

The New Phoenix

Let us close our reflections about this beloved modern classic with the last, most gripping, beautiful, and touching chapters of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, those that describe the death of Harry Potter at the hands of the worst possible wizard, and his rebirth and triumph. These are the chapters that show Harry's true magic, the power of his love that Dumbledore recognizes over and over again.

Once before did Harry know the full fury of the Dark Lord. It was at Godric's Hollow that, while tied to a tombstone, Voldemort had inflicted the Cruciatius and Imperius Curses on Harry without managing to bend his will. Then he had tried the *Avada Kedavra* Killing Curse, and Harry was spared through the help of the dead, and mostly his parents sustaining his spirit and keeping the Death Eaters at bay.

Harry has now earned certainty about his Self. He stands secure without family or spiritual masters, with just his two friends. He is content with who he is, one with his mission. He has served his fellow students, accepted to serve the world, extended his concern to house-elves and goblins alike, even to some Death Eaters. He has known the full power of the young, arrogant Snape and that of the relentless Voldemort.

Now Harry has gone a step further. He has practiced the Imperius and Cruciatius Curses himself. Nothing is left to gain from Voldemort except the *Avada Kedavra* curse. How could he possibly use this last curse without staining his soul beyond repair? Well, quite simply by accepting it in such a way that he removes from it all power.

In setting out for the quest, Harry has to put everything personal on hold; his love for Ginny puts her at risk, or him in the condition of having to choose between personal happiness or answering the call of his personal mission. And there is another bind, or rather a necessary step of growth: Harry has depended on Dumbledore first as a surrogate father, which is only normal for a youth his age, then has developed the love for the spiritual master. The loss has left a tremendous hole in his soul, which at turns is filled with sadness, anger, or doubt. Can Harry take the next step? From accepting Dumbledore as a master to accepting him as a beacon, a highly developed individual, and yet still completely human? Harry struggles in his quest because he wants to make sure Dumbledore has not cheated him, until he can see both the headmaster's dimension of a spiritual teacher and his humanity retraced in his biography.

Harry has to wander the wilderness in pursuit of what seems sheer impossibility: destroy the Horcruxes and hope that everybody else will help him in doing what he cannot do—e.g., killing Nagini—plus trust that the timing will also work in his favor. In other words, completely relinquish control. But that is not enough. Harry must say yes to the call of his destiny, which includes his own death. He has to discover and reach for the certainty of his immortality and be able to let go of the Resurrection Stone. In so doing he fulfills the prophecy of his parents' headstone

inscription, "The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death." And he has to cleanse himself of the hatred for Voldemort to the point that he can face him willingly and unarmed. He will not reach for the wand, even when it is in his power. Harry dies and Voldemort unintentionally destroys the portion of Harry's soul that was bound to his enemy ever since the attempted murder of the baby.

Through his utmost renunciation, Harry can face the choice of coming back and this time fight for Voldemort's death. It's not a coincidence that Harry can turn to Voldemort at the height of the next decisive confrontation and say "It's your one last chance, it's all you got left. ... I've seen what you'll be otherwise. ... Be a man ... try ... Try for some remorse." Harry has seen in the otherworldly King's Cross Station the fate of Voldemort, a fate that lay beyond any possible help, one that can rightfully inspire compassion. He has learned from his master, Dumbledore, that everyone deserves a second chance. He knows he cannot help Voldemort if the latter doesn't initiate the change from within.

Harry has been the hope of the Order of the Phoenix. They have fought Voldemort by protecting Harry's life at all costs. Harry has understood it. Before he took refuge in the Order's safe house, he had created Dumbledore's Army. Harry had first accepted to be called "Dumbledore's man" with pride. Before coming to Hogwarts's rescue, he indicates to Aberforth that he is completely devoted to the Order of the Phoenix. In the last confrontation with Voldemort, doesn't Harry himself embody the phoenix that dies and is reborn? And Voldemort doesn't realize what part he plays in making this possible.

Harry's ultimate sacrifice brings the complete change, including his only possible survival. Harry has the daring of hope against all odds, just like another character that is very different from him, especially in age, and yet in some magic way, very similar. It is the one who claims: "Yet it is not our part to master all the tides of the world, but to do what is in us for the succour of those years wherein we are set, uprooting the evil in the fields that we know, so that those who live after may have clean earth to till. What weather they shall have is not ours to rule."¹

¹ Gandalf in *The Lord of the Rings*.