

The Forest Again

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DH gapfiller. What really should have happened on Harry's walk towards the final face-off. HP/DM

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Chapter 1 of 1

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I'm about to die.

He walked down the familiar hallways without really registering the stone under his feet, nor the small, shuffling sound that accompanied his every step. It was almost dream-like in a way; the sounds of the castle reached him through a haze of focused clarity, if there was indeed such a thing. Since he came out of the Pensieve, he seemed to not so much experience a series of contradictory impressions as to actually have become one himself. He'd often wondered what it would feel like, those last, few moments just before death...first when Cedric was killed and then, later, with Sirius. Through his detachment, he felt slightly amazed now...amazed at how he seemed to float through it all, passing away from existence as though he'd already gone over to the other side.

He passed Ron and Hermione, huddled together against a wall. They didn't notice the brush of the cloak, and he didn't attempt to stop. He didn't need goodbyes, not anymore. They'd spent nearly a year saying their silent goodbyes after all.

He'd thought leaving Ginny behind would be harder. He'd expected his steps to slow and his body to hesitate. Neither happened, and he passed her in silence, directing his steps towards the Forbidden Forest. The air was growing colder now, and the light was fading. He could sense the Dementors closing in.

His hands grew cold, and he felt his spine slowly turn into ice, but through it all, his mind stayed clear and focused, silent and mercifully devoid of screams in spite of the increasing darkness. The Dementors were all around him now, flanking him on every side, and he thought of Sirius, of cold, lonely nights in Azkaban, the unhappy truths of his past keeping him sane when lunacy would have been a greater mercy. He felt the corners of his mouth tug upwards at the irony of it all.

I never thought death would be this empty.

He closed his eyes, since they could no longer make out the path before him, and sensed his way through the cold, walking towards the source of paralysis with increasing certainty. Occasionally, his foot would catch on a root or a larger stone, making him lose his balance slightly before continuing. He took another step and felt his foot come up against yet another obstacle, this one large and unexpected enough to make him trip and fall heavily to the ground.

He expected pain, expected his body to crash against hard rock, prickly bush or even the frozen path of the forest floor. What he got was warmth...soft fabric against his skin and yielding flesh underneath, breaking his fall with a muffled *thud*. His first instinct said 'dead body,' which made his stomach lurch before his mind registered that the chest against his chest was moving up and down in shaky intakes of breath, releasing hot puffs of damp air against his neck. He felt his hands reach out, touching the form beneath him, mapping the features of a face and body hidden in darkness. His fingers moved over shoulders and arms, navigating around hands that had come alive to map him in return. He felt trembling fingers on his face, stroking across his jaw and cheeks, along the bridge of his nose and across his eyes, which had lost the protection of glasses in the fall. He felt the fingers reach his forehead and skim over his scar at the same moment that he, himself, caught handfuls of tousled but silky-smooth hair

and leaned into it, breathing in a mixture of smoke, sweat, fear and a familiar something else through his nostrils. The dots connected in his mind at the same time as he felt the other's fingers trace his scar again with a startled gasp of recognition. For a split second, there was eerie stillness. Then... words.

"What..." The first syllable got him like a spark to a string of gunpowder, burning a swift trail through the confusion that had once been his mind. He couldn't bear to hear that voice now, couldn't deal with the implications of it here, mere moments away from his own destruction.

"Shut up," he urged, letting the words fall from his lips in a rush of warm air while his hands hardened their grip in the silky hair. The next movement came without conscious thought, and before he had time to grasp his own intent, there they were, Malfoy's lips against his, frozen for a split second before parting underneath his own with a strangled moan.

Images filled his mind, rising up inside him in great bursts of colour as he fell into sensation. Every movement of lips and tongue told a story, retracing the steps of mutual history back to the first day in Diagon Alley, when two eleven-year-old boys had met in a robes shop and laid the foundation to a relationship that would always be passionate, if never friendly. He felt Draco's palm against the side of his face and remembered it offered in greeting...and refused with a few, harsh words. He saw a lantern-lit face, close to his as they followed a trail of unicorn blood through dark woods, and the sun falling on blond hair as they raced, side by side, in pursuit of a tiny, golden ball. He pushed his hands inside the woollen robes and remembered lounging under disguise in the Slytherin common room, felt naked skin under his palms and recalled it streaked with red on a bathroom floor. Draco kissed him more deeply, feeling his way across buttons and hooks in the blackness that surrounded them like a living, breathing thing. The feeling of being inside a dream grew stronger in Harry's mind, pushing away any lingering doubt and releasing him from the last strings of reality. He could still feel the Dementors around them, circling like a giant vortex, but the cold was falling away, pushed from his body by Draco's hands, his fingers leaving paths of fire in their wake as they moved across his skin.

His cloak fell open to pool over both of them like a blanket, while underneath, hands and mouths and teeth found their way under collars and into shirts, under Weasley-made jumpers and into the waistbands of dirty jeans. Shaky breaths and broken moans were the only sounds cutting through the silence as the sum of nearly seven years of anger, frustration and passion flipped on its head and drove the two young men together, tying limb to trembling limb with solemn finality. Harry shuddered as Draco's hand closed around him, stroking him harshly, as though even his fingers knew that there was no time to spare for lingering caresses or gentle touch. Harry felt himself break, emptiness warring with completion with every burst of hot liquid over Draco's hand and their connected stomachs, and his hands moved from Draco's hair to his back, rolling them on the hard, pebbled ground. He kicked one leg free of the clinging denims, enough to be able to raise his hips in invitation...or demand, really, but neither seemed to care anymore...and use his calves to pull Draco towards him, hot and hard against his sticky skin.

It was all quick work after that, Harry's hand working the slick come over Draco's erection while the Slytherin thrust into his fist, holding himself half-way up on shaky arms and struggling to breathe in between frantic kisses. The subsequent joining made Harry cry out in pain, even as he tightened his hold, drawing Draco in deeper, desperate to feel all of him...to feel anything at all. Draco complied, giving himself over to the raging, grinding rhythm of them, pushing his way inside so deeply that Harry lost track, for a minute, of where his body ended and his soul began. He didn't even know if he had a soul anymore, but if he did, then Draco was fucking it, thrusting his way into Harry's very core and sending tiny parts of himself coursing into every cell through Harry's bloodstream. He wished there was some sort of light, something that would allow him to see Draco's body moving over him or his face as he cried out against Harry's swollen lips. A moon to show the strands of silver between his fingers or scattered stars to reveal a pair of grey eyes. No such luck; the Dementors stood their ground, keeping the darkness woven into a tight web around them, and Harry pressed his eyes firmly shut, willing himself to watch Draco through the tremors under the palms of his hands, the shuddering weight against his chest and the gasped words that seemed to fall unconsciously against the side of his neck.

Stillness descended. The forest was silent, and...curled together under the shimmering cloak...Harry could almost imagine that they were somewhere else, hidden away in a time-frozen moment. He let his hands wander over Draco's skin, smooth and ridiculously perfect under his touch. He mapped the contours of the back with his fingers, over the slope of the neck and the planes of the shoulder blades underneath, down past the slim sides and back up again along the gentle curve of a long spine. In his mind's eye, he saw the pale skin of it glow bluish-white under a waning moon, then rich and golden in the light of a hundred candles. He saw dewdrops and sun against the grass of the Quidditch pitch and the sheen of multicoloured bubbles in the prefects' bathroom. He caressed a shoulder, imagined how the afternoon sun would play across it when filtered in through the painted glass of his dormitory window and wondered how Draco's skin would look against the crimson hangings of his bed. Then he opened his eyes to the darkness and realised that those were all things he'd never get to know.

"Stay." He'd only made a hint of movement, but the second the determination had settled back into his mind, Draco seemed to know it. The kiss used to enforce his words was softer than the rest had been, light and seemingly undemanding...like a slowly contracting noose around his heart.

I need you to be here when the light comes back, to see you, to know if this is real.

"I have to go."

If I don't do it now, I won't be able to.

"Don't."

Why won't you stay?

"It's too late."

I wish I could. Right here, with your breath against my lips.

"Oh."

You're about to die, aren't you?

"Yeah."

They kissed again, long and lingering, every lazy drag of lips against lips a silent rebellion to the clock ticking down. Harry had no concept of how much time remained of Voldemort's crude little ultimatum, but it couldn't be much now.

"Then destroy me." Draco's words were soft against his ear, a warm breath against his battered senses. He jerked away.

"Wh-what?" Draco followed him as he attempted to roll away, twisting their entangled bodies until Harry was the one on top and feeling himself press against the wet skin of Draco's hip.

"You nearly killed me once," Draco said softly. "Even more so when you saved me. Be a man, Potter. Finish the job." Slender hands were on his hips, rubbing Harry against warm skin, coaxing his blood flow return its focus to the area between his legs.

"I can't."

I can't let myself get lost in you.

"Liar."

The one word was nearly a moan, nearly a sob and nearly a chuckle without sounding even remotely related to any of the three. Draco's hand slid along his ribs, down to where the slow, pulsing rhythm of *want* had started up again. He closed his hand around the hardening flesh of Harry's cock and guided him to the right spot, spreading his legs in invitation as Harry tethered on the edge of his self-control.

"Fuck me, Harry," he whispered, pushing his hips upwards, which made resisting virtually impossible as far as Harry's mind was concerned. "Don't give me that noble shit about how it's better if we don't or how I will forget about all of this and go on to marry some cute little thing that will give me blond children with slightly unorthodox but highly traditional Malfoy family names."

"Don't. Please." Harry moved his hips, unsure of the subject of his protest, as well as whether he was actually trying to break away from the heated contact or trying to increase it. Draco's calves hooked around him in response, pulling him lower, closer, *inside*.

"Too late," he murmured, and Harry thought he could hear triumph in the low voice. "It's all too late now."

He couldn't answer. The sensation of Draco's body encasing him like a hot glove was too much for him to be able to think, not to mention form actual words. The back of his throat managed a sort of strangled cry, and Draco's lips curled against his cheek.

"Destroy me, Harry," he whispered, thrusting back his hips hard enough to make both of them cry out in unison. "Fucking kill that last shred of hope that keeps insisting that I could somehow walk away from this...away from you...as something more than a broken body. That I could somehow forget that I..." He trailed off, replacing his words with fevered kisses.

Harry let go, and the last shred of hope in his own heart died with that first, hard sliding plunge. Unlike the hope for a normal life after the war, which had melted away as he rose from the Pensieve, it didn't wither away in silence, but formed itself into a tight ball of light that burst and expanded inside him, forcing its way to push on the inside of his skin until it broke, sending light spilling into the night in a crushing wave, leaving him panting and empty, fighting for air against his lover's shoulder.

"I hate you," he whispered, voice breaking as the words left his lips. The last declaration he'd made...to Ginny, just hours before...suddenly felt like the world's biggest joke. He leaned his forehead against Draco's, thankful now for the complete darkness that prevented him from seeing the wetness he could sense against his cheek or the tremble of a lower lip as he caught it gently with his upper teeth.

"Yeah," Draco rasped, voice hollow but somehow overflowing with emotion all the same. "I hate you too."

The Dementors left him mostly alone for the rest of the way, and he could almost make out the moon again as he followed the path deeper and deeper into the forest. He imagined there was little he could offer the terrifying creatures now, the place where he'd felt his soul to be no more than an empty, aching void in the middle of his chest. They still made the air hum with cold, however, and he longed for the silvery presence of his stag, if only to bring him a hint of warmth and comfort as he walked to his death. He didn't draw his wand. It would have been pointless as there was nothing happy left in him, nothing he could grab on to in order to produce his Patronus. Nevertheless, his hand found its way into his pocket, and he frowned slightly when he felt his fingers close around something else, something small and circular. The Snitch lay in his palm, its wings twisted and broken, oddly beautiful in the feeble light.

I open at the close.

Understanding came to him like a soft, summer breeze, and he raised the small, golden sphere to his lips, rubbing it gently against Draco's touch, which still lingered there.

"I'm about to die."

The words left him in a rush of breath, and he watched layer after layer of pale gold peel away from the charmed object in his hand, leaving a small, black stone in the middle. The final gateway. He wouldn't be alone after all.

Taking a deep breath to steady himself, he closed his hand around the stone, turned it back and forth a few times and watched the shadows come to life.

THE END

A/N: Please review. I'll love you forever if you do... :-)