

Boomerang

by ubiquirk

If you fling yourself through time to change an event in your past, can you be certain which 'you' will come back? Thirteen months after the Final Battle, Harry enlists Hermione and Ron's aid in saving Snape using an untested device – a device with side effects. Award winner.

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Chapter 1 of 1

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AN: This fic is for my fantastic friend, laiksmarei, who asked for a Time-Turner fic wherein Harry saves Snape and HG/SS ensues. I've taken a few liberties with her prompt, but I hope she still enjoys the story. Lots and lots of thanks to my wonderful beta, firefly_124, and lovely Brit-picker, saracen77.

This story has won an award (thanks everyone!). It can be seen on this page: <http://ubiquirk.livejournal.com/124883.html>

"I have to do it." Harry's eyes hold that earnest look he always gets right before setting off on some grand and dangerous adventure.

"Of course." Hermione glances at Ron quickly before turning back to Harry. "And we're with you."

"Yeah, mate. Even if it is to save the Gre" Ron lets out an oof of air as Hermione's elbow hits that tender spot in his floating ribs. "Snape. Even if it's to save Snape."

Hermione leans forward on the settee. "But you're going to have to tell us more about how this ... this Time-Boomerang works. I've never even heard of it."

"And she knows everything." Ron grins as she pokes him in the leg.

"Well, I wouldn't know about it either if Gaspard Thurfrank hadn't thought that I was the only one able to help him make it. He's the Unspeakable the Ministry put on recreating Time-Turners." Harry runs a hand through his hair and glances left. "He asked me to retrieve the Elder Wand ... wanted me to ... to use it ... that it would be the only thing with enough power to create these things." He looks directly at them. "So I did."

"Harry!" Hermione's hand latches onto Ron's knee and squeezes painfully.

"Ow!" Ron looks at her, and her head tilts towards Harry, who Ron swivels back to face. "And Harry, you did what?"

"I opened Dumbledore's tomb and got the Elder Wand and used it for a spell ... or, rather, lots of spells."

"All for Snape?"

"All for Snape."

Ron stares at the look of determination on Harry's face and tries to think of what to say. He's saved from having to, as so often happens, by Hermione.

"Harry." She shifts to the edge of the settee and leans forward to place a hand on Harry's arm. "I know Snape was on our side, that he loved your mum, and that it must be very hard for you to think of how, well, mean and distrustful we were towards him at times. But "

"But that's not it." Harry interrupts, words spewing out of him in a fumbling rush. "Well, that's part of it, but that's not the big it. It's that he never had a life ... a good life. He never got to have friends or have fun or ... any of that stuff. It's like what I had before Hogwarts, but that's all he had for his whole life. And ... and I want him to have something more, something like you lot and Hogwarts and the Order and everyone have given me."

Hermione gives Harry's arm a pat. "That's lovely."

Ron's not sure it's lovely, but he's heard stuff like this from a suddenly mature Bill and can recognize full-on adult talk now even when it comes from an unexpected source. "Wow, mate you really went and grew up this past year."

Harry grins. "Dying will do that to you."

Everyone eases back into their seats, the air of Grimmauld Place's drawing room lightening.

"So tell us about the Time-Boomerang I still want to know how it works."

"I'm not sure I know *how* it works, but I do know what it's supposed to do. See, Gaspard decided he didn't want to just remake Time-Turners he wanted to make something better."

Ron could feel Hermione's eyebrow rise from a foot away. "And is it better?"

"Maybe ... should be ... actually, we don't know." Harry grins again. "That'll be the other thing we'll be giving it its test run."

"Go on."

"Well, see, the Boomerang can not only take us back at least a whole year, it also won't make us then hide and relive that thirteen months again. Instead, after an hour there, it will bring us back to present time."

"That's it?" Ron grins and looks at both of them. "That sounds smashing!"

Hermione doesn't look so happy that line of thought she always gets scrunches her brows. "That does sound good ... too good. There's got to be a catch."

"Yeah, well." Harry runs a hand through his hair, making it stick up even more than usual. "Gaspard said there could be side effects, though only for the people doing the actual traveling."

She leans forward. "What kind of side effects?"

"Actually, I was hoping you could explain them to me. I don't always understand the good Master Thurfrank." Harry pulls a folder out from behind his chair cushion and hands it to her.

She dives in, scattering parchments across her lap, and Ron smiles to see her so intent on something.

But his enjoyment lasts for only the first five minutes or so before both he and Harry start to squirm.

When he moves enough to knock a piece of parchment off the settee and onto the floor, Hermione looks up at him. "This is going to take me a little while. The Arithmantic calculations here are very advanced. Why don't you two find something else to do while I work?"

"We've got the Boomerang, so it's not like another few days are going to matter." Harry stands.

"Right." Ron gets to his feet to stand beside Harry. "Fancy dinner at the Leaky? I could do with a bite." To make his point, he rubs his stomach, which lets out a small growl.

"Sure, as long as it goes with a pint."

They don't look back as they almost race out the door.

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"I've got it." Hermione rushes into the kitchen the next morning and begins pushing serving dishes out of the way to make room on the table for her stack of parchments.

Kreacher lets out an indignant squawk and pops forward to stop the tureen of mushrooms from teetering off the edge.

Unnoticing, she spreads papers across the table. "Time-Turners were simpler in lots of ways one of the most important being how they handled memory. I mean, if you go back in time and change something, then you have two sets of memories that flow sequentially, right? What originally happened and what happened your second time through."

Harry nods, but Ron's not sure enough of what she's saying to even do that yet.

"But a Time-Boomerang works differently. Because Master Thurfrank wanted something that didn't make you relive the entire time of the trip a second time through, the Boomerang handles memory in a completely different way. You bounce back to the present instantaneously, but since you don't sequentially relive the entire timeline for a second time, the device has to have some way to insert the new memories. So as you Boomerang back to your current time, you live both."

Now Harry looks as puzzled as Ron feels, his eyes squinting behind his glasses as he stares at the parchments. "Both?"

"Yes. You simultaneously live both timelines ... or probably as simultaneously as the human brain can handle." She tapped at her lips with ink-stained fingers while looking at the papers before her. "It'll be interesting to see what it's like."

Ron pushes back from the table a bit. "Sounds like that could drive you 'round the twist, that does."

"Maybe." She looks up. "But there is a correction at the end. You see, when you get back, everyone who's made the trip chooses which timeline they want to have lived. And if everyone chooses the same thing, that timeline snaps fully into being and the other disappears."

"But what if they don't choose the same thing?" Harry taps at the parchments.

Biting at her lip, Hermione frowns. "I don't know ... it wouldn't be good. Master Thurfrank suggests that only one person should make the trip to avoid such conflicts." Then she smiles. "But that shouldn't be a problem with us, right? I mean we've been together for years now, best friends and all. We can simply make sure we choose the same thing."

"Which will be Snape alive." Harry's voice is steel.

"Yes." She nods.

Ron finds his head bobbing in consent too. Anything for Harry.

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"Why does it have to be in here?" Ron curls his nose at the lingering smell of Hippogriff scat.

Hermione huffs. "I told you, Ron. It has to be somewhere that no one's been for the last year. Somewhere safe. We don't fully know what will happen with the Time-Boomerang, so we have to be especially cautious."

"Yeah, people were in and out of the Shrieking Shack for weeks after the Final Battle." Harry walks to the middle of the room. "And Kreacher confirmed that no one has been in here for over a year even him."

"Alright, alright. Let's get on with it then."

As they move close together, Hermione loops the faceted chain about them, its links gleaming even in the little light making it through dirty, neglected windows.

"I'll ask one last time, Harry. Are you sure? If all goes to plan, we won't remember we did this, and you might not even have helped Master Thurfrank make the Boomerang without Snape dead."

Harry grins. "Which is why I told Gaspard I was going to go back and sort out that big argument I had with Ginny last month." His smile fades, and his gaze sharpens into his look of determination. "Snape's the important thing."

She looks at him for a moment and then nods. "Right then. I've calculated the time fairly precisely. We should be able to Apparate straight to the Shrieking Shack and get there about five minutes after we left the last time." Holding up the complex silver sphere that rotates inside of a wire cage, Hermione gives it one final, infinitesimal twist. "Here we go."

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"That's it." Hermione looks up from where she hovers over Snape's unconscious form. "By the time the Aurors check here in half an hour, they'll find him alive and fairly stable." She gently touches the man's face, tracing fingers down over the bandage on his neck. "They won't know who did all this, but so much insanity was going on right after the battle that I'm not sure anyone will care."

"You're brilliant, Hermione!" Harry hugs her tightly as she stands, their feet sending potions vials spinning across the floor.

"Not that brilliant." Looking at her watch, she gives a little laugh. "We've only three minutes left before we start to Boomerang, and we've still to tidy."

"I'm on it." Ron starts forwards, gathering Hermione's beaded bag and stuffing empty vials, bloody gauze, left-over plasters, and anything else he can get his hands on into it. He tries to hide his grimace of disgust when touching the slimy cloths by keeping his face angled towards the floor.

Snape lies still, so still the only time Ron can ever remember seeing the man not in commanding motion. But his color's a lot more normal than when they found him an hour ago or, well, normal for Snape that is. He's still on the pale side, mind.

Joining him in scouring the room for items, Harry and Hermione eventually move back towards him with full hands.

"Thirty seconds!" Hermione pulls the Time-Boomerang from her jacket pocket while Ron grabs the last of the vials, this one dripping something green and foul smelling that only Hermione knows is good for what. He tucks the bag quickly into the back pocket of his jeans.

Coming together, they hug lightly, smiling, eyes shining in triumph as she loops the chain over their heads.

"It's a piece of piss from here, right? We just get through this memory thingy, and we're home thirteen months from now, right as rain." Ron gives Hermione's side a little extra squeeze.

She grins and holds up the Boomerang, which suddenly starts to spin on its own, throwing off bright flashes of pure white light.

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*A kaleidoscope of images flash past just quickly enough for his mind to begin to register them.*

*He'd throw up if he could move.*

*It seems to take forever or maybe no time at all, but major events begin to play out, moving more quickly than normal, confusingly doubled.*

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Standing at the graveside after Fred's funeral.

Hermione clutched to his side in a death grip. She whispers to him, but the words don't register.

An hour later, they stand in the garden at the Burrow, everyone else inside. Her kiss is hot and salty and soft with grief, his fierce with desperation.

Their first time is far from soft and sweet, the shed a chilly, grey setting. Afterwards, she strokes his back as he cries into her hair.

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Standing at the graveside after Fred's funeral.

Hermione's hand clutched in his in a death grip. She leans in to whisper to him, but the words don't register.

An hour later, they stand in the garden at the Burrow, and her voice finally penetrates his grief as she pulls her hand from his to wave Harry over. "I'm so sorry I have to go now, Ron. It's my rota to watch over Snape, and since everyone else in the Order who could be looking after him is also here, I didn't think it fair to try to switch."

She kisses both their cheeks and Disapparates with a pop.

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*He falls into time's vortex.*

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Their two month anniversary.

He takes her to the Leaky for a spot of dinner and a pint. She pushes chunks of Sheppard's Pie around her plate as he cheers at the Cannons game playing over the Wireless. When Cathy Ermswald, their brilliant new Seeker, snags the Snitch, he crushes Hermione to him, yelling happily. Her smile seems a bit wan, and he wishes she liked the game more.

Returning to Grimmauld Place, they go to her room for sex. She's quiet. But then, she's been quiet every time so far, so he doesn't think much about it.

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Two months after Fred's funeral.

Ron and Harry stand in the drawing room as Hermione helps a recovering Snape leave what used to be her bedroom to come and sit for an evening. It's his first time being up and about for an extended period.

Ron must admit, even if only to himself, that the Greasy Git isn't so greasy anymore or even that much of a git. But Ron still doesn't have much to say to him, so as the others' voices rise in conversation around him, Ron sits back and daydreams through their discussion of wand theory. He's only jolted out of imagining Quidditch moves to try against Ginny when Hermione stands to point at Snape. "Well, I say that Bustenbaum's Compendium supports my argument, and I'm going to prove it." She runs out of the room, laughing, feet dancing quickly on stairs as she climbs to her new room on the second floor.

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*The rush and flow of scatter-shot images continues to dominate, most moving too quickly to understand, the doubled events still sparking nausea. But when things do crystallize into recognizable scenes, they begin to pass more slowly, almost in real time.*

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Six months after the Final Battle.

Ron enters Grimmauld's library. "Come on, Hermione. Why are you studying? The Ministry said they'd waive our N.E.W.T.s if we wanted."

"Yes, Ron, they did, but "

"But what, Hermione? That's not good enough?"

Bracing her arms on the table, she pushes herself up to face him. "It's good enough for me, Ronald, but it's not good enough for apprenticing under the best Masters."

"Oh, come on, Hermione." He throws one hand out towards her. "You can't really believe they'd turn you down. You're bloody famous, you are. Harry and me, we got right into the Auror training program."

She looks away from him. "You're right most of them wouldn't turn me down. But ..."

"But what?"

Her shoulders slump. "Nothing ... it's nothing."

"Well, alright then." Shoulders relaxing, his arm falls to his side, and he smiles. "We're going down the pub in a few. We'll meet everyone there."

Face still turned slightly away from him, she nods, bending to gather up her parchments.

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Six months after the Final Battle.

Ron enters Grimmauld's library.

Hermione scribbles away madly, quill flying across the parchment.

Snape sits beside her reading, stopping to place a hand on her arm to get her attention before pointing out a passage in the text. He tilts the book towards her, but she still leans half over him to see it.

Neither notices him, so Ron clears his throat. "Um ... well, some of us are going to meet at the Leaky in a bit, and I thought I should let you lot know in case ..." He trails off.

Smiling, Hermione looks up at him. "That's really sweet, Ron, but my make-up N.E.W.T.s are next week, and if I want to apprentice with Master Druet, then ..."

"What Hermione is being too modest to say is that Master Druet is the world's foremost Arithmancy practitioner, who has agreed to take her on if she receives eight N.E.W.T.s." Snape turns towards her with a look that Ron can't read though he's got used to the fact that the other man doesn't scowl so much these days, Ron's still not sure that small quirk of the lips qualifies as a smile. "With diligence, she should be quite capable of accomplishing such."

She smiles widely. "Only because you're helping me hone in on topics, Severus."

Suddenly, Ron feels even more uncomfortable. "Right." He rocks slightly from foot to foot. "I'll just leave you to it then."

Hermione turns back to him. "Thanks for asking though, Ron. I promise I'll have more time after next week. Maybe we can do something then? Go and watch Ginny play a game perhaps?"

"That sounds brill, Hermione. Really smashing." And it does. He should be used to a studious Hermione, but he still misses her.

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*He reenters time's swirl.*

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Ten months after the Final Battle.

Ron walks into the kitchen to find Hermione seated at the table staring at a piece of post, its broken wax seal nothing familiar to him.

She doesn't move, so he sits and reaches to touch her shoulder.

"Hi." When she looks up, her smile is watery. "I didn't hear you."

He nods toward the parchment. "Everything alright?"

"Oh ... this? Well, it's nothing really." Her hands shake slightly as she folds the letter.

"Come on now." He taps the parchment. "You can't fool me. Or, well, you *can* fool me most of the time, but not on this."

Her laugh sounds of pain, and she pushes hair back from her face, taking a deep breath. "I didn't get that big apprenticeship."

"What? They must be mental!"

She looks down at her hands.

"What about those other ones?"

"I ... I didn't apply. I ..."

He looks at her bent head. "You didn't really want second best." Childhood Christmases in a poor family mean this type of disappointment is one thing he understands.

She nods.

Reaching out to lay a hand over hers, he thinks of how to sort it.

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Ten months after the Final Battle.

Ron walks into the kitchen to find Snape seated at the table staring into a cup of tea.

The other man looks up. "The pot is still fresh."

"Thanks, mate." Ron pours a cup, adding milk and three sugars. The clang of the spoon against porcelain echoes loudly in the large, mostly empty room.

The silence is soon broken by the sound of quick feet on stairs, and Hermione flies into the room waving a piece of parchment wildly. "I got it! I got it!"

Snape stands. "Druet?"

"Yes!" Momentum moving her forward, Hermione throws her arms around the other man. "Oh,

Severus, thank you for your help."

Instead of shaking her off as Ron expected, Snape stands very still in her embrace, his eyes a bit wide in what Ron thinks may be shock, or at least shock on anyone else. "You are the one who did all of the work, Hermione. I am ... I am proud of you." He raises one hand to gently touch her back.

At the contact, she pulls back enough to look up into his face, then blushes and backs away. Turning to Ron, she hugs him quickly.

"That's smashing, Hermione. You'll have to visit lots, and we can come and see you. I've always wanted to holiday in France."

She swats him on the arm. "I won't be living there, silly! Master Druet arranged a permanent Portkey for me." She glances over at Snape. "I'll stay here with all of you of course."

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*The flow and whirl of events drag him under again.*

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Their One Year Anniversary.

She's made him a dinner of roast with potatoes and parsnips after being not-so-secretly coached on the preparation by Molly for weeks.

"This is brilliant, Hermione." He stuffs another parsnip in his mouth, trying to show his appreciation in the way his mother always seems to prefer.

"Thank you, Ron."

Swallowing loudly, he washes down the veg with a gulp of bitter. "Why so glum? Dad said it's all arranged with you starting at the Ministry next week. Don't you like the apprenticeship he found you? Inga Burdledoon is a very high-ranking official."

"It's fine." She sets down her fork and looks up at him. "I must admit I'd never thought of law before, but ..."

"But?"

She smiles, even if a bit weakly. "But I'm sure I'm going to love it, Ron. And your father was a real dear for finding it for me."

"That's the spirit!" He grabs one of her hands and gives it a squeeze. "What say you and me leave the washing up to Kreacher and head upstairs?" He waggles his brows.

"Sure."

Tugging on her hand, he leads her eagerly to her room, her fingers a bit cool in his.

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A week after the first Victory Celebration.

Ron makes his way down the stairs from his room on the second floor, his stomach telling him it's time for a bit of nosh.

He's stopped on the first-floor landing by the sound of Hermione's laugh. Looking in the drawing room, he doesn't see anyone. Then Snape's baritone rumbles from the bedroom, and Hermione laughs again.

Ron leans against the wall in the hallway, come over a bit dizzy, mind suddenly registering what the noises he's been hearing for the past week actually mean.

Sex. Sounds of happy, only partially muted sex.

The glow Hermione has lately the joyful hum of energy she throws off just being in a room.

He's not sure whether he's happy for her or jealous, so he settles on a bit of both.

His appetite has fled, and his feet clump heavily as he moves down the stairs, not really paying any attention to where he's going and almost bumping into Harry.

"Steady on, Ron!" Harry grips his shoulders. "You alright?" His eyes flash concern that glasses can't hide.

Running a hand over his face, Ron nods.

"I know what you need. Let's go get a pint, yeah?" Harry glances up the stairs and then looks back to Ron. "And Neville and Ginny and Luna should all be there too."

The air falls crisp around them, clearing his head, and by the time they reach Diagon Alley, he already feels a bit better, smiling and meaning it when seeing his mates.

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*Scenes move past slowly now, laughing in the Leaky with Harry and Neville last Thursday, cheering the Wireless as Ginny scores on Saturday, eating kippers and eggs for breakfast this morning.*

*Then he's climbing the stairs to Buckbeak's old room, Harry and Hermione with him.*

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They're back. It is done. The two sets of memories clash and clang in his head.

"Hermione!" He reaches for her.

"Oh, Ron." Tears stand in her eyes, but she comes softly into his embrace, though she won't look at him, burrowing her face into his jumper.

His stomach clenches painfully.

He knows. He knows what she would pick if she were to pick with her heart. And he loves her now more than he ever realized he could.

He looks up at Harry, who meets his gaze with a complex expression on his face, a grin that only partially reaches the concern in his eyes triumph tinged with sadness.

Giving a small smile, Ron tilts his head down towards where Hermione's rests against him.

Harry nods.

His arms band around her more firmly, squeezing her even as the tightness in his chest squeezes all the air from his lungs.

Ron chooses.

And the world goes white.

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"Seriously, mate why'd you have us come up to this stink hole?"

Harry rubs at his forehead, brow creasing. "I ... uh ..." He looks around the dank, dirty room. "I was thinking of cleaning it out and making it a games room. Ever play billiards?"

"Billiards?"

Hermione nods. "My dad loves billiards."

"Or maybe we could set up one of those big Wizarding chess boards."

"I could go for that." Ron grins.

"And I imagine Severus would too." She smiles and bounces just a little on the balls of her feet as she walks around the room, unable to keep still.

Something sad and dear clenches Ron's heart to see her so happy. He forces himself to breathe.

Harry turns around. "Where is he anyway?"

"In the library, which I should get back to before he completely musses the arrangement of books I set aside for my research."

"Yeah." Ron clears his throat, but his voice still croaks and cracks a bit. "You should get back to ... to your books. Harry and me, we'll finish up here."

Hermione's smile flashes radiance before she swirls away, her steps light and quick, and Ron finds himself staring at the empty doorway for long moments after she's gone.

"Hey." Harry's hand falls on his shoulder. "You alright?"

"Yeah." He shakes his head rapidly from side to side. "Just a bit out of sorts. Must have slept poorly."

"How about we get a cuppa ... and some of those biscuits you love. It's almost eleven."

"Sure." Ron looks at the doorway. "Biscuits."