

Past, Present, Future

by mayfly

Draco can't help remembering the past, and Neville can't help giving second chances.

Part 1 of 2

Chapter 1 of 2

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The sun has set and the light is rapidly waning. In the dusky light the damaged castle looks even worse off, misshapen and lopsided, with gaping jagged holes in its walls. The grounds around it are hardly in better shape. Barely anything remains of the Quidditch pitch or the gamekeeper's hut. The once green grass is muddied, bloodied and burnt.

Slowly, almost listlessly, volunteers move around the now silent site, searching for any overlooked bodies of the fallen. There is a strange calmness to the air. It is as if the desperation and violence of the battle that had raged earlier in that very same place used up all the passion and energy of not only the inhabitants who seem to have been left in an almost trancelike state but of the castle itself as well.

The unnatural calmness of the scene is broken by a single agitated figure. A tall, slim youth creeps out the main door, looking shiftily around and cradling something possessively to his chest. He tries to keep unobtrusively to the shadows, but the nervous energy and fear that he projects and the wild rapid beating of his heart make him stand out like a sore thumb. However, no one is looking, and he goes unnoticed.

He skitters and runs along the side of the castle, hunching down, as if that could make him invisible, his hood drawn low over his face. One brief spring in the open and he's reached the ruined greenhouses. Quickly ducking behind the closest one, he rapidly makes his way over to the furthest one. He lifts his hood to see better as he looks around anxiously, and it slips off his head. His pale hair shimmers and the waning light catches the sharp angles of his face, making him look older and gaunter.

Satisfied that he's hidden from all eyes, he carefully holds his treasure closer to his chest as he points his wand to the roots of a nearby tree. The tree rustles its leaves angrily and makes sharp noises that are obvious demands for the offender to bugar off. The blond boy, however, is obviously accustomed to the tree's abrasive manner and pays it no heed as he efficiently casts a spell to create a hole in the ground underneath it. With the greatest of care he retrieves the precious cargo that had been hidden under his robes, against his stuttering heart, and places it in the hole. He covers it with earth by hand, carefully patting it down once he's finished.

For many long minutes the thin ragged boy stays there, kneeling under the bad-tempered tree and staring at the freshly covered hiding place.

Eventually he gets up and slinks back into the castle.

~o~

Neville eased open the castle's heavy door and walked purposely towards the greenhouses and the adjacent gardens. There they lay, in front of him, battered and bruised, but not completely destroyed. Greenhouse One hardly had a pane of unbroken glass left, while Greenhouse Two had acquired a new wonky shape. Behind them, Greenhouse Three was a burnt and charred mass, not a single plant left alive. Around him, flowerbeds were trampled and huge gouges marred the ground in the vegetable garden.

Neville sighed; he certainly had his work cut out for him. The remaining panes of glass gleamed and shined in the bright morning sun. It was like they were welcoming Neville home, and not a moment too early. Too much time had been wasted already. The summer was almost over and yet the greenhouses still lay in near ruins.

After the final battle, everyone had needed time to mourn and heal and just simply rest. Neville had returned home to his beloved Lancashire, and had spent long hours lying in the slightly damp grass, gazing at the clouds as they moved by. It was a fortnight at least before he got up and began fixing up the garden his grandmother had let go to seed. During that time, the funerals and the trials had taken place. Neville had gone to every single funeral, but refused to set foot in a courtroom.

Too soon, July had flown by, and he found himself celebrating his eighteenth birthday together with Harry, and more people than he knew. It was then, slightly tipsy on firewhisky and Muggle rum, that someone had said they should volunteer for the rebuilding of Hogwarts.

That was how it came to be that an uncharacteristically teary and emotional McGonagall, newly appointed headmistress, greeted a throng of her older students at the gates of Hogwarts in August a whole month before lessons began.

Neville entered the first greenhouse. He looked around the familiar space, taking in the damage.

"Professor Sprout, are you here?" he called out.

"Neville, my boy, is that you?"

Neville quickly followed the direction of her voice. Hidden behind a large purple bush that shivered and sneezed, burped and coughed, the grey-haired professor was busy pruning some singed flowers.

"I knew I'd be seeing you soon enough," she cheerfully informed Neville once he came into view.

Neville scratched the back of his neck, suddenly embarrassed. "Everyone else volunteered to rebuild the castle. *Someone* had to help you with greenhouses. We have less than a month till lessons start; that's not nearly enough time!"

"We'll just have to be satisfied with what we can manage then, won't we?" Professor Sprout answered, always reasonable and optimistic, and shuffled slowly over to the next potted flower.

Neville looked around and sighed. It was going to be a long hard August.

~o~

It was early morning as Draco was accompanied to Hogwarts gates. Draco couldn't help but feel a pang of sorrow and guilt as the damaged castle came into view. Nor could he help the memories that came rushing back.

It had been with great apprehension that Draco had returned to Hogwarts for his seventh year. Everyone had known that with Dumbledore dead and the Dark Lord a very real and dangerous threat, things could never be the same as before. Nevertheless he had suspected that no one else, apart from him, had actually realised exactly how unpleasant and ugly things were about to get.

Draco had gotten out of the thestral-drawn carriage last and had slowly walked towards the castle entrance. He hadn't wanted to be here, he hadn't wanted to be taught by the likes of the Carrows, and yet he hadn't wanted to return home either; with the Dark Lord in residence it was no longer home.

He had quickened his steps when he had made out the tall ominous figure in flowing black robes that had stood by the large entrance doors, overseeing the students as they entered. Snape. At least Draco had had Snape. He had realised by then how petty and childish he had been the previous year to doubt Snape. He wouldn't be making that mistake again. Apart from his parents, Snape had been the only person Draco could rely on to look out for him and take care of him.

"Good evening, sir," Draco had greeted the sallow, forbidding form of his professor, as warmly as he dared.

He had given Snape a wobbly smile, the best he had been able to manage, and the other man had responded with a regal nod of his head and an intense gaze that had given Draco the courage to square his shoulders and enter the castle.

Now, almost a year later, Draco was once more apprehensive, but for a very different reason. As he walked towards the castle entrance, he could make out the strict and unmoving figure of Professor McGonagall waiting for him. Draco took a deep breath. Nothing could be worse than the year he had already survived.

~o~

Slowly and carefully, and with utmost precision, Neville spoke the correct incantation loudly and clearly, while making the correct wand movements. A pane of glass bubbled and simmered and took form, whole and new and unbroken, where only jagged shards had been before.

Neville lowered his wand and breathed deeply. Construction magic was very precise and taxing, and he was not very good at it. Sprout was too weak from the injuries she had sustained in the Battle of Hogwarts for such magic, so she took over the task of slowly coaxing the plants back to health, while he took the thankless one of rebuilding the greenhouses.

"Mr Longbottom, I'm sorry to interrupt, but could I have a word?"

Neville wiped the sweat off his brow with the back of his hand and turned to speak with the headmistress.

She stood tall and no-nonsense, as she always had, wearing her traditional plaid robes despite the hot weather. Nevertheless, Neville barely kept his jaw from dropping open in surprise. What was out of the ordinary was the figure sheltered in her shadow. Pale and gaunt, his back rigid and his chin held at a belligerent angle, stood Draco Malfoy, dressed in pale summer robes that suddenly made Neville feel very self-conscious of his own rumpled and sweat-stained clothes.

"I trust you remember Mr Malfoy?" McGonagall asked without preamble.

As if anyone could forget him, Neville thought. "Yes, of course, Headmistress," he answered.

Malfoy briefly looked at Neville, as if to finally, reluctantly, acknowledge his existence, and then returned to staring at some indefinite point over Neville's left shoulder.

"Mr Malfoy is here to help," McGonagall continued briskly. "As per the terms of his probation. As per the same terms, wards have been placed on his wand to restrict and monitor his spell usage. Until term starts, an officer of the Law Enforcement Agency is to escort him from his home into your care every morning at nine and return to retrieve him every evening at seven."

Malfoy grimaced and McGonagall's gaze softened as she looked at Neville apologetically. "I'm truly sorry for giving you this unwelcome burden, Mr Longbottom, but we need as many hands as we can get, and Mr Malfoy was adamant about helping with the greenhouses."

"And why shouldn't I get to choose what part of the castle I will be set to work on?" Malfoy retorted haughtily, speaking for the first time. "Longbottom's obviously in dire need of assistance, and I was an exceptional Herbology student."

McGonagall looked displeased with Malfoy's attitude, which was hardly something new. Malfoy, however, positively reeked of stubbornness and determination to get his own way. He stared intently at Neville, daring him to disagree.

Neville shrugged. He *did* need help, and, surprisingly, Malfoy had been rather good at Herbology. "That's all right, Headmistress, I could use his help. Don't worry. I'll keep an eye on him."

Malfoy looked torn between satisfaction at getting his own way and affront at being talked about in that manner.

McGonagall, on the other hand, looked relieved and gave Neville a worn smile. "Thank you, Mr Longbottom. I knew I could count on you." Then she turned to Malfoy. "Mr Malfoy, I expect you to be on your best behaviour. I hope you appreciate our good-will in giving you this second chance, even after... everything." McGonagall ended abruptly, oddly reluctant to put into words Malfoy's exact crimes.

Malfoy turned towards her, looking oddly contrite and earnest. "Rest assured, Headmistress, that I *do* appreciate your clemency. I truly want to help. It was my school too, after all."

McGonagall pursed her lips and turned to go. "Good evening, gentlemen."

Neville stood silently, feeling awkward. He couldn't help but notice that he was now taller and wider across the shoulders than the other man, who, despite putting on some height, still remained painfully slender and narrow-boned. But the other's slighter build and the way fortune had reversed their old positions couldn't make Neville forget a much younger Malfoy harassing and threatening him. Similarly he also remembered the vague half-there ghost of a boy the blond had been the previous two years. Neville wondered which incarnation of Malfoy he'd be getting now.

Eventually Malfoy spoke first. "I am, you know, sorry, that is," he said awkwardly and ineloquently. "About everything. But especially about sixth year. I guess... I guess, that was my fault. But not last year. Last year I didn't want..." He stopped abruptly and swallowed. "Last year wasn't my fault. But I *am* sorry. And I want to make amends, and I want to help. So thank you. Thank you for letting me."

Malfoy stood stiffly, staring once more over Neville's left shoulder. His mouth was a thin tight line and his body was a tense bow, ready to snap. It was obvious that he was embarrassed and uncomfortable.

Well, that makes two of us, Neville thought wryly.

"All right. That's good to know," he answered, hardly knowing what he was saying, but hoping it was the right thing. "You were right about one thing though: *am* in dire need of assistance, so you better be ready to get your hands dirty."

Malfoy glanced at him apprehensively and nodded.

"Would I be correct in assuming they gave you the mandatory briefing?" Neville asked.

Malfoy sneered, a frayed shadow of his old sneer, but a sneer non-the-less. "If by briefing you mean having construction spells *bludgeoned* into my head."

Neville grinned. The Master Builder's teaching abilities did leave a lot to be desired.

"Okay then, let's get you started. We've got lots to do!" he said as he led Malfoy towards Greenhouse One. Might as well pick up where he had left off.

~o~

Being at Hogwarts brought many memories back to Draco. None were more powerful or fresh than those of the previous year. The year spent under the terror of the Dark Lord.

It had hardly been surprising that the new school year had quickly proven to be even worse than Draco had envisioned it. But then again, everything to do with the Dark Lord had been so much worse than Draco had imagined it that he had had a hard time understanding *how* his father had thought that allying himself with such a...*creature* had been a good idea. Maybe he had thought that it was necessary for the family's survival, because the Dark Lord certainly seemed invincible. But he hadn't been. Potter had defeated him once, so maybe he would again. It seemed impossible, that a scruffy half-wit half-blood like Potter could possibly defeat the Dark Lord. Stranger things had happened, however, so Draco had found himself in the bizarre position of secretly hoping Potter would win. Anything to make the Dark Lord just *go away* and never come back.

Only a couple of weeks into his seventh year, Draco had had enough. He didn't know how the Gryffindors and Mudbloods managed, it was so much worse for them; not that he should have cared - he didn't like them, after all. But not liking someone, he had realised this last year, was very very different from hating them or wanting to be the one to hurt them. And if there was one thing Draco had learned about himself lately, it was that he truly didn't have the constitution for murder and torture.

He also had never been one to suffer in silence. *That* was something he had always known about himself. He needed an audience, someone to vent to, someone to perform for, someone to admire him. But he no longer had anyone he could trust with his thoughts. The year before he had been so desperate he had turned to a ghost for a willing ear, and he still had the scars to remind him what a bad idea *that* had been.

It had only taken a few weeks in his surreal, nightmarish, *horrible* seventh year for Draco to end up seeking Snape. It had been odd and disconcerting to find the professor in Dumbledore's old office, behind Dumbledore's old desk. There had even been a stale bowl of lemon drops sitting on the corner of the desk. Thankfully Draco hadn't been offered any. Snape had looked like he hadn't even noticed their presence.

"Well?" was all Snape had said, lifting one sardonic eyebrow.

Draco had sagged with relief. Snape being snide and laconic was *sonormal*, so *comfortable*. Snape making him feel young and foolish and acting like he was doing him a great and rare favour by listening to him, was comforting in its familiarity. Snape was a safe haven in this new topsy turvy world, a rock on which Draco could lean on. The words had spilled out of Draco in an unstoppable torrent, like the breaking of dam.

He had hardly stopped for a breath, or even known what he was saying, as he had told Snape everything; how helpless and afraid he felt, how he had wanted things to return to normal, how much he loathed the Carrows and their *lessons*, how afraid he had been for his parents and himself.

Snape had sat through Draco's tirade silent and solemn, not once trying to stop him or interrupt. Once all the words and thoughts that had been filling Draco to bursting had been finally vented, Draco had fallen silent and out of breath, feeling oddly empty and relieved. Snape had remained silent for long moments, looking at Draco thoughtfully, his face uncharacteristically humane and soft for a fleeting second.

"Have you shared these thoughts with anyone else?" Snape had asked softly, finally breaking his silence.

"No."

"Good. I want you to keep it that way. Everything you just said in this room, will remain in this room *do you understand?*" Snape had stared at Draco intently, daring the boy to contradict him.

"Yes, sir," he had answered meekly. He fully realised the dangers of sharing his weak and traitorous thoughts with anyone else.

"I want you to keep your head down and your mouth closed," Snape had ordered. "I know it will be hard for you," he had continued, sneering, "but I want you to be as

invisible and unobtrusive as you can. It is your best hope for surviving the year with the least damage. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir," Draco had answered once more, vaguely startled. It almost sounded as if Snape harboured similar traitorous thoughts, but that couldn't be.

"You should return to your dorm, it's getting late." Snape had ended the conversation abruptly, dismissing Draco summarily.

As Draco got up to leave, Snape had spoken again, as if an afterthought. "If you ever feel the need to share your thoughts again, visit me. Anytime."

Draco had smiled. "Thank you, sir."

But that was then, and now was now. Now things might be easier with the Death Eaters gone, but Draco still needed someone to talk to. Only Snape was dead, and now he was truly alone.

~o~

The sun was as hot as ever and beating relentlessly down on Neville as he worked. He was kneeling on the ground, his hands elbow deep in earth as he laboured on the destroyed gardens. He felt infinitely more satisfied than he had a week ago, and he had Malfoy to thank. Neville sat back and stretched his arms. He untied his neck chief and mopped his sweaty face. Yes, he had Malfoy to thank that he was now dirty and muddy, kneeling on the ground next to a patch of freshly replanted Asphodels. That certainly was a strange thought!

Malfoy had been correct, Neville really *did* need help. He was quite rubbish with construction spells. Malfoy, on the other hand, seemed to have an aptitude for them. He was surprisingly good at repairing and fixing structures and inanimate objects. Neville had always been better with living things. It was with a sigh of relief that Neville had handed over the onerous task of fixing the structure of the greenhouses to Malfoy, while he happily immersed himself in replanting the gardens and salvaging what plants he could.

Neville's stomach rumbled loudly, reminding him it was well past lunch time. He got up to find Malfoy.

The man was working on Greenhouse One. As soon as Neville had shown him the greenhouse a week ago now, he had looked reprovingly at Neville and informed him that no one started fixing the glass covering when the structure was still unsound. Neville had coloured, and mumbled something indistinct, leaving Malfoy to work as he thought best. Seeing it now, it was clear that the blond had been right. Greenhouse One now looked much more structurally sound, even to Neville's untrained eye.

Neville walked up to Malfoy and stood a couple of feet behind him. The man didn't even notice him. Neville had observed that when Malfoy worked, he concentrated so completely on what he was doing as to completely block out everything else. If Neville didn't interrupt, he wouldn't even take a lunch break. Now Malfoy was adding the final panes of glass to Greenhouse One. Neville watched with vague jealousy at the facility with which the Slytherin conjured the glass. His movements were graceful and sure as he waved his wand, and his voice soft and steady as he intoned the incantation. Smoothly and rapidly, a new pane of glass appeared.

Neville looked closer; there were discreet decorative swirls in it. All Malfoy's panes of glass seemed to have the same subtle motif. He cast a magnifying charm to get a better look and laughed out loud when he saw that it was actually an unobtrusive etching of a Chinese dragon amongst clouds. Neville was rather impressed. His own sad panes of glass, which he had painstakingly made before Malfoy came, looked rather plain and heavyset in comparison.

Neville's stomach rumbled once more, reminding him why he had come to find Malfoy in the first place.

"Malfoy," he called out. The other man remained unmoving. "Malfoy!" he repeated louder, still to no avail.

He walked up to him, sighing. This happened often; when Malfoy immersed himself so completely in his work, he became deaf and blind to the world. He patted Malfoy on the shoulder. "Malfoy," he repeated a third time, softly but with emphasis.

Malfoy started and turned abruptly round with his wand held high. Neville, anticipating the reaction, took a step back to avoid getting an eye poked out.

"Lunch time," he said. "Time for a break."

Malfoy frowned, as if trying to understand the words. His stomach made a soft growling sound and Neville grinned. "Let's eat," he explained.

Malfoy nodded. "All right," was all he said, but he quickly waved his wand over himself before putting it away. It was a quick refreshing and cleaning charm that vanished the sweat and the stains from his clothes and body. Neville couldn't help snorting at how particular Malfoy was.

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The Great Hall was full of clumps of students and volunteers eating and talking softly. Various students waved and smiled at Neville as he passed, and others turned to greet him. Malfoy stuck to his side, silent, looking very much like he was trying to make himself small and invisible.

They installed themselves in a quiet corner and Neville waved a house-elf over to order lunch. A scant few minutes later, a rich meal appeared in front of them and they lost no time tucking in.

"You have done a good job with the greenhouse," Neville spoke, breaking the silence, once he had satisfied his immediate hunger. Malfoy just hummed so Neville continued. "I particularly liked your glasswork," he added.

Malfoy looked up sharply and Neville smiled. "You're very good at construction spells and your glass is really quite beautiful. I like it." Neville winked at Malfoy conspiratorially.

The corner of Malfoy's mouth twitched and he seemed quite gratified with the praise. "Thank you," he said. "I didn't think anyone would notice. *I'm* rather good at creating and fixing things, if I say so myself. It's gratifying to be good at something, but it's even more gratifying to have someone acknowledge it."

Neville couldn't help smiling. Malfoy reacted to praise and admiration like a Flitterbloom to sunlight, and Neville found that he enjoyed giving Malfoy what he wanted, especially when he deserved it.

When the blond had first come to work with Neville, he was ridiculously pale and drawn, with dark circles under his eyes and lines of tension around his eyes and mouth. Now, only a week later, Neville was pleased to see that his colour was already looking healthier, and with Neville's careful coaxing and judicious use of kind words and gestures he had started to relax and give occasional fleeting smiles.

When Neville thought about it, he wondered why he cared. But then again he also cared about Mimbulus Mimbletonias and Venomous Tentaculas, and that didn't make much sense either.

Neville finished his lunch quickly and was itching to get back outside. September was looming close, and he wanted to finish as much as he could before lessons started. Looking over at his companion, he saw that the other hadn't finished yet.

"Malfoy, I think I'll head out again," Neville told him. "Eat your lunch in peace and come and find me when you finish."

Malfoy nodded. "Okay, thank you. I won't take long."

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It was half an hour later or more, when Neville looked up from the particularly difficult Screechsnap he was working on, to see that Malfoy still hadn't returned. Neville frowned. He wasn't supposed to leave him out of his sight, but he could hardly have begrudged him a lunch break he had more than earned.

He got up, his face still set in a light frown, and set out to look for his errant helper. For some reason Neville had decided to take Malfoy's assurances of good faith at face value and trust the other man, and he hoped he wasn't to be disappointed.

It took Neville quite a bit of time to track Malfoy down, getting more and more worried that he was up to no good. When he finally found him, he breathed a sigh of relief before frowning once more, and this time for a completely different reason.

A group of disgruntled students were surrounding the lone Slytherin who stood defiantly with his back against the wall and his wand stowed away. Malfoy's chin was tilted upwards and his eyes glinted hard as flint as the students surrounding him threatened him ineffectually. They seemed aware that moving from verbal attacks to hexes would be crossing a dangerous line.

"We don't want you here," a burly younger student was saying. "We know what you and your family did."

"Yes," agreed an angry Ravenclaw from Neville's year. "We haven't forgotten what you did last year. Go home, where you belong!"

Another student leaned forward and spat at him.

"What's going on here?" Neville asked loudly.

The group turned round, and upon seeing him, shrank back. At least the respect and recognition the previous year's events had bestowed on him came in useful on occasion, he mused.

Breaking up the group was quick work; Neville hated arguments and truly didn't feel like reasoning with them, so he just told them to scram and do something useful with their time or else go home. A couple of minutes later he was left alone with Malfoy.

"Come," Neville told him soothingly, "let's get back outside." Without another word they both made their way back to the greenhouses.

"I'll get back to work," was the first thing Malfoy said, once they arrived at their destination. "I've almost finished Greenhouse One, and I'd like to complete it before I leave today." And with that he hurried away.

Neville shrugged, even though there was no one to see him, and rolled his sleeves up once more to return to his plants.

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It was early evening; soon the officer from the Law Enforcement Agency would be coming to pick up his charge. Neville wondered if Malfoy had managed to finish the greenhouse like he wanted. He also wondered if the other man wanted to talk. Neville wasn't a very talkative person, but he was a good listener and Malfoy's taciturn silence was very much out of character.

Neville slowly walked over to the greenhouse. It was finished! He let his gaze rest admiringly on the completed edifice. The sun was getting lower in the sky and the slanting rays of sun hit the panes of glass in such a way as to bring out the etched dragons and make the greenhouse look like a frosted complex diamond. Neville smiled, exhilarated and pleased. It was beautiful. Even more beautiful than it had originally been!

He looked around for Malfoy, but he was nowhere to be seen. However, Neville was almost certain where he was, so he walked towards the back of the greenhouses. Indeed, Malfoy was sitting in what Neville had started thinking of as 'Malfoy's Spot', under the Pugnacious Plum tree behind Greenhouse Three.

Neville had found it odd, yet fitting, that Malfoy spent so much time sitting under the quarrelsome tree. The tree had taken a liking to the blond. Neville could see it now, twitching and murmuring in a way that was uncharacteristically soothing and companionable. Neville smiled to himself; he assumed the tree had found a sister soul in Malfoy. They were both belligerent and obnoxious at first contact, but in reality actually quite harmless. The Plum tree needed particular care and patience, but when spring came round it rewarded the gardener with delicately beautiful flowers and later on with plums riper and tastier than those of other plum trees. Neville looked speculatively at Malfoy as he murmured, seemingly talking to the tree, and wondered how deep the parallels between the man and the tree ran. Neville ducked his head, smiling, and left Malfoy alone with his tree, it seemed like he had found someone to talk to after all.

~o~

Draco found that sitting under the Pugnacious Plum tree was soothing and comforting. So was the secret knowledge of what was hidden under the exact spot he was sitting in. Somehow the memories were less painful when he was sitting here.

The Christmas of Draco's seventh year had undoubtedly been the worst he had ever had, and was probably the worst he would ever have. Almost immediately, the Dark Lord had taken him under his wing. He had said he had wanted a demonstration of the Carrows' teaching skills and before Draco knew it, he had been drafted into assisting the Dark Lord with the "interrogation" of prisoners.

Every night he would take refuge in his bedroom, shaking and nauseous. Sometimes, as he hugged his pillow to himself in the dark, he thought of how things could have been if he had reached the tower a few minutes earlier that fateful night and had the time to accept Dumbledore's offer. But the thought was always quickly chased out by the surety that things couldn't have gone any other way and the knowledge of the depth of the debt he owed Snape.

Things, impossibly, got even worse when in addition to the ragged, tortured figure of Ollivander they had acquired a new prisoner. As if it wasn't bad enough having the old wandmaker locked away in their cellars, they now had a schoolgirl as well.

Draco might not have liked Luna Lovegood much at Hogwarts, but imprisoning the odd Ravenclaw in their damp basement was beyond the pale. He had hated bringing the prisoners their meals, he had hated meeting their gazes as he gave them their plates. Ollivander's eyes had been tired and resigned, but worse had been Lovegood's. Her wide luminescent eyes had only held acceptance and understanding; sometimes they even held compassion. It had made Draco feel weak and pathetic and sick to the stomach.

He had desperately looked to his parents for help. His father had been turned into a broken shell of himself, bleak-eyed and with no hope left. Looking at him had made Draco's heart ache and his eyes sting. His mother had transformed into an iron-willed statue, determined to see her family *survive*, no matter the cost. Draco had admired her, and had known that without her, he and his father would have floundered and been lost, but he had missed the softer, more approachable mother of his childhood, one that he could take refuge with and be soothed with soft words and gentle caresses. Even at home he had been unutterably alone.

Later, towards the end of the holidays, Snape had visited the manor. He had been summoned by the Dark Lord, but before leaving he had knocked softly on Draco's door.

"How are you?" he had asked Draco, and it had been too much for the boy. He had broken down into sobs and sniffles, telling his professor everything he wished he could have told his parents.

Draco hardly knew how it had happened, but he had ended up blubbering all over Snape's robes, as the severe and stiff professor awkwardly held him. Some time later, as he almost dozed off in the other's arms, he felt clumsy, shy hands stroking his hair. Draco buried his face deeper in Snape's narrow, thin chest and his heart expanded painfully with a vast surge of gratitude and affection for the man who had come to mean so much to him.

Draco felt his eyes stinging as he recalled one of his favourite and more poignant memories of Snape. A sharp pain lanced through him as he remembered that Snape was dead. With the defeat of the Dark Lord and the end of the war, he had got his parents and his life back, but he had lost his mentor. And he found himself once more in a

hostile and lonely Hogwarts.

From his comfortable vantage point under 'his' tree, he looked over his shoulder to see Longbottom in the distance talking to Sprout. Draco looked at the Gryffindor speculatively; he had been strangely kind and compassionate to him since his return to Hogwarts.

Part 2 of 2

Chapter 2 of 2

Draco can't help remembering the past, and Neville can't help giving second chances.

Author's notes: Many, many thanks to my lovely beta, raisinous fiendling, without whom I couldn't have managed. She is the reason this story is coherent at all and the reason it has proper tenses and enough commas; all remaining mistakes are all mine.

It had been pouring the whole day, great big sheets of near torrential rain. Neville looked up at the glass roof of the greenhouse and the torrents of water that flowed down its inclined sides. He was hardly surprised; they had been very lucky with the amount of sunny weather they had had until now. It might be August, but they were in Scotland after all. Neville was ridiculously grateful to Malfoy for having finished Greenhouse One.

He had told him as much that morning as they took refuge under the glass shelter of the greenhouse. Malfoy had smiled smugly.

"Aren't you glad I persuaded McGonagall to let me help you?" he had said haughtily.

Before, Neville might have been annoyed by Malfoy's attitude, but he had got used to it surprisingly quickly. It was just the way Malfoy was built. He never just spoke; he was haughty, sarcastic, sneering, or sometimes melodramatic, theatrical, histrionic or even on occasion whining, petulant, pouting. Neville had learned to be amused by his posturing, whereas before he might have been irritated or offended.

"Yes, very," Neville had answered deadpan. "What would I have ever done without you?"

Despite the gleaming, new structure that surrounded it, the inside of Greenhouse One was quite a mess, apart from the small corner Sprout was slowly working on. The ground was covered in earth and broken pots that crunched underfoot and plants that lay strewn about.

After sweeping up the floor and depositing everything in neat piles, Neville had told Malfoy to repair all the broken pots, while he would do the re-potting.

"Longbottom, isn't there *anything* else you're good at besides Herbology?" Malfoy had sneered, quite predictably.

Neville had pretended to ponder it before answering innocently, "I have been told that I'm quite good with a sword as well."

Malfoy had given a surprised bark of laughter, and his gaze had become reluctantly impressed, before he turned round to get started on the pots.

Neville had smirked inwardly. He was also rather good at Care of Magical Creatures.

Neville picked up one of Malfoy's pots to re-pot the last Smoking Azalea. The pot was perfectly formed and looked deceptively delicate. On one side, a simple decorative stamp stood out in relief. It was a minimal bouquet of tall grass, wheat and narcissi. It had made Neville smile when he noticed it; these little foibles of Malfoy's made him seem more human and approachable.

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"I'm all finished," Malfoy drawled, sounding satisfied, the suddenness of the pronouncement making Neville jump.

Neville looked over his shoulder and gave Malfoy a half-hearted glare, which he only shrugged off with a smirk.

Giving a final pat to the newly potted Azalea, Neville turned around. "You can help me with the Puffapods," he said. "I've put them on the worktable to your left."

They quickly settled into a companionable silence, working side by side. Malfoy easily proved that he wasn't lying when he said he was good at Herbology. He cleaned out, re-potted and trimmed the Puffapods neatly and efficiently.

After finishing the first, he put it aside and reached out for another, getting the front of his light beige robe caught on a splinter and ripping it. Malfoy looked down at himself, his mouth twisting into an irritated moue, and took his wand out. Neville watched with interest as he waved the long slender wand in a simple movement and wordlessly fixed the rip.

"So is that the one?" Neville asked.

Malfoy looked over at him, confused. "What one?"

"The wand Harry used to kill Voldemort. He used your wand, didn't he?"

Malfoy appeared a bit embarrassed as he glanced away. "Yeah, this is the wand. Potter gave it back to me after my trial."

"That was decent of him," Neville pointed out.

"Yes, it was," Malfoy agreed grudgingly. "He even let me win it back." Neville raised his eyebrows sceptically. "He didn't try very hard, all right?" Malfoy retorted defensively. "And it's not as if it's that surprising, my being worse than the *Saviour of the Wizarding World* at dueling," he muttered sourly.

Neville chuckled. "There's nothing wrong with not being as good as Harry at dueling," he said. "I don't see why you hate him so much. Harry's an all right bloke. A bit oblivious and a bit of a one track mind, but essentially a decent bloke."

Malfoy looked around furtively before answering in a low voice. "I don't really hate Potter; I never actually did. It's a bit hard hating someone who pulled you out of a raging fire."

Neville frowned, perplexed. "In the Room of Hidden Things," Malfoy clarified. Upon seeing Neville's continued lack of understanding, he gave a theatrical sigh. "I assume Potter never told you about it."

And so, haltingly, Malfoy told him the whole story. How he remained in Hogwarts with his friends to look for Harry, hardly knowing why he was doing it. How when they finally cornered him with his two friends in the Room of Hidden Things, Malfoy was once more confronted with the fact that Harry was their best chance of liberation from the Dark Lord. How everything went terribly, terribly wrong. And how Harry saved him from certain death, but didn't manage to save his friend.

After finishing his story, Malfoy fell silent. He bent his head, letting a curtain of impossibly blond hair hide his suspiciously bright and wet eyes.

Not quite certain he was doing the right thing, Neville rested a large calloused hand on Malfoy's thin shoulder and squeezed comfortingly. Malfoy leaned back into the touch, so Neville let his hand linger, and they stood for a few frozen moments like that, attached at one point of contact.

Eventually, Malfoy lifted his head and gently shrugged Neville's hand off. He looked sideways at Neville and gave him an impish grin. "I bet I can do more Puffapods than you," he challenged.

Neville felt an unexpected laugh bubble up. "You're on!" he exclaimed, feeling uncharacteristically competitive.

~o~

Draco often wished he could erase the undesired memories of the past years. He had even asked his mother, but she had refused, insisting that the painful memories were necessary to help them remember their mistakes and make them stronger, better wizards. He had considered going to his father, but lately his father had stopped making important decisions without first consulting his wife.

And thus, unbidden and unwanted, the unpleasant, painful memories still came. One of the memories he most shied away from was that of Easter.

Seeing Potter and his friends in the manor had been shocking. He had hardly known what to do. Improbable as it was, Potter was their best hope for freedom. So he had done what he seemed to be so good at: nothing. When Potter had escaped, for a brief moment he had been glad and hopeful. Hopeful that if Potter could concoct such a daring and unexpected escape from the manor, he might actually have a chance of defeating the Dark Lord.

But that brief moment of tentative rejoicing had been over all too soon. The Dark Lord returned. With the Dark Lord's return came pain and suffering that Draco recoiled from, whole days he tried his best to black out of his memory.

Thankfully the ordeal had eventually ended, and he had been allowed to return to Hogwarts. As soon as he had returned to the castle, Snape had called him to his office. And for once Draco had sat there, silent, head bowed. For once Draco didn't have anything to say, didn't want to say anything. All he had wanted was to forget and for it to be finally *over*.

After looking his fill, Snape had gotten up to loom over him. He had retrieved two vials of potion from his pocket.

"Drink," he had ordered quite simply.

And Draco had obeyed without hesitation, trusting Snape implicitly. The first potion was a mild sedative and painkiller and the other a general restorative. Snape had then silently reclaimed his vials and handed Draco a jar of ointment.

"Use it liberally once a day for as long as necessary," he had explained.

"Thank you, sir," Draco had managed to choke out, his voice hoarse and breaking. He had then hidden his face in his hands.

Snape had stood looming over him for long minutes as Draco tried to compose himself. At some point Snape had stretched out his hand as if intending to touch Draco or stroke his hair. But his hand had stalled. Draco had been able to feel it, just a hair's breadth away from his head. He had begun shaking, overcome with a tidal wave of irrational longing. He had wanted nothing more than for Snape to touch him, to hold him. He hardly knew what he wanted from Snape; all he knew was that he wanted *something*.

But Snape had moved away and had sat once more behind his desk. And after a while Draco had pulled himself together. He had thanked Snape once more and had quickly left to take refuge in his dorm, his emotions and desires a whirlwind of confusion.

By the time Draco had worked out what he had wanted from Snape, it was too late. Snape was dead. And now Draco was left with his new-found understanding and no one to share it with. Above him the plum tree shivered and murmured, keeping him company and holding his secrets. Draco patted the ground next to him, thinking of the stolen treasure he was sitting on. Would he ever find the fortitude to look at it properly? He wanted to share it with someone else, but Longbottom was the only candidate who came to mind. And no matter the unanticipated understanding and easy camaraderie that had sprung up between them, Draco wasn't ready to trust yet.

~o~

Neville sat on a stile by the main entrance to Hogwarts' grounds, waiting for Malfoy to be delivered into his care for the day. It was a beautiful August morning, damp but with the promise of restrained sunshine later in the day. Neville was feeling oddly content and optimistic. In only a few days, Hogwarts would be opening again for lessons. The rebuilding of the castle was getting along nicely, and even though his personal project, the greenhouses and gardens, wouldn't be completed before lessons started, with Malfoy's help they had got more done that Neville had even dreamed was possible at the beginning of the month.

With a sharp crack the now familiar Ministry official appeared with a pale-faced Malfoy in tow. Before Neville had time to ask what was wrong, he had the typical parchment thrust in front of him. He signed absentmindedly, his eyes on Malfoy's pinched face, and the official Apparated away with a muted "Good day."

"What's wrong?" Neville asked softly.

"My mother," Malfoy answered, and swallowed thickly. "Early this morning, she was at attacked. In Diagon Alley." Malfoy looked pained as he continued. "She's in St Mungo's."

"Why aren't you with her?" Neville asked, perplexed.

Malfoy's face twisted into a bitter grimace. "Standing orders," he said in a surprisingly accurate imitation of the Ministry official's murky Liverpudlian accent. "He is to deliver me from nine to seven every day into your care, unless he is told differently. And he wasn't," Malfoy explained sourly.

Neville made a split second decision.

"All right, then," he said. "Let's get going. Meet me in the hospital reception?"

Malfoy's resigned resentful expression morphed to one of pleased, but wary, astonishment.

"The orders are that you are to be in my care from nine till seven. I feel like visiting St Mungo's this morning. I can hardly leave you here unattended, can I?" Neville explained reasonably to his wide-eyed companion.

Malfoy gave Neville a lopsided grin, looking grateful and overwhelmed.

"Yes, you're right," he said, his voice taking on a strange new cadence Neville hadn't heard before. "You can't leave me here unsupervised; Merlin only knows what I could get up to. Much more prudent you take me along."

Without losing any more time, they both Apparated to St Mungo's reception and quickly and efficiently browbeat a mediwitch into leading them to Narcissa Malfoy.

They found her lying in a corner bed in an overcrowded ward, looking pale and wan. Her brow was wrinkled as if she was in pain, and she was staring at her hands dejectedly.

She looked up as soon as Malfoy called to her, and her face immediately lit up. Her son ran to her and clasped her hands in his.

"How *are* you?" he asked earnestly, and Neville started feeling out of place.

"Much better now that you are here, my dear," Narcissa answered, her face glowing and her eyes only for her son. She tenderly smoothed his hair off his face, a soft smile on her lips.

Neville felt jealousy, sharp like acid, churning in his gut. For as long as he could remember, he had longed for his own mother to look at him like that. He began to turn away and leave the Malfoys to their privacy.

"Draco, who is your friend? Where are your manners? Why don't you introduce us?" Narcissa's clear-cut voice stopped Neville's creeping retreat in its tracks. He turned around in time to see Malfoy giving them both a sheepish grin.

"Sorry, how rude of me," Malfoy excused himself. He then smiled charmingly and made the introductions with a flourish. "Mother, this is Neville Longbottom. Longbottom, this is my mother."

With a smile, Narcissa gracefully held out her hand to be kissed. Neville strode up to her bed and took her hand gently in his much larger once. Feeling very clumsy and young, he bent down as gallantly as he could and barely brushed her knuckles with his lips. Malfoy's mother truly was a beautiful and regal looking woman, but more importantly, she was *Malfoy's mother*.

"I'm so pleased to make your acquaintance, Mr Longbottom," Narcissa spoke as soon as he had released her hand. "Draco has told me about you." Her eyes softened with the mention of her son, and she cast him a fleeting glance. "We can't express how grateful we are to your kindness and compassion." Her eyes took on an earnest shine as she spoke. "Not many would gift Draco with a second chance, like you have done, without holding any grudges."

Neville felt his face heat up. "It's nothing. Nothing any one else wouldn't have done," he mumbled.

"On the contrary, few would have done as you. You are a young man of remarkable calibre." She smiled good-humouredly, and Neville could make out traces of her son's impish grin. "You are also a young man of astounding courage," she continued. "I remember you from the battle at Hogwarts. I was most impressed by your bravery."

Neville blushed a violent, fiery red. "Please don't mention it," he told her. He had been praised so much on his role during the battle, that he hardly knew how to respond any more.

Malfoy came and stood next to his mother on her other side and laid his hand on her shoulder.

"Mother," he said. "You're embarrassing him. You know how Gryffindors are, modest heroes every last one of them." She looked at him and they shared an amused smile, rich with unspoken words.

"This one certainly is," she answered Malfoy, amusement rich in her voice. Her gaze turned serious, and she stared at her son intensely. "Draco, whatever you do, don't let this one get away. He will be a worthy friend, certainly more than you merit, my darling." She waited for Malfoy to solemnly nod his acknowledgement and turned again to Neville.

"Mr Longbottom," she began. "I know it's probably more than we deserve, but if I could impose even more on your goodwill."

Neville nodded warily, wondering what she was getting to. He should never let himself forget that she was Lucius Malfoy's wife.

"By some stroke of good fortune, you seem to have taken to my Draco and given him consideration and assistance. All I ask is that you bear with him. He can be spoilt and difficult and at times stubborn and irrational. Merlin knows he is arrogant and prideful, and as his mother I can't but take full responsibility for that." Out of the corner of his eye, Neville could see Malfoy squirming and glaring exasperatedly at his mother.

Narcissa, however, continued unperturbed. "I wish I could say that his intentions are good, but they're not always the best. But he *isn't* bad. There is a lot of good in him, and he is intensely loyal to his own. So please don't retract this chance you've given him to redeem himself, and prove he can do good as well, if he puts his mind to it."

Confronted with the earnest pleading of a mother, Neville felt himself at a loss. He hadn't been planning on suddenly *abandoning* Malfoy. He had hardly realised that by accepting the blond's help, he was essentially taking him on. But the way Narcissa Malfoy put it, he had, unwittingly, taken upon himself a commitment to look out for her son. And while he did realise that there was more than a little Slytherin manipulation hidden in her heartfelt speech, he wasn't averse to doing as she asked. The last year hadn't changed the fact that he was essentially a loner, and the possibility of acquiring a new friend, whatever his past, was appealing.

"Don't worry, Mrs Malfoy," he answered eventually. "I won't let your son's less appealing qualities scare me away. We Gryffindors thrive on adversity, as you may know."

Narcissa laughed delightedly in response.

After that Neville excused himself to sit in the visitor's chair a few feet away while Malfoy and his mother shared whispered words and affectionate gestures. Neville looked away and tried his best to clear his mind of all the jealous and cheerless thoughts that tried to enter.

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"Thank you so much!" was the first thing Malfoy said as soon as they left the ward, after taking their leave from his mother. He tried to express his gratitude with long convoluted sentences that Neville hardly heard, as he was more interested in Malfoy's shining eyes and radiant face.

"You're welcome; *please* say nothing more about it," Neville finally cut him off. "I was thinking," he began, changing the subject. And he *had* been, for the whole time he had sat waiting.

"I was thinking that it felt strange to visit St Mungo's without seeing my parents. I haven't seen them in a long while, and I can't help but feel a bit guilty and sad."

Malfoy's expression changed immediately to one of solemnity and compassion. "Of course," he said. "You *should* visit your parents. I can go back and sit with my mother until you finish. I don't mind in the least."

"What I was *really* thinking," Neville clarified, looking off to the side and ruffling the hair at the back of his neck nervously, "was that I'd really prefer not to visit them alone. I would like some company. That is, if you wouldn't mind terribly much coming with me."

Neville felt ill at ease and shy, sharing something so personal as the state of his parents with someone that wasn't even a proper friend yet. But somehow, he felt that it was something he wanted and needed to do. In the few weeks he had known Malfoy, the other had shared a number of things with Neville. And today, he had met Malfoy's

mother and had been accepted by her. Neville's sense of fairness demanded that he in turn share something with the other man, and what was more personal and important than his parents?

"All right," Malfoy answered carefully. "I would be honoured to visit your parents with you." The look on the blond's face showed that the trust Neville was putting in him wasn't going unappreciated.

Neville turned and let the way to the Janus Thickey ward. He couldn't help the slight tremors of nervousness that wracked him, nor could he help the foolish sense of hope that sparked in his stomach. A step behind him Malfoy followed, faithfully and comfortably.

~o~

Draco exited the castle and started walking towards the greenhouses. He barely even thought about it, just made a beeline for his tree.

Above, the stars were shining bright in the cloudless sky, and inside the warm castle the Welcoming Feasting was still carrying on. Draco had sat at a half empty and subdued Slytherin table and heard the headmistress' welcoming speech and saw the new first years being sorted.

He had felt strange and out of place. The cheerful attempt at normalcy by all had rung a bit false. Longbottom had been sitting across the room at the Gryffindor table, between Potter and Finnigan, and it had been odd and disconcerting that this had annoyed Draco so much.

So he had left for the cool quiet of the outdoors and the friendly whispering of his prickly plum tree. As he sat in his usual spot and thought once more of what lay buried under the ground, he considered that maybe it was time he unearthed it at last. Maybe it had matured underground long enough; maybe he was now ready to be confronted with what he had stolen. It was easy to remember how he had stolen it in the first place.

The final battle of Hogwarts had been a whirlwind of desperation, action, bad decisions, terror and loss. Hexes had flown around him, thrown by braver and more competent fighters than he was, and he had been left at a loss as to what he was actually doing there.

For one brief minute he had thought that Potter was dead, the Dark Lord had won and they all were doomed. For one brief minute he had thought he was watching Longbottom commit suicide in front of him.

And then, and then, it had all happened so fast. The Dark Lord was dead, so was his monstrous snake, so was Draco's crazy aunt Bellatrix and so many, many others.

He had run around like a Crup without a master, looking for his parents. But once he had found them, once they had embraced and reassured each other that they were alive and well, he had remembered what he had heard the Dark Lord say before he had died. He had killed Snape. Severus Snape was dead, and Draco had felt the loss like a mortal wound to his soul.

He had muttered vague excuses to his parents and had escaped, running through damaged hallways, hardly knowing where he had been going or what he had wanted. At some point he had stumbled over a dead body lying on the floor. He had barely looked at the body to see if he had known it, but out of the corner of his eye, he had spied the deceased's wand lying on the floor. He had snatched it up and continued his mad course through the hallways, between the rubble and dead bodies.

He had ended up at the headmaster's office. He had known, subconsciously, that he had always been heading this way, towards the office he had started to identify with Snape and their talks, and the gentler, more humane side of the professor he had got to know the past year.

He had run up the staircase, his eyes stinging but tears refusing to fall, to find the door ajar. Someone had been there before him. Rushing in, he had found the office empty and abandoned. Even the portraits had left to visit the victors in the Great Hall.

He had looked around, desperate to find something, anything, to remind him of Snape. To prove that Snape had been a real, living, breathing wizard and his friend.

On the table had sat Dumbledore's old Pensieve, full to the brim with wispy, silvery memories. Draco had gone closer, curious. Who could have left memories lying about in the middle of a battle? He had dipped his head in to see more and had discovered that all the memories were Snape's. He had rushed through, too agitated to really see anything, and he had seen Snape as a boy, as an adolescent, a young man, as old as he had remembered him just yesterday.

Draco had yanked his head out, his mind reeling. Looking around the room wildly, he had spied a discarded glass bottle on the floor. He had scooped up the bottle and quickly emptied all the memories into it. Whoever had left these memories lying around obviously had no need for them. And Draco, Draco possibly was the last person left alive who cared about the old gloomy Potions master.

He had run out the office, with his precious treasure, desperate to find a safe hiding place for it before he was taken away to Azkaban, as was surely going to happen.

Only Draco hadn't ended up in Azkaban, as he had feared. The positive testimony of the Boy Who Lived Twice had prevented that happening. He had ended up back in Hogwarts. And as he sat under his tree, looking over the dark silent Scottish hills, he thought it was time to take a proper look at Severus Snape's memories and offer the man the respect and remembrance he deserved.

The only niggling thought was the fact he didn't want to do it alone. He wanted to share the man Snape had been and what he had meant to him with someone else. Someone he trusted to understand and offer sympathy.

~o~

Neville steps out of the castle, into the dark cool night. Above him the stars are shining, bright and distant, and behind him lays the rebuilt castle. Inside it's warm and cheery; the Welcoming Feast hasn't yet finished.

However, Malfoy isn't inside anymore. He's also outside in the dark night. He has been for some time, and Neville knows where to find him.

Neville lets his feet guide him on the well-worn path. He would know the way even with his eyes closed. The shimmery, shadowy, almost invisible shapes of the greenhouses come into view. Behind them is planted a single Pugnacious Plum Tree. The tree is old and very bad tempered. Not even Neville has managed to tame it. And yet the irascible tree has taken Malfoy under his foliage.

Malfoy spends too much time under that tree. He sits on the ground and stares into the distance. He seems to be thinking and remembering and dreaming. He pats the earth affectionately and looks contemplative. Neville has long wondered what the story that surely lies beneath is, and if he will ever be told.

Sure enough, as he rounds Greenhouse Three, the dark form of the tree comes into view, and underneath it the slim silhouette of a young man. Neville wonders if he should interrupt the silent and solitary scene, if he would be welcome. But his feet have brought him so far, and he knows he will interrupt.

"Hello, Malfoy," he says as he comes even closer. It's funny, yet fitting, how, even after all they have shared so far, they still call each other by their surnames.

Malfoy turns round, the stars shining in his eyes and the moon glimmering in his hair and pale face. The night seems to change everything into odd, magical versions of their mundane daytime selves. It feels like anything is possible this night.

Malfoy looks at him deeply, and for a moment Neville worries that he doesn't recognise him. "Maybe I was just waiting for you," Malfoy says cryptically.

Without waiting for an invitation, Neville sits next to him on the ground. The tree grumbles and complains above them and they both look over the silent, distant hills together.

"It feels like it's time," Malfoy says suddenly, his voice soft and wondering. "It, strangely enough, also feels like you are the right person." Malfoy turns his head to stare at

Neville, his eyes wide and clear. And Neville looks back, unblinking, as the grey eyes glitter and spark.

"I want to tell you a story," Malfoy says, his voice serious and deep. "I want to tell you a story about a boy and his teacher, about a monster and unpleasant, shameful deeds, about weakness and regret, compassion and forgiveness. I want to tell you about a stolen object and share a secret treasure with you."

Neville nods and stretches out to clasp Malfoy's cold hand in his own. "I'm listening," he says solemnly and knows that they are on the cusp of something. Something he hopes will be beautiful and long-lasting.

an ending / a beginning