

Title: The Untimely Time-Turner

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Summary: Hermione learns more about the mysteries of time when she receives an unexpected package.

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The Untimely Time-Turner

Chapter 1 -- The Unexpected Package

“What did Lupin say, Harry?” asked Hermione.

She and Ron were still sitting beside the black lake watching the giant squid. Harry had just returned from the castle. He had earlier rushed off to see Professor Lupin after Hagrid, who had just happened by, told them Lupin had resigned earlier that morning. Hagrid explained that Professor Snape had let slip to the Slytherins at breakfast that Lupin was a werewolf.

“He said we’d meet again,” said Harry sounding unhappy. After a moment, he added, “He gave me back the Marauder’s Map.”

Ron exclaimed, “That’s great!”

Hermione frowned. “I still think you should turn it in to Professor McGonagall.”

“Just drop it, Hermione,” said Ron with a sigh. “Harry’s already told you he’s going to keep it.”

Before Hermione could respond, Harry said, “Dumbledore was there too.”

“You saw Dumbledore sacking Lupin?” Ron gasped.

“Of course not,” said Hermione. “Hagrid told us Lupin resigned this morning. Dumbledore must have been saying goodbye.” She looked at Harry for confirmation.

Harry nodded because he did not want to tell them what Dumbledore had said to him.

He stared out at the still water of the lake. The giant squid had moved out of sight. None of them said anything for quite some time. Lupin’s departure had put a damper on the excitement of the previous night’s events.

Harry seemed lost in his own thoughts and Ron looked about to nod off, so Hermione said, “I think I’ll go back to Gryffindor Tower. I need to check my revision schedule for end of term exams.”

She got up and brushed the grass off her robes.

“Now?” said Ron, now alert, shaking his head in disbelief.

Harry chuckled, thinking to himself, ‘Just Hermione being Hermione.’

“I’m behind schedule,” said Hermione seriously. As she walked away, she turned her head and spoke over her shoulder, “I’ve already made revision schedules for both of you. I’ll give them to you at dinner.”

Together Ron and Harry exclaimed, “Hermione!”

Hermione was just beginning to review her revision schedule when she heard tapping on the window in the third-year girl’s dormitory. She was alone. She did not know where Lily and Sophie were, and Lavender and Parvati had not yet returned from Hogsmeade. The last two roommates were still acting a little distant because of Hermione’s distain for Professor Trelawney, whom they revered. She was enjoying the solitude.

Hermione turned to look at the window and was quite surprised to see a large colorful bird perched on the sill outside. The bird pecked at the window, making the tapping sound once again.

Hermione put her revision schedule aside and went to the window. The bird fluttered its wings against the glass as she approached, clearly wanting to be let in. Hermione opened the window and the bird immediately flew in and landed on her bed. It had a small oblong package tied to its leg, which it held out to her.

She studied the bird. It appeared to be a parrot, which was confirmed when the bird squawked at her, apparently impatient with her delay in accepting the delivery.

“Sorry,” she said. “I had never considered that there might be other birds who could deliver ‘Owl’ Post.” She laughed at herself and untied the package. The parrot flew to the top of her four-poster and perched on the rail.

Hermione sat back down on the bed and opened the package, which was wrapped up with brown paper and string. It was addressed in writing she did not recognize -- *To: Hermione Granger, Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, Scotland*. Beneath the paper was a small white cardboard box with a separate lid. It was about the size of a Muggle pen and pencil set except a little thicker. There was nothing written on the box. She removed the lid.

Inside was a narrowly folded letter in the bottom and something small wrapped up in more brown paper sitting on top of the letter and wedged between the sides of the box. Hermione took out the wrapped object and immediately unwrapped it.

“I don’t believe it!” she exclaimed quite loudly without thinking.

She was holding a Time-Turner. It looked older than hers, or at least more used and worn. Being made of gold, it was just as shiny, but certainly more nicked up; the hourglass looked a little frosted. It had the same type of very fine long gold neck chain...

“It *can’t* be!” she exclaimed aloud again.

The chain had an oddly twisted link near the clasp. The chain on *her* Time-Turner had a similarly twisted link -- as if some previous user had accidentally snagged it on something and pulled hard to free it. Hermione removed her Time-Turner from under her robes and around her neck and looked at the chain.

They were not just similar; they were *exactly* the same.

Hermione immediately dropped both Time-Turners onto the bed and frantically scabbled to remove the letter from the box. Her hands were shaking as she unfolded it and began to read.

“No. No. This is impossible. It can’t be,” she said shaking her head.

The letter was from Sirius Black.

Chapter 2 -- The Letter

The undated letter read:

Dear Hermione,

I want to thank you for sending this to me.

I wanted to be sure and return it to you in time. Being late is clearly not an option with Professor McGonagall involved.

As you requested, this will remain our secret.

If I never get a chance to see you again, I want you to know it really helped. I did ‘live a little’ -- but I also disproved the old saying that time heals all wounds.

Sirius

Hermione’s head was spinning. How could this be possible? How could she receive a Time-Turner from Sirius that she had never sent him? ...No, not a Time-Turner, ...*her* Time-Turner.

She stared at them both laying next to each other on the bed.

Then something Harry had said the night before popped into her head.

‘I knew I could do it this time, because I’d already done it ... Does that make sense?’

She had told him she did not know. But actually, she had not wanted to think about it. However, now she understood. It was crystal clear. More than that, it was *wonderful*. She could do something to help Sirius recover from the twelve horrible years he had spent in Azkaban as a result of a terrible miscarriage of justice.

Hermione grabbed writing materials from the drawer of her bedside table and began to write a letter.

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Dear Sirius,

I know this comes out of the blue, but you will soon understand.

This is a Time-Turner. You'll figure it out.

You can't change the past; but you can live a little.

Please return it before the end of school term. I have to turn it in to Professor McGonagall.

Love,

Hermione

P.S. This must remain our secret.

Hermione folded her letter and put it into the bottom of the same box. She then wrapped her Time-Turner in the same brown paper that Sirius' Time-Turner had been and stuffed it in the box. She smiled as she thought of the two Time-Turners in terms of hers and his to keep them straight in her mind. She put the lid on the box and then grabbed the brown paper that had been used to wrap the box and turned it over.

Her hand froze in mid air. She had been planning to use the unused side of the paper and write the delivery address on it.

But it was already addressed -- *To: Sirius Black* -- in her own handwriting.

Hermione's brain whirled again and she had to shake her head to clear it. She did not want to think about it anymore, so she completed wrapping the box.

She looked up at the parrot and said, "I want you to deliver this package to Sirius Black."

The parrot hopped down onto the bed and held out its leg. Hermione used the original string to tie the package back onto the bird's leg. When she was done, it squawked once; then it flapped its wings and soared out the window.

As it vanished in the distance, Hermione wondered in what unfathomable twist in time she had originally obtained the box and wrapping materials, written her letter, and then addressed and sent the package to Sirius.

In the original version of history, she had obviously come up with the idea on her own to send Sirius her Time-Turner.

In the original version of history she must have used an owl, because how on earth would she have gotten a parrot at Hogwarts?

But if time travel worked the way she thought it did -- based not only on yesterday's events, but also on what she had been experiencing all year -- the parrot should have arrived *after* she had sent her owl. That would have been neat and clean and easy to understand. The pieces would have all fit into place.

Hermione promised herself not to think about it anymore.

Chapter 3 -- Fifteen Months Later: At Grimmauld Place

"Read this," said Mr. Weasley as he handed a small piece of parchment to Hermione. "You too, Ron."

They were standing in the grassy area on the edge of a small square of rather shabby row houses in London. It was only just beginning to get dark, but the street lights were already on.

The parchment said, ***The Headquarters of the Order of the Phoenix may be found at number twelve, Grimmauld Place, London.*** The handwriting was neat, narrow and slanting.

Ron glanced at it over Hermione's shoulder.

"Here?" asked Ron.

"There," said Hermione, pointing to the row of houses facing them across the street.

Ron looked but only saw numbers eleven and thirteen. "There *is* no number twelve."

"Read it again, Ron, and think about what you are reading," said Mr. Weasley.

Ron took the piece of parchment from Hermione and read it again ...carefully. "Number twel..."

"Don't say it out load," interrupted Mr. Weasley rather harshly. "Just read and *think.*"

"OK," said Ron, sounding slightly offended. He read it a third time. Then he looked up and number twelve was there. The row of houses, which was now one row house wider, looked as if nothing had changed.

"I see it!" said Ron, amazed.

Mr Weasley plucked the piece of parchment from Ron's hand and said, "Let's go in."

They crossed the street and climbed the steps to the black painted front door together, Ron and Hermione one step behind Mr. Weasley. He tapped the door once with his wand, then after some metallic noises and clicks, the door opened and he ushered them in.

Hermione's eyes saw nothing but the handsome figure of Sirius Black standing at the end of a long narrow hallway smiling at them.

Chapter 4 -- Time Rules

“Are you sure you want to hear the story?” asked Sirius. “It might be better if I didn’t tell you.”

“I do,” said Hermione. “It’s not just curiosity. You *learned* something. I could sense it in your letter. I only used the Time-Turner to attend multiple lessons at the same time... and, of course, a bit with Harry to help you escape... But you did more. I want to know.”

They were sitting across from each other at the kitchen table. Everyone else had gone to bed. This included not only Ron and Mr Weasley, but also Mrs Weasley, Ginny and the twins, who had arrived later. They were all gathering at Order headquarters in advance of Harry’s arrival, which was scheduled for the day after tomorrow. The details had been worked out at a meeting of many Order members earlier in the evening. Mad Eye Moody was leading the ‘extraction operation’, as he called it. The Dementor attack on Harry in Little Whinging had been a shock to them all... except perhaps to Dumbledore.

But that was not the topic now. This was the first time Hermione had been able to speak to Sirius alone. She *had* seen him a couple of times last school year -- in Hogsmeade (actually the miserable cave in the nearby mountains) and then in the Hogwarts hospital wing after the Triwizard Tournament -- but there had been other people with them.

She had thought about writing him, but it seemed too risky. She might be found out by the Ministry... corresponding with a wanted criminal would be, to say the least, *problematic*. And, after all, how could you discuss your experience with time travel ambiguously in a letter?

Sirius looked at Hermione for what seemed a long time and then began his story.

“When I left Hogwarts, I flew Buckbeak east. We traveled for more than a week over the continent. I sent Harry a letter using a ridiculous little owl that I found. Then we flew south for another week or so until we finally stopped in equatorial Africa along the east coast. It took me several days to recover just from the traveling. Being an Animagus really helped me manage.”

“I was able to obtain a wand. I won’t bore you with the story, but it was all on the up and up. Overall, I was lucky, because there was no established magical

community where I was. I used the wand to change my human appearance, so I could blend in better... and for all the other obvious things a wizard has use of a wand.”

“I rented a small cabana by the beach. I was there perhaps a week when I received your package. I was totally *amazed* by it and your letter. I had heard of Time-Turners but never seen one. You said, ‘*You can’t change your past.*’ I confess my first thoughts *were* of changing the past, of undoing the previous twelve years, and of... *revenge.*” His eyes flashed as he said the last word.

“But then I became afraid that I might also make things *worse*. Would preventing James’ and Lilly’s deaths be the right thing to do if it meant Voldemort would have those twelve years at the peak of his strength... when the Order was already nearly defeated? I was conflicted to say the least.”

“Testing the Time-Turner occupied me for several days and gave me the time, no pun intended, that I needed to think rather than act rashly. I soon discovered the Time-Turner wasn’t all that I expected it to be. And it made sense. I don’t think the Department of Mysteries would allow a thirteen year old Hogwarts student, no matter how responsible and brilliant, to have a fully capable Time-Turner.”

Hermione blushed and asked, “What do you mean?”

“Well, it wouldn’t allow me to go forward when in the past... back to the present future, though I’m still not sure even the most powerful Time-Turner allows going into the *real* future. It clearly knows its absolute present time, moment by moment, so that when you go back in time, it knows the difference between being in the past and what its own absolute present time is -- a key reference point when you think about it -- even if *you* don’t remember it.”

Hermione looked puzzled.

“Tell me, are we currently in the absolute present, or am I back in time now talking to you in what you *believe* to be the absolute present?” asked Sirius.

“Oh, I see,” said Hermione, “only the time traveler knows.”

“Exactly... and so does the Time-Turner the traveler is using,” said Sirius.
“Everything in the universe, every atom, must have an absolute present internal time clock which cannot be changed. The Time-Turner keeps time by it. So you

would think that the Time-Turner could be used to go forward in time -- once it had been used to go back in time -- that is, go forward to its own measure of absolute present.”

“Certainly,” said Hermione.

“This Time-Turner would not. When I went into the past, I had to re-live all the time over again. Did you ever use it to jump back to the present?” asked Sirius.

“No... I never did,” she said slowly, obviously searching her memory. “I spent the time in class or studying until I had caught back up to the time I left.”

“So, you see, my desire for a quick dash to fix the past and then a quick return to the present to check out the results -- and being able to repeat the process as often as needed to get it right -- was not going to work. It would require reliving the entire twelve years instead... with one Sirius Black trying not to be seen by the other. Of course, the first one was in prison for most of it -- so actually not too hard in this case...”

Hermione saw a flaw in his logic, so she said, “But once you were back twelve years and made a change, you could wait just a little while -- a few hours or days -- and then go back again and try again if it didn’t work. So, you could still try many times over the course of twelve years to get it right.”

“You do understand this time business don’t you,” said Sirius with a smile. “But for one problem -- this Time-Turner won’t do that. You set the time to go back... and that’s it. The Time-Turner won’t go back again until it has returned to its absolute present time -- the time it left.”

“I never tried that either,” said Hermione. “So, you would be stuck reliving the entire twelve years and the consequences of *every* change you made over that time before you could try again... Oh, my.”

“Oh my, indeed,” said Sirius.

Hermione blushed slightly.

Sirius continued. “Then there was the obvious physical limitation of turning the hour glass. As you know, it’s one turn per hour. So, it’s twenty-four turns for a day; 8,760 turns for a year; 105,120 turns to go back twelve years. Plus, you’d

need to go back perhaps a year or so earlier to make all the necessary preparations to make your changes -- so roughly 115,000 turns. Obviously, it's just not practical... and physically impossible. The turning process must be continuous, without interruption. Simple muscle fatigue sets in very quickly... in the low hundreds range. Believe me; I tried it. Unfortunately, the Time-Turner is impervious to all the charms and spells I tried to turn it magically."

"By this time, I had given up on my plans for revenge. Your advice had proven to be prescient. But for some reason, I didn't give up on attempting to overcome the Time-Turner's physical turning limitation. I needed to find something that would allow me to wear it, hold it and turn it quickly and continuously... And I succeeded."

"I think you'll be surprised," said Sirius, "because I ended up modifying a Muggle electric toothbrush with a rotating head. I just attached the center of the hourglass with a short wire to the spindle of the toothbrush and ran it."

Hermione's eyes widened in amazement.

"I calculated it would turn the hourglass at a rate of just under one year per minute. I don't think the Department of Mysteries figured on anyone using Muggle technology to overcome their magical protection."

Sirius winked.

"Of course, I tested the turning mechanism many times *without* the Time-Turner chain around my neck -- which was *definitely* a good thing -- as you will soon understand. Some of my tests were for battery life of the toothbrush under load. I dozed off one time and woke up an hour later when the buzzing stopped."

Hermione said, "Yikes! I see."

"Exactly..." said Sirius. "My first 'live' test was only five seconds of spin. I went back one month. I spied on myself arriving on Buckbeak. It was both scary and fascinating. I changed locations, moving farther south."

"Once I caught up to the present, I made my decision. I was going to take your advice and *'live a little.'* In doing so, I made the final discovery about the Time-Turner, which, like its other limitations, was also clearly intended to make it safe for student use."

“Something else?” asked Hermione. “I can’t imagine what it could be.”

Sirius leaned back in his chair. “You would never have detected it the way you used it. The Department of Mysteries obviously never wanted the possibility of a very determined student, somehow managing to perform all the turns, going back in time and either intentionally or accidentally doing anything that would jeopardize the student’s very existence -- preventing their conception in short.”

“How would they prevent that?” asked Hermione.

“By making you grow *younger* as you go back in time,” said Sirius.

“Now, it wouldn’t preclude the student from vanishing if they went back too far or dying in some other way, but they wouldn’t be able to prevent their original existence, by say, preventing their mother and father from ever meeting.”

“Why is that important?” asked Hermione.

“I’m by no means and an expert in all this, but I believe it would create a serious paradox if a time traveler does something to prevent his or her own existence,” Sirius concluded.

Hermione nodded her head.

Chapter 5 -- The Old Letter

“So, you actually grew *younger*? How is that possible?” asked Hermione sounding intrigued.

“It’s just more very powerful magic associated with the Time-Turner. Think about it... Do you know of a more powerful magical object?” Sirius asked calmly.

Before she could answer, he erupted. “Merlin’s beard, Hermione... the damn thing allows you to go *back in time!*”

Hermione started in surprise and then recovered, nodding her head again.

Sirius paused for emphasis, and then asked, “If you can create a magical object able to do *that*, how much harder would it be to make you age backward at the same time?”

“I can’t argue with that,” admitted Hermione.

“I clearly noticed the effect the first time I went back a *long* time -- about five years,” said Sirius.

“You went back five *years*?” asked Hermione. She sounded very surprised.

“Ah...” said Sirius, “You’re wondering why I would go back so far if I had truly abandoned plans to change history. We’ll, I’m not sure... It may have been subconscious. I started by going back six months to enjoy cooler weather while I was recovering. Remember, I was in equatorial Africa -- extremely hot and humid. I seemed to feel better the farther I went back. So I finally decided on a ‘deep dive’ as I called it. When I went back five years, the change was unmistakable. I was younger and fitter. I wasn’t the only one who noticed, if you know what I mean,” he said slyly, raising his eyebrows.

Hermione blushed quite deeply. Sirius was a handsome man.

“Over the five years, I aged back to my present state. I decided I needed to go back to my *prime*... I went back fifteen years.”

Hermione gasped.

Sirius shook his head. “You’re too young to imagine what it’s like to go from nearly middle age back to your prime. It was invigorating. It was intoxicating. After almost wasting away in Azkaban, I was living life to the fullest... and beyond. I gave in to every worldly temptation. I never even thought about writing to James and Lilly to warn them -- even anonymously -- about Pettigrew. I was completely self absorbed.”

Hermione looked uncomfortable.

Sirius said, “I can stop if you want. It isn’t pretty... and it gets much worse before it gets better.”

Hermione shook her head.

“I’ll continue then. As I aged back closer to the present, I couldn’t wait until I could return to my prime again. I did it as soon as I could. I relocated each time. And there were many times, at least ten times in this phase.”

Hermione did not like the sound of ‘this phase.’

“After the third time, I became arrogant and reckless. I started to meet with other instances of myself. I made arrangements to give myself a no-expense-spared thirtieth birthday party. I left the invitation in the cabana. When I arrived at the party, there were seven of us there. The first time I attended, I was the most excited and enthusiastic. The others were less so to varying degrees. One of them said it would be the last time he came. I asked him wasn’t this his first time at the party too. He and all the rest laughed at me. Do you see?”

“Oh my God,” gasped Hermione, her eyes wide.

“Yes, I see you do,” said Sirius. “They were later deep dives into my hedonism, but I was obviously becoming more jaded each time. Over the next six cycles, I attended my lavish thirtieth birthday party, laughed with the others at the first timer and then, finally, announced it would be my last time to attend. Then I destroyed the invitation the next time I visited the cabana.”

Hermione had tears in her eyes.

“After some shameful number of additional decadent cycles, I did something I had not done before after each of those long cycles -- I stayed in the present for a *full* day. In that first new day, I thought about my life and what I could do with it -- either continue to live like a hedonist or do some good. I re-read your letter for the first time in as long as I could remember. It grounded me. I realized I had not read it correctly. I couldn’t safely change *my* past, but I could change the past of others, of strangers -- for the better. So I focused on that. I returned to my prime again and went to work.”

“I began by working with the poor and later did extensive missionary work. That gave me the greatest satisfaction. During this phase, I fell in love more than once. But I realized I couldn’t make a lifetime commitment and had to move on. That was the hardest of all. I met thousands and thousands of wonderful people, almost all of them Muggles. I learned many languages and many skills. I lived in many countries, mostly poor, all over the world. I was proud of myself and what I

was doing. I did many more time cycles doing good things than I had doing selfish and bad things.”

“But there was something nagging at me... a problem. I understood it, but refused to come to grips with it. Can you guess what it was?”

Hermione nodded. She was weeping now; the tears were running down her cheeks.

“Forever young,” she sobbed.

Sirius nodded. He paused for several seconds looking at Hermione and then continued.

“Cycling was an addiction and, even though I was now working for good, I couldn’t seem to find the will to stop. But eventually, somehow, I found enough strength to begin to fight it in small steps. I started taking slightly shorter cycles. I also resumed living one full day in the present after each cycle. I kept rereading your letter. I began focusing on your need to have me return the Time-Turner to you. However, that day came... and then went... I don’t know how many times... and I still couldn’t stop cycling.”

Hermione gasped, and said, “But how...”

“Think, Hermione,” scolded Sirius. “I had a Time-Turner. It was my crutch. I could always go back in time to send the Time-Turner back to you so it would arrive before you needed it. That crutch also supported my continued addiction. But I still managed to keep reducing my cycle time and living one more day in the present -- though I admit I had some relapses. You *can’t* understand how difficult it was.”

Hermione nodded her head and said, “I think I can in a very small way. Traveling back only an hour a few times a day to study more subjects was irresistible to me... even though it was wearing me down. I guess I could have also used the Time-Turner to get more rest, but I never did. I only wanted to learn and read and study.”

Sirius nodded and went on. “I needed something to focus on in the present. I thought of Harry. I had thought of him when I first arrived in Africa. And I had sent him a letter saying he should call on me if he ever needed help. Later, after I

began to live one more day in the present after each cycle, I noticed his birthday was coming up. I sent him another letter and a birthday cake. But I still went back into the past. Then on a day in the present at the end of yet another a cycle, Hedwig delivered a letter from Harry. It was mid August. Harry said his scar had hurt. That could only mean one thing -- Voldemort was back. Now, at last, I had the reason I needed to live in the present again -- to protect my godson. So, I cycled again..."

"No!" exclaimed Hermione.

Sirius laughed. "Yes, Hermione, ...just one last time. Remember, I had to send the Time-Turner back to you. And I did."

Hermione nodded, slightly embarrassed, and said, "Yes, of course."

Then his tone became very somber. "I only went back three months. But I will admit to you I was tremendously tempted to go back to my prime just one more time. When I sent the Time-Turner back to you, it was like I had lost my arms and legs. I cried as the bird flew away."

Hermione reached across the table and put her hand on his.

"Then I had to wait three months to catch up again. It was extremely stressful, not having the Time-Turner -- like withdrawing from addictive potions. I lost a lot of weight, as I had in Azkaban. Anyway, when I caught up, I wrote Harry the letter telling him I was returning. When I did return, I wore my prison robes again to hide any indication that I had been... enjoying myself. I felt ashamed." Sirius paused and hung his head.

"You know the rest," he concluded, raising his head.

Hermione looked at him sadly. Then her eyes widened as if remembering something she had wanted to say.

"Did you know I received the Time-Turner and return letter from you *before* I sent it to you? I had *two* Time-Turners for about a half hour," said Hermione.

"What?" said Sirius, looking quite startled. He sat upright, pulling his hand out from under Hermione's. "I sent it back to you based on the date of your letter -- allowing the same time it had taken to be delivered -- so it would arrive the day

after you sent it.” He paused and then said, “My bird must have been faster than yours.”

“I don’t understand; it was the same bird after all,” said Hermione in surprise. “A parrot delivered it the afternoon of the day after you left on Buckbeak. It was in an oblong box wrapped in brown paper. My address to you was already written on the other side of the wrapping paper in *my* handwriting. I just reversed the wrapping paper when I sent my Time-Turner and letter to you with the parrot. I composed my letter based on your letter to me. I had not even thought about sending you my Time-Turner until I received it back from you. Your letter sounded like it had done you some good; and I thought you could use it to make up for all that time in Azkaban,” explained Hermione.

Sirius’ mouth was open in shock. “I received your package by owl. I was in the beach cabana I rented. I always kept the cabana and Apparated back to it when I started living a day in the present after each cycle. Buckbeak was living in the jungle nearby. I just reused your box and wrapping materials to return it to you. I took them back with me when I cycled that last time.”

He paused and then said, nervously, “This is a paradox.”

“I know,” said Hermione. “I stopped trying to make sense of it ages ago... But your timing didn’t have to be so precise in returning the Time-Turner to me. I didn’t need it until the end of term.”

“But, Hermione,” said Sirius, still looking alarmed, “that’s only because you still had *my* Time-Turner *after* you sent me yours. If I had never returned it, you would have still had a Time-Turner to return to McGonagall. You had nothing to worry about. There was no risk. That’s probably why you were willing to part with it. Now it makes sense. When I received it, I couldn’t believe that you would have ever let it out of your sight.”

Hermione’s eyes went wide.

Sirius reached into his robes and withdrew a very old looking leather covered notebook. He opened it and from the inside cover pocket carefully withdrew a folded piece of parchment. It was yellow with age, stained and edge worn. He unfolded it and handed it to Hermione. One side was nearly completely covered in little tick marks. A small percentage were little crosses. The other side was a letter.

June 7

Dear Sirius,

I can't stop thinking about the terrible injustices you have suffered.

This is a Time-Turner.

You can't change your past; but I hope having some extra time will help you to heal and live a little better.

Please return it to me before the end of this weekend. Don't worry, you'll figure it out.

I need it to get to the extra classes I am taking this term. Professor McGonagall would not be pleased, to say the least, if I don't have it on Monday.

Your friend,

Hermione Granger

P.S. This must always remain our secret.

Hermione shook her head. "It is my handwriting, but this isn't the letter I wrote you. It is similar in intent, and the date is the same, but I can't imagine having taken the risk of losing my only Time-Turner. You're right; it is a paradox. I don't know what impact this is going to have or is already having."

She laid the letter on the table between them.

Sirius replied, "It's not something we can do anything about. It tells me your past has been changed. There is no such thing as a *safe* Time-Turner."

"I'm never going to ask to use one again," Hermione said emphatically. Then she paused and looked at the letter again. "Why does this letter look so old?"

"I always carried it with me... sort of as an anchor on reality. I got younger going back in time, but objects I carried did not," he said matter-of-factly.

"And what are all these marks on the back?" she asked.

They are for each cycle I made -- once I started keeping track. The ones with the crosses are the cycles that included one day in the present," said Sirius, looking very embarrassed.

Hermione gaped. There were at least several hundred tick marks and many dozen of crosses.

"How many *years*?" asked Hermione, her voice cracking.

"I haven't dared to add it up... many centuries for certain," Sirius said very sadly.

He looked at Hermione, expecting her to say something, but she didn't. Instead, her eyes filled with tears again.

Sirius continued. "Most memories are preserved. Having so many makes you feel very old, even though you are physically young. Some memories do fade, but others remain crystal clear -- mainly the regrets. I told you in my letter I learned that that time does not heal all wounds. I know this to be true -- perhaps better than anyone ever has. I said in my letter the Time-Turner helped me and I thanked you for sending it. But I not sure those statements were true."

Hermione was weeping again. She covered her face in her hands. "I'm so sorry," she sobbed. "I should *not* have sent it to you."

"You did the logical thing based on your experience with the Time-Turner," said Sirius with a comforting voice. "You also closed the time loop to prevent a major paradox. I had already received the Time-Turner because I sent it back to you. All we have is the question of where did the box and wrapping materials come from? ...Apparently from thin air, but obviously from you in the what must have been the original timeline. In that timeline, later the same day, something inspired you to take that risk and send me your one and only Time-Turner. We'll never know why because those events were replaced in this timeline when you received mine."

Hermione blubbered, "It was like violating the rule of not being seen by yourself."

Sirius nodded. "Correct. If you're not expecting it, you will almost certainly react incorrectly to a potentially time changing event. In this case, because my bird flew faster than yours, even after allowing for it to arrive a day later, I caused you to create a new timeline. But if you had not sent your Time-Turner with the parrot, another timeline might have had a much worse paradox. I have no doubt your parrot made its delivery. Another Sirius must have wondered where you got a parrot at Hogwarts and how his own writing got onto the wrapping paper."

Sirius paused for a few moments and then chuckled. "Overall, it worked out fairly well... all things considered."

Hermione continued to sob softly.

Sirius picked up the letter, folded it and returned it to the pocket of his leather notebook. Then he got up and walked around the table. He stood behind Hermione's chair and said, "It's time for you to go to bed and get a good night's sleep."

Sirius helped with her chair as Hermione stood up. Suddenly she turned, buried her face in his shoulder and hugged him around the waist.

He patted Hermione on the back.

"I've wondered," Sirius mused, "if there is a wizard somewhere out there from the Department of Mysteries who is reliving some favorite period of his life or perhaps some favorite historical time period, over and over -- forever young -- using a Time-Turner not bound by all the rules of the one we had... It would be so tempting."

Hermione could not help but hear the terrible longing in Sirius' voice.

Sirius gently pushed Hermione from her embrace and lifted her chin with his hand, looking into her eyes. "What might have happened to *you*, instead of me, if you had kept the *extra* Time-Turner for yourself?"

Hermione knew she had not, and never would have, considered doing that. But then she imagined another version of herself, a version of herself who might have been tempted -- perhaps the risk-taking Hermione who had sent Sirius her one and only Time-Turner via Owl Post. She could envision that Hermione

checking out armfuls of books every hour of every day from the Hogwarts school library and then -- using the Time-Turner -- having unlimited time to read every one of the tens of thousands of wonderful books at her leisure, resting as long as and whenever she needed. And there were so many other wonderful libraries in the world...

Hermione shuddered, suddenly realizing that now, at this moment, she *wished* she had thought of it at the time.

Chapter 6 -- Forward and Back Again

"Are you all right?" asked Sirius, seeing Hermione shudder. He let go of her chin.

"Yes, I'm fine," she said, not meaning it. "Thank you for telling me," she added, not sure if she meant that either. "I'll go to bed now; I do need a good night's sleep." She doubted she'd be able to sleep much at all.

"Well then, good night, Hermione. I'll see you in the morning."

"Good night, Sirius."

Hermione turned and walked out of the kitchen.

Sirius stood silently, listening until he could no longer hear her footsteps on the stairs. His mind was reliving the future as he absently fingered the Time-Turner laying against his chest under his robes.

It was all true -- what he had just told Hermione -- up to a point. He *had* cried when he sent the time turner back to her, and it *had* felt like he had lost his limbs. He was planning his return to England while he waited to return to the present -- when the miracle, or rather the real paradox, had happened.

His parrot returned with the Time-Turner and another letter from Hermione -- the letter *she* remembered sending. He wondered how had it managed to pick *him* out of the hundred of instances of himself occupying the very same moment in time all over the world? There had to be several of himself just in the vicinity.

He still had the second letter, like the first. He would show it to Hermione some day, when he would tell her the rest of the story. He smiled at the play-acting he had just performed -- pretending to be surprised when Hermione said she'd received his time turner early and sent hers using his parrot. Sirius had not been absolutely sure what happened on her end; but he had guessed right. He had caused a paradox; and he was hoping now it was the miracle he needed to set things right at last.

When the parrot delivered the Time-Turner to him, it was truly 'out of the blue' as Hermione had said. He had cried again. He had his crutch again. It was as if fate did not want him to go back to England yet.

But he did not go back to his prime. Instead, he went back only a year to see someone very special, just after he had left her. From his perspective, it had been very, very long ago. He hoped she would take him back.

He had told Hermione he had fallen in love many times. He had, but the last time was different. He had never fallen in love again, because there was no one else after Mary. She did take him back and they lived happily again for several years, taking him more than two years into what, at the present moment, was the future.

But then the world changed.

It started in England. Voldemort had won and taken power. Magic was unleashed on the Muggle world. Even with all its technology, it was helpless. There was utter chaos. Getting information from England was almost impossible. And then chaos had started to spread beyond England.

The only thing he knew for certain was that Harry Potter was dead. He did not know how or when, but he had to find out.

He finally had to say good-bye to Mary. He knew his future would be without her. He could hardly bear it. She had been the strong one. On his return, he told her everything. She knew he could not remain and had to go.

Sirius returned to England. He struggled to find out what happened. Dumbledore was dead too. All the Order members were either dead or in hiding. He finally ran into Lupin, whom he hoped could tell him what happened. Their conversation was burned into his memory.

“I thought I was the only Order member left,” Lupin said.

Lupin looked wretched, and he sounded exhausted.

“The last one I had contact with was Hagrid, but they got him last month. This is the only time in my life when being a werewolf has helped me. I’m good at hiding out, and they don’t dare look for me near the full moon,” he said, smiling faintly.

Then he asked, “Where have you been, Sirius?”

They were sitting on two prop chairs in the back of an abandoned theater in London. They were all that way now. London was unrecognizable. It was like an occupied city. Very few people were on the street. Most shops were closed. *‘Magic is Might’* banners and posters were hung everywhere. Witches and wizards now paraded openly; not all of them had been Dark Wizards. Many had Imperiused Muggle slaves in tow. It made Sirius sick.

“Never mind that now. What’s happened, Remus!” Sirius exclaimed.

“Well,” said Lupin, “After you escaped from Hogwarts, things seemed normal for a while. But we now know that Pettigrew helped Voldemort return to his body. It was a ridiculously complex plot which worked. I’ll tell you the details later.” Lupin paused.

Then he said ominously, “It was the school year after that when it all went bad.”

“It started when Ronald Weasley was kidnapped on a Hogsmeade weekend visit late in the school year. Harry and a bunch of his school friends, including Hermione Granger, were somehow lured to the Department of Mysteries by Voldemort. We suspect they were trying to save Ron. Harry was captured, and the rest were killed by the Death Eaters. A few days later, Voldemort ransomed Harry, but it was just a trap to get Dumbledore. He and several members of the Order were killed by a horde of Death Eaters. Bellatrix killed Harry and Voldemort hung him from the astronomy tower at Hogwarts.”

“Oh, God,” gasped Sirius. His face lost all its color.

“I know. It was more horrible than you can imagine,” said Lupin. “After that, the Ministry fell very quickly. The rest of the Order was hunted down. You might be surprised to learn that Voldemort killed Snape. I supposed he didn’t trust spies he no longer needed. Who does?” he added almost casually.

“I have to go,” said Sirius, standing up quickly.

“What?” said Lupin. “No! Why? What’s going on? Where are you going?”

Sirius ignored him and hurried away. Lupin followed, but when he turned the corner in the hallway where he had just seen Sirius only moments before, Sirius was gone.

Sirius was still holding the Time-Turner. He had turned it once and gone back an hour, roughly thirty minutes before entering the abandoned theater with Lupin.

“This will not stand,” he said out loud. “I’m finally going to do what I should have done long ago.”

A scraping noise brought him back from his memory. It was Kreacher entering the kitchen.

Kreacher saw him and said, “Kreacher did not know that master was still awake.”

Sirius ignored him and simply watched as Kreacher shuffled to the cupboard where he slept, muttering under his breath the whole way, and went in.

Sirius had no thoughts of Kreacher. He was recalling how he had wasted the first year of his plan to change the past.

After returning to his absolute present time after seeing Lupin, he had gone back to the year he first come to Africa, arriving a few months before he received the second Time-Turner from Hermione. He wanted to be sure and return to England according to his original plan. He again lost a lot of weight from the stress. He appreciated the irony of it. This time it was from worrying about the terrible future that awaited everyone if he were not able to change it. There was nothing he

could change because Voldemort had not yet returned, and he had no idea where Pettigrew was.

He was completely surprised to learn of Harry's participation in the Triwizard Tournament. He assumed it had to be part of the ridiculously complex plot that Lupin had mentioned. Now he wished he had made Lupin tell him about it. He returned to England on Buckbeak to be closer to Harry. But he figured Harry was safe with both Dumbledore and Mad Eye at Hogwarts, despite Karkaroff being there.

Unfortunately, like everyone else – including Dumbledore -- he was completely fooled. As a result, the ridiculous plot succeeded -- Voldemort returned to full strength and was gathering more followers even now. Sirius had not been able to prevent it.

He was devastated but had to keep living the timeline until he returned to his absolute present and was able to try again.

Still, Sirius remembered this was the crucial year according to Lupin. This was the year that Harry would die if he could not change history.

He was really worried by the Dementor attack on Harry in Little Whinging. Lupin had not said anything about it. He wondered if he had already done something to change history. Was it good; was it bad? He did not know. It was incredibly frustrating.

His focus had to be on anything having to do with Harry being drawn to the Department of Mysteries to retrieve the prophecy. Dumbledore had told the Order members that only Harry or Voldemort could touch it. This was where he thought he could still make a crucial difference.

This time, he would be there to save Harry -- no matter what.

Chapter 7 -- The Question

The next morning, after Mrs Weasley had cooked them all a wonderful breakfast, Hermione caught Sirius alone in the entry hallway.

“Sirius, remember when you asked me, ‘*Are we currently in the absolute present, or am I back in time now talking to you in what you believe to be the absolute present?*’”

“You do have a mind like a trap, don’t you?” said Sirius in genuine amazement.

“Sirius,” said Hermione with a don’t-change-the-subject tone in her voice.

“Yes, I remember,” he said, having trouble concealing a bit of nervousness.

He could tell that Hermione knew.

Hermione stared at him. With had a look of genuine concern on her face, she asked, “Is everything going to be all right?”

He looked her straight in the eye and, sounding as confident as possible, said, “Don’t worry, Hermione. Everything is going to be just fine.”

The End

End Notes:

The quote in **bold** text in Chapter 2 of this story is taken from Chapter Twenty-One of Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban, by J. K. Rowling.

The quote in **bold** text in Chapter 3 of this story is taken from Chapter Three of Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix, by J. K. Rowling.