in his hand. When he opens his hand, the butterfly has become a beautiful emerald green color, and it darts into the sky toward the Forbidden Forest.

"Follow the butterflies, Harry. It will get difficult, but you will understand."

Harry simply nods his thanks as he stands to pursue his strange escort. He turns before coming to the edge of the trees and sees Bill and Fleur on the steps of the castle with the others who have guided him so far.

As Harry walks into the trees, he is shocked to see a greasy-haired man standing with his hand on the shoulders of a pale-faced young man. The emerald butterfly lands on the trunk of an elm tree just behind them.

"Well, Potter," says Severus Snape, stepping around Draco Malfoy and walking slowly toward Harry. "Figured it out yet?"

Harry takes a startled step backwards, staring in disbelief at the traitor who killed Professor Dumbledore the previous year. He shakes his head and grows irritated when Snape laughs in derision.

"You never were a quick student," says Snape scornfully. Malfoy lets out a mocking laugh as well, and Harry glares at him.

"Shut up, Malfoy," Harry snaps at the Slytherin. "You don't know any better than I do what's going on."

Malfoy raises his eyebrows. "Sure I do, Potter. It's simple, but I suppose a dunderhead like you would never see it."

"I'm supposed to be learning about love," cries Harry. "I despise you...both of you! What does that have to do with love?"

Snape looks at Harry condescendingly. "Love and hate are opposites, Potter. You cannot have one without the other. More importantly, you must release your hate if you are to truly love."

Harry's mouth falls open at the older man's words. "What do you know about love? You've never loved. You killed Professor Dumbledore, the one man who trusted you."

Snape inclines his head; there is a haunted look in his eyes. "I did, but this is neither the time nor place for that discussion. You must forgive all those who have wronged you, Potter, if you truly wish to tap the power the Dark Lord knows not. Otherwise he will win...with the power of hate."

Harry feels an incredulous look come over his face. "You mean I have to forgive you? Right here, right now?"

Malfoy laughs again, and Harry rounds on him furiously. "I said stuff it, Malfoy," he hisses, though his voice is now laced with doubt.

"Or what? You'll kill me?" Malfoy steps past Snape to look Harry in the eye. "You've already forgiven me, Potter, you just don't know it. I may have let the Death Eaters into the castle that night, but I would never have killed Dumbledore. He offered to help me...he forgave me." A strange look passes over Malfoy's face. "He showed me mercy," Draco finishes softly.

"And I'm supposed to show you mercy too, is that it?" asks Harry angrily.

"Yes, Potter, that is exactly the point," snaps Snape. "There is much you do not know or understand about what happened that night. Mercy is an act of forgiveness...of love. You must release your hatred in order to forgive and truly love, for it is only through this power that you can hope to defeat the Dark Lord."

"I'll try my best," says Harry shortly, holding his tirade inside. The green butterfly behind the two men launches itself from the tree, its wings slowly shifting to a beautiful dark blue as it flies off into the forest.

"I hope, for your sake, that you do, Potter," says Snape, his dark eyes glittering. "Now follow the butterflies, and you might just understand."

Malfoy snickers at Harry, but Harry turns his back on the men and plunges deeper in the forest. Just through the outline of the trees, he can make out the figures of Snape and Malfoy standing on the stone steps of the castle slightly apart from the others. He sees Professor Dumbledore walk over to speak to them before he is swallowed by the dark forest.

The sapphire butterfly leads him to a clearing where a young girl stands beside a small pond, silently staring into its deep depths. The insect lands on her shoulder, and she turns to welcome him.

"Harry!" cries Ginny as she wraps her arms around him. Harry lets himself enjoy the embrace, for it is filled with love and grounds him after the unsettling encounter on the edge of the forest.

"Hi, Ginny," he says and kisses her fervently.

"What was that for?" she asks, smiling in surprise.

"Just something I learned earlier," replies Harry with a wink. As he gazes into her clear brown eyes, he begins to understand some of what he has experienced so far. Impulsively he picks her up and spins her joyfully around the clearing.

"Harry!" she exclaims, laughing. "Put me down! I have something to tell you."

Harry sets her down and takes her hand, his heart full. "Tell me, then. I am ready to receive your wisdom."

"This is important, Harry," says Ginny as she swats playfully at his arm.

Harry nods, a mischievous expression still on his face. "I know."

Ginny rolls her eyes at him. "You are paying attention, aren't you, Harry?"

"Yes," Harry sighs, serious again. "I am."

"Good," Ginny nods, satisfied. "Then you may know what I'm going to say."

"I think Bill already told me," replies Harry.

"He didn't say everything," answers Ginny. "I'm here to tell you myself that I love you. Not like I did during my first year when you saved me from the Chamber of Secrets, and not like during my third year when you went to the ball with Cho Chang, and not even like during my fifth year after you finally kissed me."

Harry waits, as Ginny gathers herself. "I don't love Ron's best friend or Gryffindor's youngest Seeker, or even the Chosen One who is destined to save the world. I love you, Harry. We are defined by love: by those we love and those who love us. Remember that. Remember who you truly are...and that I love you."

She reaches to his face and kisses him passionately. Harry feels her love for him and is shocked at how strong it is. He is also surprised to find that he feels an equally

strong love for Ginny, and not as Ron's sister or a good Quidditch player. He loves *her*, and that feeling fills his heart.

Ginny finally pulls away from their kiss and puts her finger on his lips. "Follow the butterflies, Harry. You're almost there."

Harry can only stare at her, wide-eyed from the emotions running through his body and soul. He nods, and Ginny fades away. He knows she will be joining her family at the castle steps and turns to follow the butterfly deeper into the darkening forest. Its blue wings are now a deep indigo, and it leads him to a large beech tree. Underneath the tree a tall young man with ginger hair is laughing next to a girl with bushy brown hair.

"Harry!" exclaims Hermione. "You're finally here."

Ron snorts. "It's his dream, where else would he be?"

Hermione rolls her eyes. "Never mind, Ron. Be serious."

"Actually," says Harry, grinning, "Fred and George told me laughter is a good thing."

Ron crows in triumph as Hermione shakes her head. "Yes, well, that's the twins for you. They never met a joke they didn't like. Come on, Harry, let's walk." She leads the way deeper into the forest, the indigo butterfly fluttering about her head. Ron shrugs and motions Harry after him, then follows silently.

Soon they stop at the edge of a small green meadow. The sun has set and the meadow is shaded with the soft light of dusk. It is quiet and peaceful, a strange oasis in the dark and gloomy Forbidden Forest.

"Where are we?" asks Harry, bewildered. "Why are we here?"

"You'll see," says Hermione. Ron and Hermione turn toward Harry with sincere and compassionate expressions on their faces.

"Harry, we love you," Hermione says simply, her eyes growing bright. "We want to help you."

"You don't have to protect us, mate," adds Ron.

"I know that now," Harry says softly, looking away from their earnest faces. "I just don't want to lose you."

Hermione takes his hand and looks deep into his eyes. "Harry, part of loving is taking the risk of losing those we love. We've taken that risk everyday we've loved you; now you must take that risk for us."

Ron looks at him seriously as well. "It's like Bill said: you can't push away the people you love just because you are afraid of hurting them...or losing them. Otherwise we'd all be alone in the world, and that's not the way it's meant to be."

Harry raises his eyebrow. "When did you get so smart?"

Ron grins with a shrug. "Like I said, it's your vision."

"The point is, Harry," interrupts Hermione, "that in order to fully embrace the love within you, you have to accept the risks involved. Otherwise you will never defeat Voldemort." Ron twitches and Hermione takes his hand as well with a gentle smile.

"Listen to her, mate. She's usually right," says Ron with another lopsided grin. "We choose to stand by your side and accept the risk of losing you. You have to do the same now."

"Besides, those we love never truly leave us," adds Hermione quietly, and she gestures toward the meadow. The indigo butterfly has darkened to a royal purple. It floats over the flowing grass and lands in the palm of a beautiful woman with dark red hair and brilliant green eyes. She is standing with a tall man wearing round glasses. He has messy hair and smiles at Harry from a very familiar face.

"We love you," Hermione says again, fading away to join the others on the stone steps to the castle.

"Follow the butterflies, Harry," adds Ron with one last grin as he, too, disappears. Harry turns and starts across the meadow to join the smiling couple.

"Mum?" he asks as tears sting his eyes. "Dad...what are you doing here?"

Lily Potter laughs joyously as she grasps her son close. "Haven't you worn out that question yet?"

"I'm still waiting for a good answer," grins Harry and moves to his father's loving embrace.

"We're here to remind you of the greatest power of love, Harry," says his father, his face now serious. "We died to save you because we loved you so much."

"We couldn't bear the thought of Voldemort hurting you," says his mother, touching his cheek much like Mrs. Weasley had done earlier. "We gave our lives instead so that you could live."

"You died because of Voldemort," whispers Harry, hatred for the man who had murdered his parents filling his heart.

"We died for *love*, Harry," says his mother, her voice earnest. "We chose to die, and not from fear or hate or revenge or despair. We chose to die because of our love for you."

"You may have to make that choice, son," says his father gravely, laying his hand on Harry's shoulder. "Part of loving is living, but part of living is dying. Therefore to truly love we must all be prepared to die."

Harry is silent for a long while. He feels his heart skip a beat as he realizes that he is finally ready for all that he has heard. He is ready to love...to give it as well as receive it. He is ready to accept it, and not fear it. He is ready to risk losing it, and ready to die for it. Harry feels the power of love in his heart, and the hate begins to fade away.

"I think I understand," he says softly.

His mother and father embrace him tightly, and for a long while they stand together in the meadow enveloped in their love for one another. Finally, Lily reaches up and smooths Harry's hair, smiling when the locks in the back refuse to stay in place. With one last kiss, she steps back.

"We love you, Harry," she whispers as tears fall down her face.

"You have the power to defeat Voldemort," says his father, his voice thick with emotion. "Remember what you have learned here. Live with all the strength of your spirit, love with all the depth of your soul, and laugh with all the joy of your heart. You will succeed."

Harry is shaken to his very core by his father's confidence in him and can only nod, for his throat is too tight. His father embraces him fiercely, then steps back to join his wife. They smile tenderly as they fade from the meadow to join the others on the castle steps.

"Follow the butterflies," whispers his mother's ghostly voice. "The end is near." Harry is surprised to see that the butterfly is flitting about his head, a deep black sheen to its

wings. It leads him across the meadow and back into the forest. He follows the dim shape through the dark trees, wondering what could possibly be waiting for him at the end of his journey.

The butterfly leads him into a large empty clearing. The sky above is now dark and filled with stars that sparkle like diamonds in a blanket of plush velvet. The insect pauses, and to Harry's surprise, it begins to shift into a mysterious, robed figure. Harry feels his heart start to pound, as a man turns and lifts his dark hood.

The figure is Harry.

Harry stares at himself, stunned.

"Do you understand now?" asks his robed self.

Harry nods as he slowly walks forward. "I do," he says and continues until he is face to face with himself. He stops and gazes into his own green eyes, at the lightning-shaped scar on his forehead. He does understand.

With a deep breath, Harry takes a step forward into the robed figure, and they merge as one. There is no fear, only love. He is ready.

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Harry awoke with a start, sitting up abruptly in bed and glancing wildly around the dark room. He groped for his glasses, breathing heavily as he recalled the strange vision he had just experienced. In spite of its mysterious message, Harry felt calm and at peace. His heart felt full and confident. He glanced at Ron and Hermione, sleeping nearby and smiled.

Harry stood and padded silently to the open window. He looked out at the starry sky, reflecting on his dream and what he had learned. He felt the power that Dumbledore had named love coursing through his body and knew he had accepted his destiny at last, as well as the means to achieve it. With a contented sigh, he returned to his bed; he needed his rest for the final battle still to come.

A small white butterfly with silver wings followed him across the room and settled on the bedpost to watch over him as he slept. Harry smiled once more as he drifted off into a peaceful sleep, free of dreams, full of love.

A/N: This story is dedicated to myownmuggle and mugglemathdork (also known as mgleteacher), my two wonderful, hard-working betas this past year. It has a rather peculiar inspiration. In the film version of *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, Ron exclaims, "Why couldn't it be follow the butterflies!" after following the spiders into the Forbidden Forest. There is a rather amusing online video that pokes great fun at this line. I decided I would write a story called "Follow the Butterflies." Oddly enough, though it might seem the title for a humor story, this idea appeared instead. The butterfly would serve as a symbolic link between the stages of Harry's journey to discover the true meaning of love. It is a rather unusual bit of writing for me, and I quite enjoyed writing this story. I hope you enjoy reading it and appreciate your comments and reviews.