

Before I Sleep

by Soul Bound

Six years after the war has ended, Harry finds himself in a pub every night, listening to a man play the piano, a man he'd thought was dead. HP/DM

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The Same Song

Chapter 1 of 4

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Disclaimer: I make no money from this work, and these are not my characters; I only take them out to play.

Thanks go to Jackie for the beta read.

The Same Song

It's the same song. It's always the same song. Harry's fingers grip his tumbler of Muggle whisky, and he wonders, not for the first or hundredth time, why the man always starts with the same song. It varies after the first from night to night, the order—how long he plays. Harry takes another swallow as the irony hits him—the irony that this is the only question he asks anymore: why the same song?

He's been coming here every night, almost without exception, for more than two years. He remembers that first night—remembers the long day he'd come from. A new flat in a new neighborhood, a new place to drink his already exhausted body to a point where sleep would come—this place.

He remembers sitting in this booth, just this way, with his back to the wall. No one spoke to him that night but the barman. He remembers staring across the room at the back of a man sitting at a piano. The man played for hours, and Harry didn't know—still doesn't know—if he stayed because of the music or because he was afraid he knew whom the blond hair belonged to.

That first night, as the pub emptied and the barman stacked the chairs on the table to make sweeping easier, Harry's heart pounded as the man finally closed the lid over the keys and stood. He shrank back into the shadows as the man turned and walked to the door with the smallest of nods to the barman.

Harry had thought that Draco Malfoy was dead.

That night, sleep never found him. A thousand memories assaulted him as he paced his bedroom floor—of a small, arrogant boy in a robe shop; of an outstretched hand that he refused to take; of that same little boy on a broom, holding a glowing sphere in his hand. He remembered everything—from that first arrogant glance to the last time he'd seen it.

It had been at the end of the war. Harry had finally killed Voldemort and had fallen to his knees, exhausted, body and soul. He'd looked across the grounds of Hogwarts and had seen Lucius Malfoy dragging his son's limp body into the forest. He hadn't found the energy to go after them. It hadn't mattered. Three weeks after that, Lucius Malfoy had been captured and sentenced. He'd said that his son was dead, and the body had never been found. People had stopped looking.

It was four years later that Harry found himself for the first time in this Muggle pub, wondering why he had chosen to become an Auror when he so truly hated being responsible for the lives of others. It was as he watched the barman walk away from his table that he turned his gaze to the back of a man playing the piano and caught a glimpse of that blond hair.

Though his memories and unanswered questions had kept him from sleep, he found himself again the next night in the back of that pub, unnoticed in the shadows—and the next night, and the next.

For the longest time, he asked himself why his childhood nemesis was there. Where he'd been. Where he was going. Every time he'd thought of showing himself and demanding the answers, the music had stopped him. After a while, he'd stopped asking himself why Malfoy came back every night and instead asked himself why *he*, Harry, came back—but there was no answer to that, either. So after months of finding himself in the same place every night, he'd stopped asking questions altogether except for the little things, like the question he was asking now.

Why does Malfoy always begin with the same song?

"Another?" the barman asks as he ambles by and catches sight of Harry's empty glass.

Harry shakes his head. The man doesn't charge him anymore, but it isn't in Harry to take advantage of that fact, and he's had enough anyway. He watches the muscles under Malfoy's grey shirt flex as the music rings through the room. It's just past eleven o'clock now, and like all weeknights, the pub is slowly emptying, the other regulars going home. Harry always leaves last; he doesn't know why. Tonight is no different.

His day has been long; most of his days are. He wants to resign. He hates the things he has to do in the name of justice, but he feels it's his responsibility to do them—just like it always has been. Harry Potter: savior and executioner of the Wizarding world.

His thoughts are interrupted as Malfoy's playing comes to an end for the night.

"Thank you, John," the blond says to the barman. "Until tomorrow." He always says that—or something like it. His gaze briefly passes over Harry's corner as he pulls his jacket on before he leaves, and Harry wonders what he sees.

He's never made an attempt to hide himself; the fact that he stays in the shadows is a reflection of his desire to be alone, not of any to hide from Malfoy. All in all, he's not even sure that the man would recognize him even if he could see him. Harry's hair is longer now, and his glasses are gone. The once livid scar on his forehead, the one that made him famous, has faded to be replaced by other, newer marks of his life—small abrasions, lines that shouldn't appear on the face of any man of twenty-five.

Malfoy looks different, too. His face shares the same lines as Harry's, and his hair is also longer. Malfoy is still taller than Harry—he always was—but now it's not by much. Still, as different as the blond looks, Harry couldn't mistake him or miss him. That aristocratic jaw, those sharp eyes—grey, liquid—and the hair... Harry would know him anywhere after any number of years.

Gone is the cruel sneer, but the ice, the stubborn power, remains. Harry knows that will never change.

The door closes, and Harry waits only minutes more before he leaves. His bed is the same as always tonight, cold and empty, but familiar.

Somewhere To Go

Chapter 2 of 4

Six years after the war has ended, Harry finds himself in a pub every night, listening to a man play the piano, a man he'd thought was dead. HP/DM

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Some nights, Potter is there before he arrives; others, he never sees him until he turns to leave. But he knows he's there. He's always there. Sometimes Draco plays for him. That is, of course, impossible, as Draco isn't sure what Potter wants to hear. It's more that he plays knowing Potter is listening, and he wonders what Potter thinks.

Tonight, he arrives before Potter. Usually, he goes straight to the piano, but he wants a drink this time. He takes a seat at an empty bar stool—most of them are empty—and drums his fingers for a moment on the polished wood. This place is quiet for a pub; he likes that about it.

After a few moments, a small glass of gin is placed in front of him, and he nods his thanks. His thoughts are of nothing and everything as he slowly sips, forgetting to maintain his perfect posture.

"They come for you, you know," the barman—John is his name—says as he cleans the inside of a glass and moves on to the next.

A Muggle song he's heard comes to mind. "Sing us a song—you're the fucking Piano Man..."

John chuckles and shakes his head. "It's true."

"Hardly." Draco glances up. "They come for themselves."

"Why do you come?" the man asks.

Draco thinks about that. "I come... because I have nowhere else to go." It used to be true. When he'd first started coming here, he'd been alone. A wizard stranded in a Muggle world. The only way to stay under the gaze of the Ministry had been to live without magic. Draco had wanted to live, so he'd exchanged his considerable fortune for Muggle money and hadn't allowed himself to look back since.

Protection... It was the last thing, the one thing, that his father had been able to give him. It couldn't make up for leading him into what was certain death, teaching him bitterness, but his father had known his life was over and had given it to Draco. He hadn't seen the man since.

The barman speaks again. "Every night for five years is a long time to come simply because you have nowhere else to go. Everyone has somewhere to go."

Five years. Gods, it has been five years...

He remembers the first time he came through the door, the first glance of this room. He remembers the first time his eyes fell on the aged piano, the first time he tentatively sat down to play.

He has a flat a few blocks away, but he feels more at home in this place than there. Draco knows it is pathetic—that he has found a home in a Muggle pub—but he stopped caring long ago. For a few hours each night, nothing else matters. Asking for anything more doesn't occur to him anymore.

"Perhaps," he finally says. "Are you saying there's somewhere else I should be?"

John chuckles. "No, son. I know very well that if you stopped coming, I'd lose half my nightly business."

Draco scoffs mildly and takes another sip.

"It's true," the man says. "They watch you. They listen."

It might be true. Draco doesn't know. He plays; it's never been for anyone else. That they are listening is unimportant. Almost. He doesn't know why it's important that Potter listens, but it is.

He glances almost unconsciously towards the dimly lit back section of the pub. It's empty still. Potter hasn't come yet. He goes back to his drink.

"Ah," the barman says, "yes, he watches."

Draco's eyes flash with something, but his head is tilted down, and no one notices.

"He's like you."

Draco doesn't pretend ignorance. "How so?"

"I think he has nowhere to go."

Draco snorts. "He's Potter; of course he has somewhere to go." Draco doesn't know why Potter came the first time, and he doesn't know why he comes back.

Potter doesn't have to live without magic.

Potter has friends.

Potter has family.

Potter has a home.

"You know him?" the barman asks, his tone surprised.

Draco is silent. It is because he's in a place like this, holding a half-empty glass of gin, talking to a man whom in five years has never asked his name, that he feels separate enough from himself to truly think about that question.

"No," he finally says. "I don't know him."

"But you know his name."

"Everyone knows his name."

If the barman wonders what he means, he doesn't ask. Instead, he wipes another glass and says, "He knows you."

Draco glances up sharply. "What do you mean?"

The barman shakes his head. "Can't say. He watches you like he knows you."

It's Draco's turn to shake his head. "He doesn't know me. He never did." Draco never knew himself.

He used to wonder if Potter would say something, confront him. Every night of those first weeks, months, he had thought about not coming back, afraid that Potter would turn him in, but the man never did. He never said anything. Draco has known for two years now that if Potter wanted the Wizarding world to know where Draco Malfoy was, he could have informed them. He knows now that if Potter was going to, he would have already.

Draco throws back the last of his gin in one swallow and stands. His fingers want to play.

Three hours later, as he heads for the door, he sees Potter's shadow in the far corner, and he knows it will be the same tomorrow.

Different Worlds

Chapter 3 of 4

Six years after the war has ended, Harry finds himself in a pub every night, listening to a man play the piano, a man he'd thought was dead. HP/DM

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It's one of those nights where Potter is there before him. He always sits in the same place, but tonight, a family sits in his corner, so he's sitting at the bar.

His back is to Draco, but he's unmistakable. For some reason, as Draco approaches the piano, his heart begins to beat faster. In two years, Potter has never sat so close to where Draco plays. It's only seven or eight meters between the bar and Potter's corner, but it's all the difference in the world now.

Until now, Potter has stayed in his own world, maintained a distance. Now he is only an arm's length away. Draco does his best to calm himself as he pulls back the bench and sits down. At the first note, he senses that Potter is aware. He knows he's listening. He can see it out of the corner of his eye.

What he couldn't do for himself, the piano does for him; soon, he is lost in the music, and while Potter isn't forgotten, he fades into the background.

He finishes playing and looks around the pub. It's all but empty, as always. Only Potter remains, sitting at the bar, his back still to Draco. Draco is frozen with indecision.

He hears himself saying, "Thank you, John," and the man nods to him, then draws Draco's gaze to Potter sitting at the bar. Draco's heart slams against his ribs. This is a step he won't be able to take back once he's taken it. He knows he shouldn't. He doesn't know why he would, but he finds himself taking a seat next to Potter.

He doesn't look at anything but the bar as John says, "Gin again?"

"As always."

He hears John ask the man next to him the same question, and he sees him nod.

He's taken the first step, and this second one makes him feel like he's racing towards a precipice, each moment accelerating him towards a place he won't be able to come back from. He takes it anyway, though he doesn't know why. This seems to be a theme for him.... "Hello, Potter."

"Malfoy."

There is a long silence. Draco doesn't have an idea of how or what he can say to fill it. It goes on, and soon Draco's glass is empty. He glances to the side and sees that Potter's is, too. It feels like it would be wrong to say something, even as heavy as the silence is, so he says nothing, and neither does Potter.

He knows it's late, and John needs to close. He stands, and because he doesn't know what else to do, he leaves without a word. Potter will be there tomorrow.

* * *

Hello, Potter.

The words ring in his mind, keeping him from sleep. He's watched him every night for two years, so much that Malfoy has become something of a fixture to him, an idea, untouchable. Two words, only two words, but they change something for Harry.

Now that they've spoken, all bets are off, he feels.

Tomorrow, he'll take tomorrow as it comes.

Hello, Potter.

Hello, Potter....

* * *

Harry listens to the music from his shadowed corner, wondering what will happen when it's over. He watches for the how-many-hundredth time as Malfoy stands and stretches. But when he should reach for his coat like he always does, he turns around and walks across the pub. Harry's pulse races as Malfoy slides himself onto the cheap fabric of the bench opposite him.

"Hello, Malfoy," he says quietly.

"Potter."

The barman, John, brings them each a drink. Harry doesn't know what to say, if there even is anything to say. He can admit to himself in the darkness of his bedroom that he watches Malfoy, that he keeps coming to this place because of Malfoy, but with the blond sitting in front of him, real and with a voice, Harry finds himself out of his depth.

He says the only thing he can think of. "Where did you learn to play?"

"My mother."

He still can't force himself to look Malfoy in the eyes, though he can't explain why. "You're good."

He can feel Malfoy watching him, and he becomes aware of his own breathing—how it sounds as the air rushes out of him, how many times he inhales in a minute—he is aware of every part of his body.

"Potter," Malfoy says, "why do you come here?"

Harry's eyes lock with Malfoy's before he can stop them.

"What?" he breathes, his heart stopping.

"Why?" Malfoy repeats, his gaze boring into Harry's.

Malfoy shouldn't have asked. It's a question that's like Malfoy himself—untouchable. Malfoy should not have crossed over this line, but now that he has, Harry finds himself at a loss. "I don't know," he answers, not sure that it's a lie. "Habit, maybe."

"Why?"

Harry isn't sure how to answer him. He isn't sure he wants to. He isn't sure he can. "There's nowhere else," he finally says.

"You have nowhere else to go?" he asks.

"I suppose I don't. Why do you come here?"

"The gin is good."

Harry smiles. "You rarely drink."

"You noticed."

Harry looks down. "You're hard to miss."

He can feel Malfoy smirking. "You've never said a word to me."

"I—I wasn't sure you recognized me."

"You're hard to miss."

Harry feels his face flush a bit. "You play well."

"You said that."

Right.

Harry is at a loss again. He looks up once more and finds Malfoy staring at him. He leans forward a bit, looking for the boy he knew. He is there, barely—but, yes... he's there.

"You've changed," Harry says. "You look different."

Malfoy smirks, and this time he sees it. "Different from when we were children?"

"Yes." Children. They'd been children then. It was so long ago. Harry asks again. "Why do you come here?"

The smirk fades from the other man's pale face. Malfoy doesn't answer, but Harry thinks that maybe there's nowhere else for him, too. Maybe he comes here because everywhere reminds him of mistakes, regrets, things he can't go back to, even if he wants to. Maybe he spends every night in this pub because there is no such thing as normal, and he knows it, so he takes what he can get.

"John lets me play as long and as loudly as I want," Malfoy finally answers as if it explains everything, but Harry knows the truth.

He nods. He understands.

Harry can't think of anything else to say. He doesn't feel he needs to, and he thinks that Malfoy probably feels the same way.

Harry sleeps better this night.

Fill the Silence

Chapter 4 of 4

Six years after the war has ended, Harry finds himself in a pub every night, listening to a man play the piano, a man he'd thought was dead. HP/DM

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Many thanks go to my wonderful beta, southern_witch_69.

This time, Draco knows that Potter is listening, and this time, he knows he's playing for him. He doesn't deny it.

When his fingers are tired, he stands. He turns and finds Potter in his corner, and he says nothing as he joins him. He still doesn't know why he's doing it, but he knows he can't walk away.

He sits down, and Potter speaks softly. "That's one of my favorites."

"Which one?"

"The last."

"Why?"

Potter shrugs.

John brings their drinks, and Draco thinks that life could never be considered ordinary. Here is a man who spends every night giving the same drinks to two men who spend every night drinking them. He never asks questions, not really. It occurs to Draco that perhaps ordinary means that every man is equally unordinary.

The silence is no more or less heavy than any other silence, but it is Draco's natural instinct to try to fill it, yet he doesn't know how.

Potter does it for him.

"We thought you were dead."

The words catch Draco off guard, but he doesn't have to ask who Potter means by 'we.' He means everyone. "That was the idea."

"Why did you leave?"

Draco can tell from the way Potter says it that it's a question he's wanted to ask for a long time. He thinks the answer is obvious, but then, Potter always was a bit on the thick side. He answers anyway. "I wanted to live."

"You had to fake your own death to live?"

That is one way of putting it, Draco thinks. "They would have crucified me, Potter. *You* would have crucified me."

Dark hair sways a bit as the other man's head snaps up to stare at him. He can feel Potter's confusion, and he wonders at it.

"For what?" Potter asks.

Draco's eyes narrow. He's always hated Potter's games. "For what?" he says. "What do you think?"

The intensity in those green eyes makes him uneasy. "For what happened sixth year?"

"Right in one."

"But...then...you didn't know?"

Surprise lights those green eyes, and something jolts through Draco, but he ignores it and asks, "What didn't I know?"

"That... your name was cleared."

Draco feels blood rushing through his head. The color in the room fades a little. He grips the edge of the table. Finally, he finds his voice. He speaks slowly, almost in a whisper, as he stares hard into Potter's eyes. "How could my name be cleared if I was dead... and why?"

Potter clears his throat and speaks carefully. "After everything was over, Hermione found a Pensieve with some of Dumbledore's memories. She talked to Snape, and he..."

"Severus is alive?" Draco's heart is pounding. When he'd left his world, Severus Snape had been in St. Mungo's with little hope of survival, branded a traitor to the Ministry, according to Lucius.

Potter nods. "He told Hermione about the Vow he and your mother made...under Veritaserum...and Dumbledore's evidence was enough to clear both of you."

Draco gapes at him, then simply laughs. "Potter, I was hardly innocent. I know what I did."

"And I know why you did it," Potter says quietly, still pinning him under his gaze. "You were protecting your family. He didn't give you a choice."

Draco knows who He was. He grips his left forearm without thinking. He thinks about it, and it's true; he really hadn't had a choice. He couldn't have simply let his family be killed. He'd had to at least try.

In the years since, Draco has thought endlessly about the things he could have done differently so that no one got hurt. He knows he could have gone to Dumbledore earlier, and he sometimes wonders what would have happened differently if he had. But that is neither here nor there now. He'd plotted and planned for a year, almost killed two people, and in the end, Draco knows that Dumbledore's death would have been impossible without his actions. He was guilty; the reasons were irrelevant. "You must be joking. Nobody in their right mind would pardon the man who orchestrated the death of the great Albus Dumbledore." Really.

Potter shakes his head. "Dumbledore was already dying. He knew it, and he knew about the Vow...and that you were trying to kill him. He made it clear in the memories he left that he didn't hold you responsible."

"What do you mean, 'he was already dying,' Potter?"

"I mean exactly that. Do you remember that his hand was blackened for the entire year?"

Draco nods.

"I still don't know exactly how, but his hand was only a symptom of a curse that was slowly weakening him. And there's more... I...the night he di..."

Draco notices that Potter's eyes have fallen. Whatever he was going to say, he seems to have decided against it.

"He was already dying," Potter says firmly. "What you did... He would have died that night anyway...or very soon after."

The blood drains from Draco's face as he realizes the truth. "Two years," he chokes. "You've been coming here every night for two years, and you never thought to tell me?"

"I thought you knew. When I saw you here, I realized you hadn't died, but I figured you just didn't want to be found. I wondered... but... Gods, Malfoy, how could you not have known?"

"Who would have told me?" he asks, still incredulous.

"You don't take the *Prophet*?"

"Of course not," Draco snaps. "How stupid do you think I am?"

Potter glares. "Fairly fucking stupid if you just left everything behind and never thought to look back. Six years, Malfoy. It's been six years. You're telling me you've severed all ties with *everything*?"

"Of course I have! I'm dead, remember? I could hardly buy a subscription to the *Prophet* without calling attention to myself. And who would I have contacted for news?"

Potter appears to be taking this in. If he's thinking of anyone, Draco doesn't know it. Potter's thoughts appear to quiet, and he speaks. "And now?"

"What *about* now?"

"I mean, now that you know, what will you do?"

"I... I can't go back."

"Of course you can!"

"To whom, Potter? To my father? If anyone got a life sentence, it was him."

Potter nods. "To Snape."

That gives Draco pause. He'd missed his godfather.

"How is he?" Draco asks. He realizes as he says it that it's the first time he's let himself wonder aloud about the people he left behind.

"He never showed it, but I think he took it pretty hard when your body was never found."

Draco closes his eyes. During those years of the war, Severus had been more of a father to him than his own. He'd thought he'd figured out the man's true by the end of the war, but he'd never said anything about it. He'd known better.

He's glad to know that he was right, that at least Snape has his life back.

"How is he?" Draco finds himself asking again, then realizes he's asking the wrong person. Potter hates Snape. "Not that you'd kn..."

"He's fine. He's married actually, quite happily."

Draco's mouth drops open. He finds it hard to believe that Severus could let anyone close enough to marry him and even harder to believe that Potter knows Severus well enough to comment on state of his happiness. "Are you sure?" he asks, skepticism finding its way into his tone.

"Pretty sure, yeah."

"To whom?"

Potter smiles. "Hermione."

Draco sputters inelegantly. "*Granger?*"

"Granger-Snape now."

"*How?*" Draco isn't entirely sure Potter's not having him on.

Potter shrugs. "She worked with him to clear your names, and I guess they came to an understanding."

Potter makes it sound so simple, and it drives in even harder the knowledge that Draco has missed so very much. He closes his eyes tight, trying to fight the hurt he feels at being left out of his own world for so long, even though he knows his exile has been self-imposed. There's so much he's lost, so much he needs to understand. He can't help himself. He is Draco Malfoy, and this is Harry Potter, but he has questions, and Potter has answers. Who they are doesn't matter in this moment.

"What else?" he asks, and he hopes that Potter understands that he means *everything*.

"There's not much else."

"For *you* maybe. But you were there. Tell me."

"What do you want to know?"

"Well," Draco says, "considering I know *nothing*, anything you could tell me would be more than what I have."

Potter doesn't seem to be offended by his flippant tone. He nods, taking another sip of his drink. "I guess there is a lot. I don't know where to st..."

"My mother."

"Oh."

"Is she alive?"

"She's... yes, she is."

Draco closes his eyes and nods, relieved. He is afraid to ask, but..."Where is she?"

"At Malfoy Manor, of course. She never had the Mark, so she was never taken in."

"No," Draco says softly, "she didn't." For some reason, all this time, he's feared the worst. To know that she is alive and well, or as well as she can be, eases a burden in him. "What else?" he asks.

"Ask for names, Malfoy. I wouldn't know where to start."

"My friends...Crabbe, Goyle, Zabini, Pansy..."

Potter hesitates, and Draco's fears are confirmed. "Just tell me, Potter. I've gone six years assuming they were all dead anyway."

"They're not all dead, just Goyle. I haven't seen or heard from Crabbe or Zabini in a while, but I know they're fine. Just... living. Pansy... Pansy is..." Draco can read Potter easily. Something has happened to Pansy, and Potter doesn't want to tell him. He doesn't understand why that would be; he's already told him he'd assumed the worst. As long as she's alive...

"She's married."

Draco lets out the breath he's been holding. "Well, go on then. To whom?"

"Erm, Ron."

"Weasley," Draco says blankly.

"That's the one."

"Weasley," Draco says again. Perhaps Potter had a point, not wanting to tell him... "Right."

"I know that must be hard to hear..." Potter begins, pity in his tone.

Draco scoffs. "Come off it, Potter. I don't care that Pansy's married; I'm just surprised at her choice of..."

"Oh," Potter says, clearly caught off guard. Draco rolls his eyes. Potter goes on. "I just assumed..."

"That I was madly in love with Parkinson and that it would break my heart to hear she'd chosen another?"

"Er..."

"Hardly, Potter."

"Right, then," Potter says, and he looks uncomfortable.

If Draco is honest with himself, he does feel a certain amount of bitterness, but it has less to do with his friends marrying and more to do with the fact that everything seems to have been tied up in a neat little package. And Potter was there to see it all. Not Draco. Potter.

Silence reigns for a while as they work on their drinks. So much has happened, so much time has passed, that it feels surreal to be sitting here with Potter, having a normal discussion. Soon Draco's had enough alcohol that the surreal feeling becomes too much, and he knows it's time to leave before any more life-altering revelations come to light. Draco snorts as he gets to his feet, thinking that for not having a word to say in two years, Potter is certainly good at making up for lost time.

He pays for both of their drinks and says, "See you tomorrow, Potter."