

Title: Harry Potter – Slytherin: Time's Gift

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Summary: Harry Potter contemplates a world where Voldemort never existed.

[Note: This story is an epilog to my seven AU novellas. It does not stand alone.]

Timeframe: Three years after the Battle of Hogwarts

Audience: PG

Category: Alternate Universe

Warnings: none

Length: 26 pages

Harry Potter – Slytherin: Time's Gift

Chapter 1 – Intent

Harry Potter had wanted to become an Auror since his fifth year at Hogwarts. Mad-Eye Moody had suggested it, and from that moment on, Harry had never considered anything else.

He was now only days away from achieving it. It had been three long and grueling years of study and internship -- very much harder than Hogwarts had ever been. But it had been worth it. He would finally have the means of gaining access to what he so desperately wanted -- a Time-Turner.

Becoming an Auror was no longer his ambition; it had become the means to an end. His goal was undoing everything Lord Voldemort had inflicted on the world -- the untold death, destruction, pain, and suffering. Harry would prevent the monster from ever existing.

Dumbledore had given him the idea... not directly, no, but in the typically obtuse and tantalizing way that had annoyed Harry since his first year at Hogwarts. It happened after the Battle of Hogwarts when Harry, Hermione, Draco, and Ginny had gone to the headmaster's office with Professor McGonagall.

The portraits of all the previous headmasters cheered them for their victory. Then the portrait of Professor Dumbledore praised each one of them individually. In praising

Hermione, Dumbledore said he regretted having had only one private conversation with her. Then he looked at Harry and winked. Harry knew immediately Dumbledore was signaling him.

Later that day, Harry asked Hermione about her conversation with Dumbledore. She was evasive, but Harry insisted she tell him what Dumbledore had told her. Her reluctant revelation stunned Harry. She said Harry had *died* trying to save Sirius from the Dementors their third year and that she had used the Time-Turner to save him.

Being Hermione, she explained that, technically, neither Harry nor Sirius had actually died; the Dementors had just sucked the souls from their bodies using the Dementor's Kiss.

She had used the Time-Turner twice. First, she had saved Harry but failed to save Sirius. Second, she and Harry together had used it to save Sirius. However, Hermione explained that she could not remember the first attempt. It was Dumbledore who told her that her 'future-self' informed him about her first saving Harry. He explained that it was only possible to remember the last time loop of the same event.

Hermione did not tell Harry that the future Hermione had later visited her to say that she was stuck in the earlier time loop that would disappear when it caught up with its starting point and closed. It was the reason Hermione never wanted to use time travel again.

The story had so intrigued Harry that he could never get it out of his mind. He had *died!* And yet, Hermione had used time travel to save him so he could ultimately defeat Voldemort and fulfill the Prophecy. If she could do that, then they should also be able to go back in time to save the *world* from Voldemort.

Harry had asked Hermione to help him, but she had adamantly refused. Not only that, she had declared she would actively *oppose* him attempting it. She said time travel was just too dangerous. Harry had no choice but to back down. But he had not given up.

He would just have to do it without her.

Chapter Two – Preparation

Harry and Hermione were living together at number Twelve, Grimmauld Place. Hermione was studying wizarding law. Like Harry, she was very close to completing

her studies and taking the certifying examination. She already had job offers waiting from several prestigious law firms plus the Ministry of Magic, but also, more impressively, the Wizengamot.

Everyone expected Harry and Hermione to get married as soon as they started their careers. Though they had not set a date, they expected to do so very soon. Harry was becoming anxious -- but not about marrying Hermione. He loved Hermione deeply but felt that if he married her right away, he would have to abandon his plan forever. And he was not willing to do that yet. He would just have to string out their current arrangement without seeming to.

Then he came up with an idea. He asked Hermione if she would be willing to wait until they both turned twenty-one -- which he felt was more in line with their Muggle upbringing. Hermione agreed without any misgivings. Harry promised himself, if he could not accomplish his objective in one year, he would give it up forever and marry Hermione on his birthday.

Unfortunately, Draco and Ginny, who lived just across the green park in number Twenty-Eight, were always popping over to see how they were doing. They had already been married a year and Ginny was expecting -- putting her early stint with the Holyhead Harpies on hold. Every time they visited, they could not help asking when Harry and Hermione were going to fix the date. Harry always let Hermione answer and she would always say, obligingly for Harry's sake, "We'll let you know soon enough."

Harry and Hermione used the occasion of Harry's twentieth birthday to celebrate his completion of Auror training, which had occurred a few days before. Number Twelve was filled with their friends and family. They used the occasion to finally announce their formal engagement and wedding date of July thirty-first the following year. Everyone celebrated, but quite a few of their friends privately questioned why they were waiting another year. Ginny was particularly annoying, telling Hermione she did not want their children to be too far apart in age. But Hermione just said amiably, "It's the right time for both of us."

Hermione did not want a party of her own to celebrate passing the law examination the following week. She simply received her credentials, accepted the position offered by the Wizengamot and went to work at their staff office in the Ministry.

Harry was given his choice of starting Auror positions. He picked 'death duty', the 'insider' nickname for Execution Security -- the Aurors responsible for transporting, guarding, preparing, and escorting condemned prisoners to the Death Chamber in the

Department of Mysteries. The actual execution was performed by an Unspeakable who toppled the fully bound condemned through the veiled archway. The Execution Security Aurors merely held the condemned in position until the specified time. Most people thought Harry just wanted to see justice done to the handful of remaining Death Eaters before the death penalty was again suspended indefinitely by the Wizengamot. Then he would move on to a more exciting job.

But the real reason, the only reason, Harry took the job was to have access to the Department of Mysteries. He had already learned from two other Aurors that he could get to other areas of the Department from the Death Chamber because they had once chased a Death Eater who had somehow managed to break free awaiting his execution. Harry's only previous experience in the Department had been his visit with Professor Dumbledore to the Hall of Prophecies in his fourth year to retrieve his own Prophecy. They had entered through a circular room lined with many doors escorted by Broderick Bode, an Unspeakable from the Department of Mysteries. Bode had helped Dumbledore and the Order of the Phoenix over the years. Unfortunately, he had been murdered by the Death Eaters when Voldemort was returning to power.

Harry did not have long to await his opportunity. Aurors had finally tracked down and captured Antonin Dolohov in South America. He had vowed to die fighting, but Nymphadora Tonks had been instrumental in his capture, impersonating his landlady to catch him off guard. Dolohov had been tried and convicted in absentia years before by the Wizengamot, so it was merely a matter of processing paperwork and setting his execution date to speed him to his inevitable demise.

When Dolohov saw that Harry Potter was one of his Execution Security Aurors, he went berserk. He crashed into the bars of his execution holding cell, bloodying his face, trying to get at Harry. Harry had to stun him before fully binding and silencing him. Harry and his partner then levitated Dolohov and transported him to the Death Chamber. The process was usually dignified and uneventful -- but not this time.

Though only a short distance from the courtroom level, the corridor to the Department of Mysteries was packed and raucous -- celebrating the impending execution of one of Lord Voldemort's chief henchmen. As a result, there were many more security guards, officials from the Ministry of Magic, members of the Wizengamot, and reporters from the daily Prophet. They cheered and jeered so loudly they could be heard up through the distant elevator shaft into the Atrium one floor up.

Harry made sure Dolohov knew what was happening. Harry revived him using *Enervate* before leaving the holding cell.

Only the Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot, Madam Griselda Marchbanks; the Minister for Magic, Kingsley Shacklebolt; and one public representative, usually Barnabas Cuffe from the Daily Prophet, were allowed into the Death Chamber to witness an execution.

When the Chief Warlock read the execution order in the Death Chamber, Harry could see the terror in Dolohov's eyes. At the Chief Warlocks signal, and without ceremony, Dolohov was pushed through the veiled arch by the Unspeakable. It was all very clean and neat. Harry's partner warned him to ignore the voices that could be heard through the veil and not to linger after the execution. The warning had not fully registered on Harry until he experienced the voices himself. He found them unnerving.

As they stepped off the arch dais to leave, Harry told his partner he wanted a word with the Minister for Magic. Everyone knew of Harry's acquaintances with so many important people, so his partner thought nothing of it and departed. Harry did speak briefly with Kingsley but then said goodbye. As he headed toward the exit door he looked back. Kingsley, Marchbanks, Cuffe, and the Unspeakable, whom Harry did not know, were not looking his way. They were all busy signing paperwork.

Harry quickly pulled his invisibility cloak from his robes and threw it over himself. He moved to the top of the stadium steps and along the top row of seating to position himself far away from the others. There he waited until everyone left. He noted the door the Unspeakable went through. It was not the exit door. Harry waited again until well after closing time. Death Eater executions were usually scheduled at the end of the workday, so people could go 'celebrate' right afterwards.

When Harry felt confident everyone would be gone, he drew his wand and went through the door the Unspeakable had used. He found himself in the middle of a long room full of bright sparkling light. It was dazzlingly beautiful; light reflected off the glass faces of hundreds of clocks of every make and kind covering the walls and desks. The source of the light was an enormous crystal bell jar at one end of the room.

As soon as his eyes had adjusted to the brightness, he became aware of the relentless ticking of the clocks. They were all perfectly synchronized. He could feel the monotonous rhythm of it in his head. He did not think it was something he could get used to. But then something else caught his attention. It was a large cabinet on the wall directly across the room from him. It had a glass door and glass shelves, which were covered with hourglasses of every size and shape.

Harry hurried across the room for a closer look. He immediately recognized them.

In less than a minute, he had found exactly what he was looking for.

Time-Turners!

Chapter 3 – The Unexpected Unspeakable

Harry scanned the shelves and spotted one that looked very similar to the Time-Turner Hermione had used their third year. He reached to open the cabinet, when a voice directly behind him said, “You don’t want one of those, Mr Potter.”

Harry spun around so fast; the invisibility cloak billowed out like a matador’s cape at the passing of the bull. He almost lost his balance but recovered and pointed his wand at... nothing. There was no one there.

“I expected better from you, Mr Potter, given what you’ve accomplished.” The voice was now to his right. Harry turned once more.

Then again from behind, “You’re out of your depth here, Mr Potter.”

Then immediately from his left, “Take off your cloak and put away your wand or I’ll be forced to stun you.”

And from his right, even as the last word had finished, “Not something you want...”

And immediately from behind, “...on your Curriculum Vitae.”

Harry knew he was outmatched. He stopped turning and pulled off the invisibility cloak while pocketing his wand, saying, “You win.” He was facing the door he came in.

“I’m behind you,” said the voice again.

This time Harry turned around slowly. There was a wizard sitting at the desk closest to the cabinet. He was smiling. “Nice to see you again, Mr Potter.”

Harry’s jaw dropped. He could not believe it. He recovered and stammered, “Bode?”

“You remember me? I wasn’t sure you would. It was what... thirty minutes together, nine years ago?” said Bode.

"But you're dead. It was in the Daily Prophet," said Harry.

"Yes. '*Strangled by a Venomous Tentacula plant while recovering in St Mungo's*' as reported. And, as you know, it was from touching a Prophecy in the Hall of Prophecies while under the Imperius Curse... Incidentally, applied by the very same Death Eater you saw off today... Perhaps ironic," chuckled Bode.

"I don't understand," asked Harry, "was your death faked?"

"Oh, dear, no," said Bode seriously. "I am truly dead. But I will endeavor to help you understand so you may accomplish your objective."

"What!" exclaimed Harry. "How could you *possibly* know?"

"That will become apparent in due course as I explain. Please, sit down," said Bode gesturing for Harry to pull up a chair.

Harry grabbed the chair from the desk across the aisle and sat so he was facing Bode close enough to lean over and slap his knee.

"Why don't you ask me questions to start with," suggested Bode. "It's usually easier that way. I know you used a clerk level Time-Turner with Hermione Granger ten years ago, so you are not a complete innocent."

"Alright..." said Harry folding his arms. "How can you be *dead* and here *alive*?"

"In the '*River of Time*', everyone that has ever lived is both alive and dead," said Bode. "Muggle scientists would say it's a time function quantum state."

Harry shook his head slowly. "I'm not getting you..."

"Understandable," said Bode. "If I went two hundred years into the future, you would be very likely dead. If I went two hundred years into the past, you would neither be alive nor dead. Instead, you would be potentially alive, but only if nothing critical happened to change the future. If something did, you might never have lived. I can travel back in time and retrieve your parents right now because they lived. They would stand here before you -- alive. I could do the same for Lord Voldemort. I could also go back in time and change something that would prevent them from being born. They would never have existed, so would neither be alive nor dead. Because I was the causal actor, I

would remember, but no one else would. The River of Time would fill all the voids seamlessly. So, what if *I* know? There are people everywhere who 'know' things that aren't reality."

Harry finally understood. He had only thought about preventing Voldemort from ever existing. The idea that someone could bring Voldemort back again tied his stomach in knots. But the thought of being able to know his parents caused a lump in his throat and made his eyes tear up. Everyone who ever lived was still alive somewhere in time.

Suppressing his feeling, Harry said, "You're alive because you've traveled from a time *before* you died."

"Good. You catch on fast. Next question?" said Bode quickly.

"Why are you really here?" asked Harry. "I'm sure it's not to help me."

Bode laughed. "Not quite true, Mr Potter. I'm here to make sure you don't muck things up. This business requires a feather, not a hammer, especially the farther you go back in time. Changes in time are like ripples in a pond. Very small changes can eventually create *huge* changes. Just *being* present in the past creates changes. They spread everywhere. Ramesses the Great, Pharaoh of ancient Egypt, lived thirty-two hundred years ago. He lived ninety years and fathered over one-hundred children. Change time so he never existed, and a sizeable percentage of the people on earth today would never have been born."

"Are you trying to talk me out of it?" asked Harry.

"Have I?" asked Bode.

"No," said Harry firmly.

"Fine," said Bode evenly. "Next question?"

"How did you move like you did when I came into the room?" asked Harry.

"I used a very special Time-Turner -- not like those *antiques* in the cabinet. They are for clerks and students and have *very* limited capabilities. You couldn't accomplish your goal using one of them. The one I have is *incredibly* powerful. I won't show it to you and won't let you use it. Only specially trained Unspeakables get them. I can use it to become a *shadow* in time, existing an instant behind the present. It makes you

completely invisible, yet able to see the present unfolding before you. When I talked to you, I was out of your sight line and jumped forward into the present to speak and then back into shadow. Of course, I can take as long as I need to position myself and get it right.”

Bode waxed on, “The *present* is mysterious. It is an infinitely small slice of time. We believe it is the smallest measurable length of time in the physical universe -- one quantum pulse, one quantum vibration.”

Harry did not care about quantum pulses or vibrations. He asked, “So, you can use do-overs to fix mistakes?”

“Ah... not exactly. That can create certain... complications. Intersecting with one’s own time loops in the same place should be avoided. We endeavor to get it right the *first time*. If we do need to fix a mistake we make, it’s usually better to send someone else,” explained Bode.

Harry did not think Bode was telling him everything but did not pursue it. Instead, he asked his next question. “If you agree with my plan, why don’t or didn’t you just do it yourself. You’re the expert; you don’t need me.”

“We have our reasons, Mr Potter. But let me just say that you are a critical part of the plan,” said Bode, smiling.

“Just who are ‘we’ -- the *Unmentionables*?” asked Harry sarcastically, becoming irritated. Bode was starting to come across as condescending.

“That is a very *old* joke, Mr Potter. Yes, ‘we’ are the *Unspeakables* in this section of the Department of Mysteries,” said Bode, sounding a bit irritated himself.

“How many of you are there?” demanded Harry.

“I don’t actually know. There have only ever been a handful chosen to hold the position in this section at any one time. But we assume there are thousands and thousands of us going forward in time -- though only a few dozen going backward. Time-Turners came to the Department’s attention in the late nineteenth century. Since then, there have been Unspeakables who are responsible for managing certain *problems*. As a general rule, we only make modifications in our own era -- our own lifespans. Going beyond what we know would be quite dangerous, as I have already explained.

Furthermore, we very *rarely* change anything at all and then usually only *very* small things -- one at a time. We mainly observe and study.”

“But you said just *being* somewhere else in time can cause changes,” challenged Harry.

“But *not* when you are there as a *shadow*,” responded Bode. “We sometimes run across other Unspeakables we don’t know observing and studying. Clearly, they are from other eras. We mutually avoid contact and never discuss what we are doing.”

“But you *have* made *big* changes before, right?” asked Harry insistently.

“Yes,” admitted Bode. “The last one was almost forty years ago. We prevented a major war in the Muggle world that had devastated the entire planet. All we did was make the American president ignore one particular message from his Russian counterpart. As I said, a feather.”

“So, what are we going to do to get rid of Voldemort?” asked Harry, finally returning to the reason he came.

“Just for my amusement, tell me what *you* would have done?” said Bode, raising his eyebrows inquiringly.

Harry felt like he was being mocked. But he kept calm and said, “I was going to stop Merope Gaunt from marrying Voldemort’s father, Tom Riddle, senior.”

“Not bad at all, Mr Potter,” said Bode sounding impressed, adding questioningly, “...assuming you weren’t going to do it by physically harming either one of them?”

“No, of course not. They are innocents,” responded Harry quickly.

“Were you going to try a Memory Charm or the Imperius Curse?” prompted Bode.

“The Imperius Curse... I’m not that good at Memory Charms,” admitted Harry.

“Well, that’s why I’m here. The Imperius Curse would have broken as soon as you left *their* present time. You’d have to stay in that time period for it to hold. Memory Charms are best. And just to be clear, we never use violence of any kind. It is completely unnecessary. Is that clear?” instructed Bode.

Harry nodded.

“Good. Are you ready to go?” asked Bode.

“Now? Just like that?” asked Harry, sounding surprised.

“It’s not like we have all the time in the world... I’m working overtime right now, you know...” joked Bode, with a laugh.

Then he continued, “Seriously, I have scouted the era. We are going to a small inn where Merope and Tom senior are staying. It’s the start of their honeymoon. They are having dinner. We’ll go there, and I’ll do what’s needed. You know what they look like; you’ve seen them in Dumbledore’s Pensieve.”

Harry was shocked. “How do you *know* that, and *why* aren’t you stopping them from getting *married*?” he demanded.

“Mr Potter, love is the most powerful force in the universe. It is almost impossible to stop it, even if it is only one-sided. Merope would have her Tom unless you stopped either one of them from being born or prevented them from ever meeting. Remember, they are innocents. It wouldn’t be right. And as for the Pensieve... I told you; we mainly observe and study,” said Bode firmly.

Harry understood, saying. “Right. Your way then.”

“Good man,” said Bode approvingly. “Stash your cloak. Stand up and take my hand. Don’t let go. Next stop... the White Hart Inn.”

Chapter 4 – The White Hart and Back

An instant later, Harry and Bode were standing a few feet outside of a nice-looking country inn. It was clearly in a Muggle village in the early evening. There were vintage cars that looked quite new parked outside.

“It’s always a good idea to approach a target from open ground even if you know the layout,” advised Bode, letting go of Harry’s hand.

“How did we get here? I mean we moved in space, not just in time... and where’s your Time-Turner?” asked Harry.

“Just something you learn to do -- Disapparate, Apparate and cross time simultaneously,” said Bode offhandedly, adding, “My Time-Turner is controlled by my mind... Again, don't ask me to show it or explain it.”

“OK... But you can't Apparate or Disapparate in the Department of Mysteries,” said Harry.

“As soon as you cross time, you're really not anywhere or anywhen until you arrive, so you can arrive wherever you want. There are no spells to prevent it... Mind-blowing possibilities, eh, Mr Potter?” said Bode with a mischievous grin on his face.

Harry could only imagine the incredible possibilities.

Bode continued, “Remember, we mainly observe and study. We're *shadowing* now so we won't be observed. But still, stay out of contact with people. If you touch someone, they will get the *'heebie jeebies'* and may cry out or drop something. Let's go.”

Bode took Harry's elbow and guided him to the front door. It opened like a normal door. Bode said, “They won't see the door open. Everything we do, instant by instant, is happening in their past -- except it didn't happen in the past they experienced.”

Once inside they walked past the bar into the dining area. There were a number of people at different tables enjoying themselves. But unmistakably, sitting at a corner table, were Merope Gaunt and Tom Riddle senior. They were holding hands and gazing into each other's eyes. They both looked lovestruck, especially Tom, almost sickeningly so. Harry knew it was the Love Potion that Merope was giving him.

Bode and Harry moved to an empty and un-trafficked area. “We're almost ready,” said Bode. “I'm going to shift to their present for a split second and then back, just long enough to do what's necessary. People almost never notice anything and, if they do, they think their eyes played tricks on them.”

To Harry's eyes, Bode disappeared, then unexpectedly, appeared instantly behind the bar. Bode already had his wand out pointing at the bar maiden. A split second later, Bode disappeared again and reappeared next to Harry with his hands at his sides, wand already away.

“Done!” he declared, adding, “Now we observe.”

“Done? What did you do?” asked Harry, incredulously, turning to stare at Bode. “What does *she* have to do with it?”

“Patience,” said Bode, pointing back toward the bar.

Harry turned to look and saw the bar maid coming out from the kitchen carrying a big piece of cake and two forks. She walked over to Merope and Tom’s table and set the plate and forks down. She leaned over and spoke softly, but Harry could hear her say, “Compliments of the house for the loving couple.”

“How lovely. Thank you,” Merope could be heard to say. The bar maid returned to her duties and Merope and Tom enjoyed the cake. Soon after, the bar maid returned with a bottle of Champagne and two glasses. She chatted while she opened the bottle and poured their glasses. Merope seemed overwhelmed by the generous treatment.

“Well, that should do it. Time to go,” said Bode sounding satisfied.

Harry started to say, “But...” when Bode cut him off saying, “We’ll talk outside.”

When they were standing outside again away from the inn, Harry said anxiously, “Tell me what happened. You didn’t do *anything* to either of them.”

“Not true. I made them *wait*,” said Bode. “When we left them, they were well past the time they had originally left the table and gone to their room. The cake would have been enough time, but I added the Champagne for good measure.”

“So? They’re still in their room on their *honeymoon*, Bode. How has that stopped Voldemort?” demanded Harry.

“Maybe you weren’t listening earlier after all, Mr Potter” said Bode sounding annoyed. “I said... a *feather* rather than a hammer is the best approach -- plus years of training and experience. The odds that Voldemort will be born now are only one in several hundred million. *Timing* is everything in matters of love and procreation. We’ll know for sure very shortly.” Then, Bode seemed to shiver slightly and added, “That’s it; mission accomplished.”

“That’s it!” exclaimed Harry. “How do you know?”

“We’ll talk about it back at the Department,” said Bode dismissively. But then looking very relieved, he glanced at Harry and said cryptically, “Thank God there wasn’t a lightning bolt.”

He grabbed Harry’s hand and a second later, they were back where and when they left the Department of Mysteries.

Chapter 5 – Unanswered Questions

“And you used the Imperius Curse!” said Harry angrily as soon as they arrived. “You said...”

Bode cut across him, “The bar maid wasn’t the *target*. And the curse was lifted automatically without consequence when I left, as I have already explained. You lack subtlety, Mr Potter,” said Bode critically.

Harry stared at Bode and gritted his teeth. Then he asked sarcastically, “And what did you mean about a lightning bolt? Was that a joke or me not being *subtle*?”

Bode looked very intently at Harry before speaking, “Mr Potter, even Unspeakables are not *masters* of time. There have been very rare instances when something we have decided to change has *not* been changed. When we sent someone to observe what happened, they witnessed our change agent being vaporized by a bolt of lightning immediately upon arrival. We have never been able to determine how or why. There are clearly others *much* more powerful than we are sailing the same River of Time. And they obviously have their *own* agenda...”

“And believe in the *hammer* over the feather,” added Harry.

“We have never been able to talk with them, but they have sometimes talked to us. They are never visible, and the one-sided conversation takes place inside your head in your own voice. But you know it’s them. I personally think of them as ‘angels,’” said Bode wistfully.

“The *avenging* type, I assume,” responded Harry sarcastically.

Bode ignored it, continuing, “There is a room in the Department we cannot open. The voices tell us it will only open when the door turns white. I personally believe that will happen when the angels are ready to let us meet them.”

“Dumbledore told me it’s the room that contains the most dangerous and powerful force in the universe -- love,” said Harry.

“Tosh!” snorted Bode, but then admitted, “Perhaps... No one really knows.”

“How did you know outside the White Hart we had been successful,” asked Harry.

“Ah, right... I received a message from another shadow Unspeakable who checked the future,” explained Bode.

“A shadow shadowing a shadow?” asked Harry.

“Very good... For us in shadow, that was *our* ‘relative’ present. Someone can be in shadow behind us. The procedure is: touch right shoulder for success, left shoulder for fail. The effect is the same -- like ice down your spine -- the *heebie jeebies*. And if fail, you leave immediately because someone else will be assigned to fix it, as I explained before,” said Bode.

“Why didn’t the messenger match shadow time with us and just talk?” asked Harry.

“He must not have wanted to be seen. Maybe he was naked... I don’t know. You ask a lot of unimportant questions, Mr Potter,” said Bode sounding annoyed.

“So, what happens *now*,” asked Harry irritably.

“Now, I pop away for a bit to get debriefed, and then I tell you the consequences of our actions,” said Bode.

“Consequences!” Harry exclaimed. “You said...” but Bode did not wait for him to finish. He was gone.

Harry was not sure how long a ‘bit’ was, so he sat down again in the same chair. After a minute, he could not help imagining that something had gone wrong. Harry started to really worry. Bode’s abilities would allow him to attend one of Professor Binns long boring lectures and still come back only a second after he left. After five minutes, Harry was beginning to panic. Then Bode popped back and sat in his chair.

He apologized, “Sorry for that, I had to write a very long report... and then visit the loo in real time just now.”

Harry just gaped at him.

Bode began, "I'm just going to give you the highlights, because, bottom line, it doesn't matter. What's done is done. There is always the good and the bad from a personal perspective. But time does not care or judge. The River of Time flows; the ripples of change spread out. We were upstream of the change so we can understand the differences. Those downstream will not. That is why I had to debrief and write a report. *All* the changes that occurred are unknowable. What we want to know is: did the *desired* change occur? Others will decide if overrides becomes necessary."

Harry was impatient for him to get to the point, "Bode, please... get on with it."

Bode smiled and continued, "Voldemort was never conceived. Merope had a daughter and did not die in childbirth. Tom still abandoned her as before. But Merope was taken in by a caring family and she raised her daughter, a witch. They seem to be enjoying a normal life. Merope is quite old now, but still alive. There was never another Dark Wizard like Voldemort, even up to this present moment -- with *everything* that means."

Bode sat back in his chair. He seemed to be finished.

"That can't be all. What else? You said there was also the bad..." Harry looked questioningly at Bode.

"Mr Potter, I think the rest is best left for someone else to explain, someone you know. I must go now. I only wrote a preliminary report. The full report is going to take me months and months. And then there is the small matter to deal with of my not being murdered... but I need not burden you with my concerns. They will all be managed. It has been a pleasure, Mr Potter, I assure you. Goodbye." And before Harry could say anything, Bode was gone.

Harry sat stunned. He closed his eyes.

What was he supposed to do? He had really never spent much time contemplating a world without Voldemort in any great detail. But now he realized he did not know anything that had happened in the last seventy years. How could he walk out into a world that had completely changed? But before he could dwell on it, he heard someone call his name.

"Harry?"

He knew the voice better than his own. He opened his eyes.

“Hermione!”

She was standing right in front of him.

He leapt up and embraced her. Then he kissed her, and she kissed him back. Finally, they broke apart. Hermione had tears in her eyes.

“Hermione, I have to explain...” started Harry.

But Hermione put her finger to his lips and said, “I know *everything*, Harry. It is *I* who must explain to *you*.”

Chapter 6 – Hermione’s Story

They sat down. Hermione began, “Broderick Bode came to see me at the end of my first day working for the Wizengamot. I had stayed late because I wanted to get my space organized... He was suddenly there, standing in front of my desk. I was probably as startled as you were to see a man I thought had been murdered. He told me many things -- what *you* were planning to do and what he needed *me* to do. I can’t say I wasn’t shocked. But I knew immediately; I had to do it, or I would lose you forever.”

Harry felt more guilty than he ever had in his life. He knew Hermione had vowed to oppose him. “But you said you wouldn’t...”

Hermione interrupted, “I was wrong. I didn’t know enough. Information had been withheld from me. But I had also been misled so I would not know *too soon*.”

“What are you talking about, Hermione?” asked Harry. He had no idea what Hermione was telling him.

“Please just listen; it’s complicated,” said Hermione.

Harry nodded.

Hermione took a deep breath. “Earlier *today, my* today, our third-year school-selves saved you and Sirius from the Dementor’s Kiss. Remember when I told you I didn’t

remember working alone to save you but failing to save Sirius, and that Dumbledore told me a future version of me had told him I had. That part was true. He also said I'd only remember the most recent time loop. That and the rest was all a lie to keep third-year me from figuring out what really happened."

"If you are the cause of a time change, you always remember because you are upstream, as Broderick would say. No version of me was lost in time. Everything I did *today* was what third-year me experienced as a future version of me that year at Hogwarts. Professor Dumbledore was in on the lie because he understood it was necessary. It was meant to scare me about time travel -- until now."

"I saw my younger self at the edge of the Forbidden Forest, and she saw me, but I used a Memory Charm to make her uncertain about it. Otherwise, she would have figured out what was going on, because she saw I was *years* older. I did meet her later to create the lost-in-time story, but it was very dark, and she really couldn't see me. Dumbledore and I really fooled her -- *me*."

Harry's head was swimming. But he had to ask a question, "Why did this only happen now, today?"

"Because it had to happen so you would live to destroy Voldemort, or you would not be here today to do what only you could do -- change *everything*. But also, to prevent me from trying to help you too soon. Broderick said *today* is when it was supposed to happen. I still don't know exactly why *today*. Remember, we... I mean, *they* study and observe. You can't explain time paradoxes. But they were impressed that I had successfully, though '*improperly*', used a simple clerk-level Time-Turner in third year -- and they let it stand. There's more...."

Harry cut in, "Hermione, this doesn't make sense to me. I don't think Bode has been telling the truth. Why were Unspeakables involved with you going back to save me? I think they're tampering with things all the time. They only claim to mainly observe and study. With the incredible power they have at their disposal, I think they become arrogant and controlling. It's human nature to..."

Harry had a sudden thought that made him stop and ask, "Did Bode give you one of his fancy Time-Turners?" he asked warily.

"I don't know about *fancy*, but it can take you back and forth to the date and time you want, and you can Apparate simultaneously to change location -- if that's what you're asking," said Hermione innocently.

“Wait a minute, Hermione,” said Harry accusingly, “Bode told me Unspeakables never show their Time-Turners to people... So, show me *yours*.”

Hermione turned red. It was confession time. “Harry, I can’t, even if I wanted to. It’s... *virtual*, Harry... they change your *brain*.”

Harry’s jaw dropped.

Hermione cried out. “I’m sorry, Harry! ...The truth is... I’ve been working with Broderick for over a year of perceived time but only a few days of present time. I’m an *Unspeakable* too. Professor Dumbledore recommended me long ago because of what I did third-year, and Broderick finally recruited me last week. One of my first big assignments in preparing for today was to stop Peter Pettigrew from escaping. Bode said that originally, it was Pettigrew who helped Voldemort return, not Barty Crouch Jr.”

Harry looked dazed. Hermione continued.

“Because of what the Unspeakables had decided to let you do, they gave it to me as a ‘practice run’ that would eventually be erased from the final target timeline -- no harm done. I went back, borrowed the Invisibility Cloak from you, told myself to stop Pettigrew from escaping, and then put the Cloak in my book bag while everything transpired as we both remember.”

“So, that’s why you could never remember going back to warn yourself; you never did until now -- seven years later,” said Harry shaking his head in wonder. “But why didn’t I see that you were older when you asked me for the Cloak?”

“I put the torches out in the dungeon corridor outside your common room. I also used a spell to make myself look a bit younger because I would be face to face with you,” explained Hermione, adding, “And Broderick says people tend to see what they expect to see.”

Hermione was grinning, “*Amazing* isn’t it?” Then she added, “If you can believe it, Bode told me they changed things to have you sorted into Slytherin instead of Gryffindor, just to see if it made a difference in you defeating Voldemort. He said it didn’t, except that we were not together originally. But I think he was just pulling my chain. I wouldn’t want to live in a world where we weren’t together. He also said that some Unspeakables believe that every time you go back in time and make a change, it causes a whole new timeline to branch off, meaning there are by now untold thousands of them.”

Harry was beginning to doubt that reality had any meaning.

"Today I was shadowing you from the moment you entered the Time Room. I went with you to the White Hart Inn. I've never been farther than a heartbeat away from you tonight, even with all the time it took to verify the changes."

"Then you were upstream; you didn't experience the change. You're the *old* Hermione, *my* Hermione," choked Harry. "I didn't *lose* you."

"No. Broderick offered me the choice... I *couldn't* let you go..." Hermione choked out the last words and began crying.

Harry moved to embrace her. They kissed again.

Harry said gently, "I didn't want to give you up, but you said you'd oppose me if I tried to do what I believed I *had* to do."

"I know," said Hermione. "If I had known everything then, I would have helped you from the day after the Battle of Hogwarts. But we would have *failed* on our own and probably done serious damage. We didn't know enough or have the wherewithal then. It had to be now."

"So, you *know* what's changed...?" asked Harry reluctantly.

"Not everything; that's impossible... But I know what I observed, and I helped Broderick write the preliminary report," said Hermione. Then she started crying again. This time in earnest. Finally, she managed to hiccup a few words, "Harry, we... were... never... born."

Harry felt all the blood drain from his face. He felt lightheaded...

NEVER BORN!

He had barely recovered from the initial shock when Hermine began speaking again. Apparently getting the words out helped her regain her composure.

"...My parents are still together, but they never had *me*. They have twin boys. Your parents never married. Lilly married *Severus*." She paused to let it sink in. She was not sure Harry was fully listening -- he still looked stunned -- but she continued. "There was

no enticing external dark force to pull him away from Lilly. They both teach at Hogwarts -- Lily, Charms; Severus, Defense Against the Dark Arts. They have two children, a boy and a girl, both at Hogwarts, one in Gryffindor and one in Slytherin..."

This drew a faint smile from Harry.

Hermione smiled too and went on. "James and Sirius went to Australia after Hogwarts to find adventure. Lupin was never bitten by Fenrir Greyback, who was captured earlier and sent to Azkaban, where he died. The Dementors still guard it. And Pettigrew was never born. So, the Marauders never banded together. Professor Dumbledore is still Headmaster of Hogwarts, Professor McGonagall is there as well. Trelawney, Quirrell, and Lockhart never taught at Hogwarts. Slughorn only just now retired. Hagrid graduated from Hogwarts and now has an amazing creature shop in Diagon Alley. Alastor Moody is still an Auror and is not Mad-Eye. Moaning Myrtle graduated and now writes a lovelorn column in the Daily Prophet."

Harry shook his head and laughed about Myrtle, but Hermione knew what was coming.

"Amelia Bones just replaced Barty Crouch Sr, who retired, as Minister for Magic. He still became estranged from his son after his wife died. Dolores Umbridge died several years ago of Dragon Pox. Regulus is head of the Black family. Bellatrix is a twin of her sister, Cassiopeia, with her other two sisters. Rita Skeeter was never born, but also Madam Rosmerta, Stan Shunpike and... *many* of our friends -- Cho, the Patil twins, Tracy, Adrian, Hanna and more -- almost too many to name. Of course, there are now others in their place, strangers to us. In general, the older someone was in our world the more likely they are still in this world -- and the opposite."

Harry nodded somberly, then asked, "But wouldn't the Unspeakables suffer losses too; why would they risk it?"

"Bode said they have ways to shield themselves from it, but it can happen because there are other 'agencies' at work," Hermione explained.

Harry just stared at her.

Hermione had waited until the end for what followed. She took a breath and continued, "The Malfoys had a son named Draco, who *just* got married to a pureblood witch who was homeschooled, but he isn't *our* Draco. Dobby was never freed..."

Harry gasped, "Draco, No!" then cried, "Ginny?" He was dreading what Hermione would say next because he realized she had delayed saying what happened to their closest friends.

Hermione was tearing up again. "Mr and Mrs Weasley did not marry early because there were no dark times. They still had seven children, but we don't know *any* of them..." She sobbed, "This is breaking my heart, so I'll end with only good things... Luna Lovegood's mother did not die when she was young, and Luna, our Luna, remains the wonderful person she always has been. Neville has loving and wonderful parents to guide him. Tonks still found Remus; they have a girl. The wizarding world is a peaceful and generally contented place. Pure-blood attitudes are still a problem, but it has been steadily declining for years. Muggle-borns were never persecuted."

Harry shook his head. It had cost so much, but only from his and Hermione's original world view. He let out an enormous sigh.

"Did I do the right thing, Hermione? I'm not sure anymore," said Harry uncertainly.

"Harry, what you did was incredibly brave and selfless. Broderick said it was approved because it was for the greater good. He volunteered for the assignment even though he said he was sure we were going to be hit by lightning when we arrived at the White Hart. He said they had tried two previous times over the years to erase Voldemort's existence, but each time the Unspeakable had been destroyed by a lightning bolt."

"After you succeeded in destroying Voldemort in two different 'scenarios' -- as they call changes to history they make to confirm the likelihood of a desired outcome -- they concluded that you were the necessary 'catalyst' -- a term they use for a pivotal person in history -- to succeed in making a major change. The important thing was that you wanted to erase Voldemort from history *yourself*."

"After we succeeded, Bode said he believed the only reason the 'angels' allowed it was because you had already twice eliminated Voldemort the *hard way*. So, you were entitled to do it the *easy way*."

Hermione grinned. It was a joke. They both laughed.

Then quite seriously, Harry asked, "But if the 'angels' allowed it just because I wanted it to happen and tried to make it happen, why didn't the Unspeakables just do it *without* me? I mean, I didn't do anything; Bode did everything."

"I think for some reason the 'angels' wanted *us* to live, Harry -- you and me *together*," said Hermione softly. She touched Harry's cheek.

They just stared into each other's eyes for the longest time.

Then Harry asked, "Hermione, who's making these decisions? Who's in charge of the Unspeakables? You're one; who do you work for?"

Hermione shook her head. "I work for Bode, but I don't know anything about the organizational structure here. He told me not to ask."

But in fact, Hermione had a theory about who was in charge. It wasn't based on any concrete evidence -- it was perhaps even a little wild -- and she wasn't ready to share it with anyone, including Harry, just yet... not until she was *certain*.

Harry looked exasperated. Finally, he asked, "So what do we do now?"

Hermione said, "We have a blank slate. *You* could become an Unspeakable too..."

"I want no part of this, Hermione," Harry declared, shaking his head.

"...or we could go to Australia to find -- to meet -- James and Sirius... or... *anything* we want," finished Hermione.

"Hermione, we don't belong here. Besides, we don't have a single *knut* between us... or a *home* to go back to," said Harry incredulously. "That's not a very good start... Say, why don't we go see Professor Dumbledore?"

"I'm... not... sure... that's... a good... idea," said Hermione slowly. "I mean, he might guess I sus... No..."

She paused, seeming to be thinking, and then said, "You know, Broderick told me Professor Dumbledore *invented* the Time-Turner -- at least, he turned in the very first one for study to the Department of Mysteries over a hundred years ago. Bode also told me Professor Dumbledore never destroyed the Philosopher's Stone in our timeline. He and Nicolas Flamel were... are ...still using it. The Department keeps track of such things."

It was just Hermione being Hermione. But Harry had no complaints. It made things seem almost... normal. Just as he was about to say it proved his point about the Unspeakables, a voice -- his voice -- spoke loudly inside his head.

"THE DOOR IS WHITE. SEEK IT NOW!"

"THE DOOR IS WHITE. SEEK IT NOW!"

Chapter 7 -- Reward

Harry and Hermione looked at each other, eyes wide.

"Did you..." they both said together, and then nodded in agreement.

"Quick, take my hand," said Hermione.

They were both on their feet. Hermione was pulling Harry toward the end of the room opposite the huge bell jar. She opened the door and pulled him through. They were in the black painted round entry hall with all the doors and blue-light candles on the walls. The wall spun when the door to the Time Room closed behind Harry. Hermione had her wand out and illuminated, but you did not need it to see that one of the doors was now white. When the wall stopped spinning, they approached the white door. Like the others, it had no handle. Harry stepped forward and pushed it.

The door opened smoothly and effortlessly. As it opened, the doorway became bright. The light filled the door frame like a curtain. You could not see into the room beyond.

They looked at each other again. They would have to walk through the light to see what was in the room. They did not speak, but again nodded in agreement. Then they held hands and stepped together into the light. There was a sound of rushing wind. They felt it strongly on their faces and had to shut their eyes against it until they were through it.

When they stopped and opened their eyes, they found themselves standing in the kitchen of number Twelve, Grimmauld Place. Kreacher was bustling about the kitchen preparing breakfast.

"Good morning, Master Harry, Miss Hermione. Another busy day ahead," croaked the wizened old house-elf.

Harry looked at the kitchen table. The Daily Prophet was laid out in the usual place. The headline read:

DEATH EATER DOLOHOV EXECUTED

It was the next morning already. Harry had not been at the Department of Mysteries more than a couple of hours past closing time. He looked at his watch; it read nine pm.

“What just happened, Hermione?” asked Harry nervously.

“I don’t know. It looks like *nothing* has changed,” said Hermione ominously.

Then Harry spotted it -- a note on the table by the fruit bowl.

He rushed over to get it, Hermione beside him.

It wasn’t in an envelope, just folded parchment. Harry’s hands were shaking as he picked it up and unfolded it. In a very familiar and elegant loopy script, the note read:

My Dear Harry and Hermione,

Please continue to make the world you know a better place in which to live.

Congratulations on your impending nuptials.

A.D.

P.S. There are no longer any Time-Turners here.

Hermione immediately tried to access hers.

It was gone.

Now Hermione was *certain*.

The End

End Notes:

Without citation, the nature of this alternate universe fan fiction story requires liberal use of terms, concepts, characters, paraphrased conversations, and story lines from the seven *Harry Potter* books by J.K. Rowling.