Summary

When Hermione leaves with Ron, Harry gets captured by Death Eaters. But just as he thinks all is lost, help comes from the most unexpected person.

Notes

This story goes AU from the point where Ron leaves Harry and Hermione during their search for Horcruxes.

See the end of the work for more notes.
Harry stared at the dark, damp wall in front of him. He had no idea how long he'd been staring at it already. How long he'd been here. It was always dark down here, wherever here actually was.

He remembered catching glimpses of a huge building when they'd arrived. Remembered being dragged through vast halls, barely lit by ancient looking chandeliers, past heavy iron gates and down rough stone steps, until they had finally thrown him into this cell. There was nothing in it - not even a cot. He had to sleep on the cold, hard floor. Death Eaters obviously didn't want their prisoners to be comfortable. What a surprise.

He had expected them to question or maybe even torture him, but so far they hadn't even looked at him. He'd only seen Wormtail once, when he'd brought Harry a pitcher of water and some stale bread. Aside from that his only company were the oppressing shadows. It was quiet down here. The only sound he heard was that of water dripping onto stone, somewhere to his right.

Left alone with his thoughts he could do nothing but wait. Surely they had alerted Voldemort to his capture. Soon he would be here and then … Harry would be dead. Everything would be lost. And it was his fault. Because he had been stupid. So incredibly stupid. He should have listened to Hermione.

Then again, Hermione shouldn't have deserted him. Shouldn't have gone with Ron. They had both promised to help him and then they had just left.

Deep down he knew that he wasn't being fair. They had helped him so much. They had risked their lives and put up with his dark mood for a long time. With the futility of their quest. He couldn't blame his two best friends for giving in to despair, when he himself had given up as well.

They had fought and he'd said horrible things. It was his fault that they had left. Just like it was his fault that the Death Eaters had caught him. Hermione had warned him that they would expect him to go to Godric's Hollow. He hadn't listened. Feeling abandoned by his friends, he had given in to the desire to see the place where it had all began. The home where he would have grown up, if it hadn't been for Voldemort.

The small village had been so quiet. Peaceful even. Covered in snow, it had looked like something out of a picture book. Harry remembered staring at the remains of the house where he had lived with his parents, surprised that no-one had tried to repair it or at least break it down. He remembered looking at the statue of them, with him as a baby. It had been so surreal, seeing himself with them. And he remembered standing at their grave, feeling more alone than ever before.

That's where they had found him. The Death Eaters. They had appeared seemingly out of nowhere, taking him by surprise. He'd been tired and depressed and too slow to defend himself properly. He had still managed to take one of them out, but then the other four had overpowered him. They had immobilized him and taken away his wand. And then they had brought him here, crowing with victory, taunting him about his fate.

He had failed. Voldemort would win and it was only his fault. Because he'd been stupid. So incredibly stupid. He'd given in to the urge to see where he'd come from, like a lost little boy. And by doing so he'd run right into Voldemort's trap.

He wondered if anyone even knew that he'd been captured. Probably not. Aside from Ron and Hermione no-one had known about his hunt for Horcruxes. And they had left him. Harry regretted
the mean things he'd said to both of them. He was sure that he would never see them again. The last time he'd spoken to his best friends had been in a fit of anger. That knowledge hurt more than anything.

The sound of the heavy iron door opening startled him out of his depressing thoughts. He wondered if it was Wormtail again, bringing him more water. The pitcher had been empty for a while now. The bread lay untouched. At first he hadn't wanted to drink the water either, but his thirst had quickly gotten the better of him. And they could hardly poison him, he'd reasoned. Voldemort wanted him alive.

Footsteps drew nearer and finally stopped in front of his cell. Harry looked up at the bulky, dark-haired man. Not Wormtail this time, but another Death Eater. Rookwood, if he remembered correctly. Not that it really mattered. One was just as worse as the other.

Unfortunately he didn't seem to be here to bring Harry more water. His hands were empty safe for his wand. So it was time for the questioning then. Or the torture. Harry found that he didn't much care either way. The thought of being tortured didn't even scare him right now. He only felt numb.

After simply staring at him for a few minutes, Rookwood finally opened the door and stepped into the cell, towering over Harry, who dropped his gaze to the ground. He flinched when the taller man roughly grabbed his hair and yanked his head up, forcing Harry to look him in the eye.

"Ahh, if they could see their precious Chosen One now. Defeated and broken. Abandoned by his friends. Pathetic." he taunted.

Harry merely blinked up at him, too tired to offer a comeback. He was so tired of fighting. Of running. He had no strength left.

"What, no objections? No witty comebacks? You're not so cocky now, huh?"

Rookwood pushed him roughly back down and Harry made no move to get up again. He simply lay there, his face pressed against the cool stone, hoping it would all be over soon. He didn't even react when the tall man roughly grabbed his hair and yanked his head up, forcing Harry to look him in the eye.

"What a pity that the Dark Lord wants you alive. But then again, he never said we're not allowed to have some fun with you." Rookwood mused. "It really would be a shame to waste an opportunity like this."

Harry was grabbed roughly and turned over onto his back. He closed his eyes, waiting for the inevitable pain of a Crucio. And he didn't have to wait long. Despite knowing what was coming, the force of the curse knocked the breath from his lungs and his body convulsed.

Rookwood laughed and eased up for a moment. "Having enough already? We're only getting started. I can't wait to try some other things on you." he taunted. Without warning he aimed another curse at Harry and suddenly the boy's skin felt like it was on fire. He whimpered in pain and tried to crawl away, but it was no use. The Death Eater only laughed and hit him with another curse that made his muscles seize up. Neither of them noticed when another person arrived on the scene.

"Stupefy!"

The spell took Rookwood completely by surprise. He was slammed into the wall and crumbled to the floor motionless. Harry was panting and shaking from the curses used on him, feeling unable to move. He could only lie there and stare up at the slender figure in Muggle jeans and a black hoodie, who came running towards him. His mysterious saviour dropped down in front of him, pushing back
the hood, revealing pale blond hair.

"Malfoy?"
"Are you okay? Can you get up?" the blond inquired.
Harry nodded dumbly and allowed the other boy to help him to his feet, ignoring his protesting muscles.
"Come on. We need to get out of here." Malfoy urged.

He pulled Harry out of the cell and dragged him along a dark, winding corridor, passing even more empty cells. In the distance he could hear faint yells and running footsteps. Malfoy cursed and broke into a run, still dragging a staggering Harry with him.

Rounding a corner they saw an open door in front of them, but when they tried to get through, they suddenly found their way blocked by Wormtail.
“Stop. Stop right there!” the balding man cried, brandishing his wand.

“Expelliarmus!” Draco countered and Wormtail's wand flew from his hand. He looked scared, but still didn't budge.
“Get out of our way. And don't make a sound.” the blond ordered.

Wormtail seemed to waver for a moment. But then he suddenly lunged himself at the two boys. Caught by surprise, all three went down. Draco's wand clattered to the floor and Pettigrew tried to grab it. Harry wrenched his hand away at the last second. Wormtail tried to scream, but Harry slapped a hand to his mouth, muffling the sound.

Draco aimed a kick at the small man's ribs and then scrabbled for his wand. Wormtail continued to struggle. His silver hand closed around Harry's throat, choking him. Seeing this, Draco abandoned his wand and tried to pry the hand off Harry, but it wouldn't budge.

“You owe me, Wormtail. I saved your life!” Harry wheezed.

The silver fingers slackened and Harry wrenched himself free, completely surprised. Wormtail, it seemed, was just as surprised as he. His rat-like eyes widened in shock and fear. And then, as if he had no control over it, his silver hand closed around his own throat.

Harry watched in horror as the little man started choking himself. He grabbed the silver hand and tried to pry it away from Pettigrew's throat, but again it was no use. Draco had finally picked up his wand again and pointed it at the hand: “Relashio!”

The spell didn't work either. Wormtail struggled against his magical hand, but he grew weaker by the second. Then his eyes rolled upwards, he gave one last, feeble twitch and went still. Both boys stared at him for a moment. But already the shouts were growing louder. The footsteps drawing nearer. Draco grabbed Harry's hand again and pulled him up.

“There's nothing we can do for him. We need to get out of here.”
Harry only nodded and allowed the blond to drag him through the door.

They sprinted up a flight of stairs, followed by another corridor and even more stairs, before finally emerging into a dimly lit hall. Harry's breath was coming in short, painful gasps. He was hurting all over. Both of them skidded to a halt when a house elf appeared in front of them with a loud crack.

"Mipsy got the things master Draco wanted. But mistress Bellatrix has seen Mipsy take them." she wailed.
"Then you need to get us out now. Take us where I told you to." Draco ordered.
Harry could only watch the exchange silently, still too shocked by all these unexpected events and Wormtail's gruesome death to really comprehend what was happening. Thundering footsteps were drawing nearer and then a group of Death Eaters appeared at the other end of the hall, lead by an all-too-familiar, dark-haired woman.

“What do you think you're doing, Draco?!” Bellatrix screeched.
“T'm making a choice. One I should have made ages ago.” the blond shouted back.

Bellatrix sneered at him, advancing with quick strides. “You pathetic little fool. I always knew you'd be too weak.” She raised her wand and pointed it straight at her nephew with a manic glint in her eyes. “Avada...”

“Now, Mipsy!” Draco yelled.
And before Harry had a chance to react, the house elf had grabbed one of his hands and was apparating them away.
They landed in a small park on a rocky cliff-side. The setting sun was casting eerie shadows across the path and the sound of the waves crashing against the cliffs felt deafening after the long silence down in the dark cells. Mipsy was handing a rucksack and some other things to Draco. Harry only now noticed that the blond already had a rucksack slung over one shoulder.

"Mipsy needs to go back." the elf squeaked.
"No! You're not going back. They'll kill you." Draco objected.
"Mistress is calling for Mipsy." the tiny creature explained, looking sick with the strain of refusing the call.

"You can't go!" Draco pulled something out of his rucksack and pushed it into her shaking hands.
"Here. I'm giving you clothes. You're free."

She looked at the pair of gloves in wonder. "Mipsy is free?"
"Yes, you're free. Just don't ever go back there. It's not safe for you." the blond implored.
"But… where will Mipsy go?" the elf asked in a frightened voice.

Draco didn't seem to have an answer and Harry found himself speaking up without really meaning to: "Hogwarts."
They both turned to look at him.
"You could work in the kitchens, I guess. Dobby works there."

"Dobby is at Hogwarts?" Mipsy asked, perking up.
"Yes, he is."
"Then Mipsy will go to Hogwarts." she decided. "But if master Draco ever need help, he be calling Mipsy."
"I will. Thank you. For everything."

She gave them a watery smile and disapparated with a crack. Harry stared at Draco like he was seeing him for the first time, completely confused by his actions. He was even more startled when Draco passed the rucksack Mipsy had given him over and he recognized it as his own.

"I told Mipsy to get your stuff. It should all be there. And here's your wand."
Harry's fingers trembled as they closed around the familiar holly wand. He'd felt naked and helpless without it.
"Thank you."

Draco inclined his head and looked around nervously. The shadows were lengthening and it was rapidly getting darker.
"We need to get out of here. Find a safe place for the night." he urged.  
"I don't know any safe places." Harry had to admit.  
"I... I think I know a place, but... You'd have to trust me."

The dark-haired boy hesitated. Could he really trust Malfoy? The boy who had tortured and taunted him for six years? Who'd done everything he could to get Harry into trouble? But Malfoy had also saved him tonight. He had risked his own life by saving him. By standing up to Bellatrix and the others. And Harry remembered the scene on top of the Astronomy tower. When Draco had had the chance to kill Dumbledore. Instead of using it, he had lowered his wand.

Taking a deep breath, he held out his arm.  
"Side-along me?"

The blond smiled nervously and took his arm. Harry shuddered at the contact. And then they were gone.

Seconds later he found himself standing in front of a small cottage. It looked almost cosy, at first glance. But then he noticed that it was dark inside, that the front-door had been blown off its hinges and a window was smashed in. And then he spied the dark mark looming in the sky above the cottage and recoiled.

"You...!"  
"No, listen to me. Let me explain. Please, Harry!"

The use of his given name was surprising enough to stop him from bolting.

"This cottage belonged to a pureblood family who opposed him. The Death Eaters ... they were here a few nights ago. Bellatrix forced me to come along and .. watch. And... let's just say, I didn't react too well and leave it at that. The important thing is: This is the last place on earth they'll come looking for me. And they.. they're superstitious. Most of them. They never come back to the places they've ... raided."

Draco really did look rather pale and shaken. And why would he save Harry from the Death Eaters, only to take him right back to them? That simply made no sense. He also really had no other alternative right now. So he nodded reluctantly. The blond took a deep breath and led the way into the house.

The inside looked even worse than the outside. They made their way through pieces of smashed furniture and splintered glass, past dark stains where curses had rebounded from the walls. The owners had either put up a good fight or the Death Eaters had simply enjoyed destroying everything they saw. It looked like a hurricane had swept through the house.

"Upstairs?" Harry asked in a hushed whisper.

Draco gave a jerky shake of his head. He was wide-eyed and ghostly pale. "No. Upstairs is... it's worse. I thought... maybe the kitchen?"

Harry nodded and quietly followed him through a sturdy door into the cosy little kitchen.

The Death Eaters seemed to have spared this room. The furniture was mostly intact and there were no signs of a struggle. For a long moment both boys simply stood there in silence.

"I'll try to find us some blankets or something." Harry offered finally.

Draco just nodded, so he turned and walked back out of the kitchen, strangely reluctant to let the blond out of his sight. And it wasn't even that he feared Malfoy would betray him now. He just didn't want to be alone.
After the blond's words he was reluctant to venture upstairs, so he just took some cushions from the destroyed living room and then hunted through the cupboards until he found a couple of blankets. Satisfied with his find he returned to the kitchen, where Draco was making tea and sandwiches. He'd obviously raided the cupboards and pantry. His hands were shaking.

"We should ward this room. Just in case." Harry murmured, making the blond jump.
"Yeah, good idea. Can you…?"

With a nod the dark-haired boy went to work, setting up the protective spells he had learned from Hermione. When he was done he took a seat at the table and gratefully accepted a mug of tea.

"It's not much. I didn't have time to pack food and their cupboards were mostly empty." the blond murmured apologetically, setting down a tray of sandwiches.
"This is great." Harry assured. "I feel like I haven't eaten in days."

The next few minutes passed in silence, with Harry wolfing down his food, while Draco ate with a lot less appetite.

"Why did you help me?" the Gryffindor finally asked the question that had been on his mind since their escape.

Draco stared into his empty mug. "Because he's … he's a monster. Most of them are. I tried to do what they wanted. What they ordered me to do. To protect mother. But I just can't…" He finally raised his eyes to meet Harry's. "They say you're the only one who can defeat him."

"I'll certainly try."
"You have to defeat him, Potter. He can't win. You have no idea what it's like to live with him in your house. The things I've seen…" he dropped his gaze and shuddered at the memory.

"I'll do everything I can. But he's not exactly easy to … kill."

Because that was what it would come down to in the end, right? He would have to kill Voldemort or be killed by him instead. Wouldn't he kill a part of Voldemort with every Horcrux he managed to destroy?

Malfoy didn't look happy with his answer, but Harry cut off his next words by suggesting they get some sleep. He felt like he also hadn't really slept in days.

They piled the cushions on the floor and wrapped themselves up in blankets. It was uncomfortable, but Harry'd had worse. And going by Malfoy's earlier reaction and what he himself had seen of the house, he didn't want to venture upstairs and look for a bedroom. He also felt strangely comforted by the Slytherin's presence. At least he wasn't alone, even if it was just for one night. The loneliness had been the worst thing after Hermione and Ron had left.

Of course everything had gone downhill from the moment they left. Without Hermione's magical bag, Harry'd had to leave the tent and most other things behind. They were just too heavy and cumbersome to carry around. He had only packed the necessities into his rucksack and left everything else by the river where they had made their camp that night. And when his two best friends still hadn't returned to him by morning, he had apparated away and walked right into Voldemort's trap.

A trap from which Draco Malfoy of all people had saved him. Harry glanced over to where the blond was lying. He could just make out his outline in the little light that filtered in through the window, but he was sure that Malfoy wasn't sleeping either.
The whole rescue thing still puzzled him, even if he understood Draco's motives. He had been pushed into this by his parents, especially his father. And now that he knew just how horrible Voldemort and his followers really were, he wanted out. Still, he could have just run for it and left Harry in his cell. Would've been easier.

Harry couldn't help but wonder if he'd even thought this through. What were his plans? Where would he go now? He felt a strange fear at the thought that they would part ways again in the morning. But they would have to. The Slytherin would probably go into hiding, while Harry still had a task to fulfil. Even if said task seemed all the more impossible now, without the help of his friends.

Eventually he did fall asleep, but it didn't take long for the nightmares to come. It never did, these days. But instead of images of Voldemort or his dying parents, Harry now saw Ron and Hermione...

“We thought you knew what you were doing! We thought Dumbledore had told you what to do. We thought you had a real plan!”

Harry felt hollow, inadequate. Ron's words only proved what he'd been fearing for weeks now. Still he reminded his friend that they had at least found one Horcrux, even if the words sounded weak to his own ears. Ron, of course, only kept shouting at him.

Hermione tried to intervene, be the voice of reason. She assured Harry that it was only the Horcrux making Ron talk and act like this. But Harry was exhausted and cranky as well and wanted to hear none of it.

“Did you think I haven't noticed the two of you whispering behind my back? Did you think I didn't guess you were thinking this?” he yelled back accusingly.

Hermione started to cry. She was still trying to calm both boys down, but tempers had flared and they weren't even listening to her. Both too angry and too busy yelling accusations at each other.

“That GO!” Harry roared finally. “Go back home and let Mummy feed you and...”

Ron reached for his wand and Harry mirrored the action almost unconsciously, but Hermione cast a shield charm between them, before either boy could draw his wand. They glared at each other from opposite sides of the tent and Harry felt a corrosive hatred towards Ron.

“Go!” he spat again.

“Gladly!” the red-head spat back, before turning to Hermione. “Are you coming?”

She seemed torn, glancing from Ron to Harry, for once at a loss for words.

“Don't stay on my account!” the dark-haired boy snapped at her.

She flinched and a fresh wave of tears flowed down her cheeks. Ron gave a disgusted snort, grabbed his pack and stormed out of the tent without looking back. With a last, sad look over her shoulder, Hermione grabbed her bag and followed him. Harry was utterly alone.

The scene changed and he was back in the dark cell, with Rookwood standing over him, torturing him with one curse after another. He tried to beg for mercy, but no sound left his lips and the ugly man's laughter rang in his ears...

"Harry! Harry! Wake up!"
He came awake with a gasp, shooting upright and fighting against the hands on his shoulders. Slender fingers grabbed his wrists and a soft voice demanded:

"Look at me!"

He stared into frightened grey eyes and stopped struggling, once he recognized who was holding him.

"It was only a nightmare. You're okay. You're safe."

Slowly the panic was receding. Draco let go of his wrists, but didn't move away. He was sitting so close that Harry could make out his features despite not wearing his glasses.

"It was just a nightmare." the blond whispered again.

But it wasn't just a nightmare. Ron and Hermione had really left him. Rookwood had really tortured him. All those things had happened. And that made it worse. It made the whole hopelessness of his situation crash down on him and Harry tried in vain to stifle a sob. The blond reached out tentatively, laying a comforting hand on the younger boy's shoulder.

And the damn broke. Harry collapsed against the blond and started crying. Draco stiffened at first, but then he wrapped both arms around Harry and pulled him even closer. Harry clung to him, great sobs wrecking his body, while Draco stroked his back and murmured soothing, nonsense words.
Harry couldn't remember falling asleep again. Couldn't even remember closing his eyes. But when he opened them again, morning sunlight was shining in through the window and he was lying in a pile of cushions and blankets, with Draco Malfoy spooned against his back. One of Draco's arms was wrapped securely around his waist. He knew it should be weird and uncomfortable, but he actually felt strangely safe.

The moment of peace was broken when the Slytherin woke up and the awkwardness of their position set in. They quickly pulled apart, unable to even look at each other.

The blond got up and started the kettle for more tea, while Harry looked through the pantry for something edible. He found a couple of eggs and some bread and quickly got a pan out, all the while stealing glances at Draco when he wasn't looking. The eggs were okay, but the bread was old and hard. It said a lot about their situation that Draco ate without complaint.

"Thank you. For … last night." Harry finally muttered, not daring to look up from his food. "It's okay." the blond said, equally quiet and without looking up.

They finished eating and then sat in silence for a few tense minutes, before Draco finally sighed and lifted his head.

"I didn't think… It's…" he stuttered, before shaking his head at himself. "Everyone just sees you as the brave hero. The Chosen One. I guess it's easy to forget that you're only human, too."

Harry looked up in surprise. "It's just … hard, you know? To always be strong and keep going. To know how many people rely on me." he whispered.

He never heard Draco's next words, because suddenly a searing pain exploded in his head and he saw Death Eaters cowering before Voldemort. Rookwood was writhing on the ground, tortured with a Cruciatius.

The flash was gone as suddenly as it had come. Harry found himself sitting in the cozy little kitchen again. Draco was staring at him, wide-eyed and pale. He found himself speaking without really meaning to.

"He's angry. Because I escaped. He's... torturing Rookwood."

The blond seemed to grow even paler at those words, because suddenly a searing pain exploded in his head and he saw Death Eaters cowering before Voldemort. Rookwood was writhing on the ground, tortured with a Cruciatius.

"And does he know of this connection?"
"Yes. He... he used it, once. To lure me into the Department of Mysteries."

He hated being reminded of that day. Sirius had died that day, because he'd run right into danger, without thinking it through first. Stupid, reckless idiot that he was. His godfather's death had been his
“Why don't you use occlumency?” Draco's words shook him from his dark thoughts.
“Because I suck at it. Snape was supposed to teach me in fifth year, but I never got the hang of it. Maybe he never really tried. I don't know.”

The Slytherin frowned. “Can he see into your mind, too?”
Harry had wondered that himself a few times. Snape had hinted that he might. “I don't know. But I don't think so. He would've caught me by now, if he could, right?”

“Probably. But it would be better not to take any chances. I think you should really learn occlumency.” Draco suggested.
“Great idea. I'll just call Snape and ask him to teach me again, shall I?”

The blond snorted and Harry thought he saw a smile tugging at his lips.
“You could do that. Or I could teach you.” he offered.
“You?”
“Yes. I'm very skilled at it. Had to be, living in a house full of Death Eaters, without sharing their beliefs. Bellatrix had no problem using legilimency on me.”

“You would really teach me?” Harry checked.
“I would. I told you, I want you to beat him. I want you to win this war.” Draco reminded him.
“Yes, but... I probably won't learn fast. You would have to stay with me for some time.”

“Well, I'm on the run as it is. And so are you. We might as well stick together for a while.” the blond reasoned.
And Harry felt so relieved at the prospect of company, even if said company was Malfoy, that he agreed.

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Since neither of them had a real plan or any idea on where to go, they decided to stay where they were for the moment. Draco tried to explain occlumency to Harry and showed him some techniques to clear his mind and master his emotions. He seemed less than pleased with the outcome.

They ended up spending another night at the destroyed cottage, before moving on to the next house the Death Eaters had recently raided and the next one after that. There was no shortage of them, as it turned out and they were also quite easy to locate. Draco had found an old wizard wireless in the ruins of the cottage. They just listened to the reports about Death Eater raids and missing or murdered people, before deciding on their next hiding place.

The houses themselves were all equally horrible. Broken furniture, curse stains and occasional blood splatters made their stomachs churn every time they entered a new house. Sometimes it was so bad that they had to turn around and leave again immediately. Mostly though, they found at least one room that was pretty much untouched and set up camp there.

Harry hated all those houses, but had to agree with Draco that they were their best chance of hiding from the Death Eaters. No-one ever dared to approach a house that had been raided. Not even Voldemort's followers themselves. And having a roof over their heads was a lot better than camping in the woods, like he'd done with Ron and Hermione, now that the weather had turned cold and snow covered the grounds.

When they had picked a room to stay in for the night, they would ward it and then look for food. There was almost always something edible to be found in those houses. That at least was another
plus. Usually they only parted ways to use the bathroom or wash up quickly, both afraid of being alone, even if neither said so aloud.

Trying to learn occlumency was just as hard as Harry remembered it to be, even if Draco was a better teacher than Snape. At least it took him longer to snap at Harry and he never commented on the things he saw in the younger boy's mind, before Harry finally managed to shut him out. He actually showed surprising patience, explaining things again and again. It wasn't his fault that the dark-haired boy still struggled with it.

Harry got a few more visions of Voldemort punishing Death Eaters, before the blond thief seemed to catch his attention again. At least the visions were good for one thing. The Gryffindor could assure Draco that his mother wasn't blamed for his actions.

The blond thanked him quietly, but then reminded him that he had to practice harder, since they were trying to stop those visions. Harry was getting tired of the reminder. Tired of the lessons themselves. Of Draco invading his mind and seeing flashes of his childhood.

“Maybe we should just give up. I'm obviously never getting the hang of this.”

“Because you're not trying hard enough.” the blond complained.

“I am trying! Do you think I want you to prod around in my mind? Do you think I want you of all people to see my embarrassing childhood memories?” he yelled.

“I'm only trying to help you!” Draco yelled back.

“Really? Or maybe you just enjoy poking around in my head.”

“Don't overestimate yourself, Potter. Your mind isn't that interesting. But maybe you actually enjoy your connection to the Dark Lord. Maybe you enjoy being in his head!”

It wasn't a conscious reaction. Harry was almost surprised himself when his fist connected with Draco's jaw. Draco's eyes darkened in anger and before he really knew what was happening, they were rolling around on the floor, kicking and punching each other.

The fight ended as quickly as it had begun. Harry rolled over onto his back, wheezing because the blond had landed a nasty punch in his side. Next to him, Draco rolled onto his back as well, panting and nursing a split lip and a bleeding nose.

For a long moment the only sound that could be heard was their heavy breathing. Finally Harry looked over at the blond, grimacing at the blood on his face.

“Sorry.”

Draco snorted and then winced when it obviously hurt. “Yeah, me too.”

They slowly got up and started treating their injuries. Luckily the Slytherin had remembered to pack some healing potions and salve.

“You're right, in a way.” Harry muttered after another long bout of silence. “I mean, I don't enjoy it or anything, but... sometimes I think it's useful, you know? To be able to see what he's doing and stuff.”

Draco sighed. “I get that. But... it's dangerous. You understand that, don't you? If he gets into your head and sees where you are...”

“I know. I'll try harder. Okay?”

“Okay.”

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Somehow it felt like the fight had cleared the air between them. Harry found it easier to interact with the blond and even started using his first name after a while. Draco seemed surprised, but sometimes he slipped and called him Harry as well.

They even started talking. About some of the memories Draco had seen. Harry told him a little about his childhood and growing up with his Muggle relatives and in turn learned that it hadn't been all that easy growing up with Lucius as a father either. Narcissa had always showered her son with gifts and affection. Lucius had been strict and demanding.

Harry had a few more nightmares about Rookwood and was grateful that Draco was there to comfort him after. The blond had admitted in a quiet voice that Rookwood had loved to stare at him and taunt him, calling him weak and pathetic and threatening him with nasty curses. It had been unnerving, even if he'd never actually dared to hurt Draco. The blond had his fair share of nightmares as well, so there were just as many nights where it was Harry's turn to offer comfort.

Chapter End Notes

Comments would be very much appreciated. And usually make me update faster ;)
Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

The boys grow closer and start making dangerous plans.

Chapter Notes

Thanks to everyone who took the time to leave a comment. They really make my day.

It was maybe a few weeks later (the days had started blending together after a while, so he couldn't be sure how much time had really gone by) when Harry finally managed to block Draco's attempts at legilimency. It took a lot of willpower and concentration, but he managed and that was what mattered.

His visions of Voldemort had mostly stopped as well. Whenever the evil wizard's emotions were too strong, they would still get through Harry's defences. Like that one time, when he stole Dumbledore's wand from his tomb and felt completely elated about it. But Harry was getting better. At least Draco thought so.

Their time together so far had been strange. They talked a lot and even laughed together sometimes. Harry found himself actually enjoying Draco's company and his vicious humour. But neither had brought up their complicated past or what they would do once Harry was able to shield himself from Voldemort. He didn't want them to part ways. He didn't want to be alone again. And most surprising, he didn't want to lose the connection they had formed.

Maybe it was those fears that brought on the nightmare. That made him relive his fight with Ron and Hermione again. He woke to find Draco holding him down, calling his name. This time the blond pulled Harry into his arms without hesitation, already used to comforting him after a nightmare. Harry managed to hold back the tears, but he clung to Draco for a long moment.

They fell asleep cuddled against each other, like they often did now. The next morning they went about their routine like always. Harry was happy to ignore his nightmare and the question of what to do next and was surprised when Draco spoke up after breakfast.

"Where are Weasley and Granger? You... you called out for them last night. I thought they'd be with you."

It was the first time he brought up Harry's friends and the Gryffindor looked away, pain etched into his features at the reminder. "They were. But... they left."

"They just... left you alone?" Draco asked in shock.

The younger boy shrugged. "We had a nasty fight. And they left." he repeated. "I can't... I can't even blame them for despairing, you know? The task Dumbledore set us ... it's impossible."

He actually hated the old headmaster a little for dumping this onto him. Because after months of running away from Death Eaters, camping in the woods with Ron and Hermione and now in these
abandoned houses with Malfoy, with barely enough food and too little sleep, he was still no nearer to finding the next Horcrux. And with every passing day, more lives were lost and Voldemort's power grew.

"What task?" Draco asked quietly.

Harry looked at him and strangely enough didn't see his childhood rival. He only saw a frightened boy, who had still had the courage to help him. A boy who had offered comfort and companionship when Harry had needed it most. The last few weeks had changed something between them. He wasn't sure what exactly they were now. He only knew that Malfoy was no longer his enemy. And that he trusted the blond, even if it was completely stupid.

"Have you ever heard of a Horcrux?"

When Draco shook his head, he explained what he knew about them, starting with the diary in second year and ending with Dumbledore leaving it up to him to destroy them.

"So... until all of them are destroyed, he's practically immortal?" the blond muttered once he had ended.
"Pretty much, yeah. I told you he's not that easy to kill."
"How many did you destroy so far?"

"Only two. I destroyed the diary and Dumbledore a ring. We found another one, but... I have no idea where it is now. I only realized that Ron still had it after he and Hermione had left. But it's probably wishful thinking to imagine that they managed to destroy it by now."

Had his friends even continued looking? For the next Horcrux or the sword of Gryffindor? Or had they abandoned their quest, like they had abandoned him? Like Harry himself had abandoned it these past few weeks?

"And how many are there?" the blond wanted to know.
"Dumbledore was fairly sure that he made six."

Harry buried his head in his hands with a sigh. "It's all so hopeless. I don't even know where to start looking for the next one. And destroying them is another thing."
"How did you find the others?"

"Well, Dumbledore found the ring. He never told me how. And the diary... that was just luck. Voldemort had given it to your father. For safe-keeping, I guess. He smuggled it into Ginny's school things when we met at Flourish and Blotts."

The blond looked guilty at that.

"And the locket, the one Ron and Hermione have, well... Sirius' brother had realized what it was and stolen it. He hid it at Grimmauld Place, from where it was stolen again. We managed to track it down in the end with the help of my house elf." Even though getting it back had been another matter. "Dumbledore thought that he'd mostly hidden the objects in places that meant something to him. But I've run out of possible places ages ago."

"And do you at least know what objects you're looking for?"
"I know of two. The last one he made was his snake."
"Nagini?" Draco checked.

"Yes. And from what Dumbledore found out, he used the cup of Helga Hufflepuff. But the last one could be anything."
"Wait, did you say cup?" Draco checked.

"Yeah, Helga Hufflepuff's cup. Dumbledore found out that he stole it from some old witch. He seems pretty obsessed with the founders of Hogwarts. The locket actually belonged to Slytherin. So I think he might have used something from Ravenclaw, too." Harry explained. "Why?"

Draco gave him a strange look. "I think I know where the cup is."
"You… Really?"

The blond nodded. "A little while ago I overheard mother talking to Bellatrix. At the time the conversation didn't make sense and I chalked it up to Bellatrix just being crazy, but… She said something about a cup. And that she would not fail the Dark Lord like my father had done. She would protect hers."

Harry felt excitement creeping in. "It would make sense. She's one of his most loyal followers, right?"
"She's completely dedicated to him. It's sick. She would do anything for him." Draco confirmed.
"Then it has to be the Horcrux. Do you know where she keeps it?"
"That's the bad part. It's in her Gringott's vault."

Okay, that was bad. Really bad. And it made Harry's heart sink again. But on the other hand, he finally had a new lead, after weeks of fruitless search. He couldn't let anything stop him now.

"Then I'll have to break into Gringott's."
"What? Potter, are you mad? You can't break into Gringott's!" Draco protested.

"Why not? It's happened before. When we were in first year someone broke in, remember? And Hermione, Ron and I broke into the Ministry just a little while ago, to get the locket back from Umbridge."

"It's a miracle you made it out of that alive, but Gringott's is a whole different level. You don't want to mess with those goblins. And Bellatrix vault is one of the old ones. It's going to have extra protection. This is a suicide mission."

Harry got up and started pacing, his mind going a mile a minute. He knew that it would be difficult. Nearly impossible, in fact. That there was a good chance he wouldn't make it out alive. But what other option did he have? He had to destroy the Horcruxes if he wanted to defeat Voldemort.

"I have to do this. There's no other way. If I don't destroy his Horcruxes, I have no chance of beating him. He's going to win, Draco. And with every day I waste, his power grows. Innocent people die."
He looked at the blond imploringly. "I've already wasted too much time."

Draco stared back. After a while he closed his eyes and shook his head, seemingly in defeat. But then he whispered: "No."
"Draco, I have to. There's nothing you can say to stop me. I'm going to break into Gringott's."

The blond got up and took a few steps towards Harry, until they were standing face to face. "No, Harry. We're going to break into Gringott's."

It took a moment for the implication of those words to sink in.
"Wait, you mean… you're helping me?"
"I've probably gone mad, but yes Potter, I'm helping you."
Harry could only stare at him in shock. "Why?"

"I'm already doomed as it is. I helped you escape. When the Death Eaters catch me, they're going to
kill me. Slowly and painfully. And there's nowhere I can hide. Sooner or later they will catch me."
the blond said quietly.

"I had planned on running away, you know? I just couldn't take it any longer. Mother ... she told me
to run, when I had the chance. To save myself. She assured me that she would manage. I .. hadn't
really thought it through yet. What I would do. Where I would go. But when I learned that you had
been caught, I knew that I couldn't waste any more time. I knew that I only had that one chance to
get us both out."

"You could have left me there." Harry whispered.
"No, I couldn't." Draco whispered back.

The Gryffindor wondered if he would continue to be surprised by this strange, honest version of
Malfoy. Had the boy always been like that? Had he really never known the true Draco?

"I've been a coward all my life." the blond admitted, surprising him anew. "And look where it got
me. Maybe it's time to be brave for a change."
"Saving me was very brave."
"It was, wasn't it?"

Harry was distinctly aware of how close they were standing. Of the heat radiating off Draco's body.
Of those expressive grey eyes boring into his. Had Draco's eyes always been that grey? Like storm
clouds. Harry liked storms. He felt strangely breathless, staring into those storm-grey eyes.

Then Draco looked away and the moment was broken.

"And besides... Someone has to keep a level head and balance your impulsive Gryffindor nature."
the blond joked.
Harry actually found himself smiling. "Guess it's a good thing I've got a sneaky Slytherin on my side
now, huh?"
"Of course it is."

The playful banter felt good. And as they settled down to discuss their next steps, Harry couldn't help
but wonder how his life might have gone if he hadn't refused Draco's hand back in first year. If he
hadn't told the sorting hat not to put him in Slytherin. Could they have been friends? Were they
friends now?
Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

Thanks for the sweet comments. They really made me smile and continue to work on this story. Hope you like the new chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

As it turned out, deciding to break into Gringott's and actually coming up with a plan to do so, were two completely different things. Harry and Draco spent the next couple of days making up plans, only to dismiss them again. The Gryffindor felt full of nervous energy and ready to just storm the bank and make it up as they went. But he knew that Draco was right and that they needed a solid plan first.

They continued moving around, still using mostly raided or abandoned houses, though they also spent a few nights at an old barn or hidden away in the stable of a Muggle farmer. Neither of them could get used to the carnage the Death Eaters left behind.

Being on the run with Draco was a lot different from the time Harry had spent on the run with Ron and Hermione. They were his best friends and he had known them for years. He was used to spending a lot of time with them, used to their reactions and their ways of thinking.

Draco was still very much a mystery. Surprisingly little of the annoying git he'd known (or thought he'd known) for years remained and Harry found himself once again wondering if he'd ever really known the blond at all.

The Slytherin was very intelligent. That much was no surprise, since he'd always been top of their classes, alongside Hermione. He had a sharp mind and quickly found all the flaws in the outrageous plans the dark-haired boy thought up. Which was a little annoying, but really for the best. At least he wasn't too vicious about pointing out those flaws and he also didn't insult Harry (too much).

He was also very resourceful and good with spells. After that first night on the kitchen floor, he had taken the time to transfigure some furniture into a nice, big camp bed, complete with cushions and warm sheets, proceeded to shrink the whole thing and put it into his rucksack. Something Harry would have never thought of. Since then their nights were a lot more comfortable.

The sleeping arrangements were another surprise. Draco could have probably created two separate camp beds without much difficulty, but Harry didn't feel the need to point that out. After the first few, awkward nights, he quickly got used to sharing a bed with his former rival. Draco's presence was comforting and mostly held the nightmares at bay. They would always drift closer together during the night, but neither boy said anything when they woke up curled around each other. They simply got up and went about their daily routine.

Harry soon lost track of time. He had no idea how much time had gone by since their escape from Malfoy Manor (for that was where he'd been imprisoned, of course), when they finally settled on a plan. The snow had melted, given way to fresh grass and spring seemed to be lurking just around the corner.

It was a crazy plan, with a lot of dangerous variables and great risks. It could very well get them
killed. But it was still the best and only plan they had.

The last house they had stayed in had held a hidden potions lab in the basement, which they had only discovered by chance. The Death Eaters had obviously overlooked it in their raid, so all the ingredients and finished potions were still there. Draco had found a vial of Polyjuice and Harry, remembering his break-in at the Ministry with Ron and Hermione, had immediately suggested using it.

Of course they couldn't go about it like Harry and his friends had. There were only a handful of wizards and witches working for Gringotts and none of them had the authority to go anywhere near the vaults. So Harry's first idea had been to wait close to the bank for a witch or wizard who they could use. Preferably someone with a vault as old as that of Bellatrix.

Draco had been quick to point out how dangerous it would be to lurk anywhere around Diagon Alley, even with the invisibility cloak and that they might have to wait quite a while for a suitable candidate to show up. It would mean relying too much on chance and even with Harry's outrageous amount of luck, he wasn't willing to risk it.

They pondered this problem for a couple of days, until a solution presented itself. Draco had been re-packing his rucksack, when he discovered a long blond hair caught in the money bag he'd snatched from his father's desk before their escape. After some persuasion from Harry, he agreed to polyjuice as Lucius. It would still be a gamble, but it was their best bet.

After another four days of talking it through, they agreed that they had everything as well planned out as possible. Draco would pose as Lucius and demand to be taken to his vault. Harry would follow him under the invisibility cloak. The Malfoy vault was close to the Lestrange vault, so this would at least take them in the right direction. Once the cart had made it down, they would have to overpower the goblin, get him to take them to Bellatrix vault and then lead them out again.

Harry lay awake the night before, thinking of all the things that could go wrong. Before he'd broken into the Minstry with Ron and Hermione he'd felt determined and almost excited. This time there was only anxiety and nagging doubts.

He didn't even know where those doubts came from. Was it because this time he was doing it with Draco? But he trusted the blond. He was sure that Draco wouldn't betray him. So maybe it was their experience at the Ministry that made him so jittery. Their plan back then had been better than this one and still it had almost failed spectacularly. But there was no turning back now.

***

The morning dawned cold and grey. After a small breakfast, Draco pulled on his outfit. He had found some old robes in one of the houses and transfigured them into something his father might wear.

“I'm not liking this one bit.” he complained, as he dropped the long hair into the polyjuice potion with a disgusted look.

“Well, I don't like it either. But it's our best bet.” Harry reasoned.

They shared a long look and Harry nodded encouragingly. With a grimace Draco swallowed the potion. The effect was immediate. He shot up another few inches, his hair lengthened and his face changed slightly. Seconds later Harry was staring at Lucius Malfoy.

“That's scary.” he commented.

“Tell me about it.” Draco/Lucius muttered back.
"Alright, let's do this."

The Gryffindor pulled on his invisibility cloak, took a deep breath and grabbed Draco's hand. Together they apparated to the Leaky Cauldron.

The inn was quiet this early in the morning. Tom looked up, seemingly surprised to see Lucius. "Mister Malfoy," he greeted warily. Draco only turned his nose up at him and marched through to the tiny backyard. Harry had to give him credit. His impersonation of Lucius was perfect.

They passed through the archway into Diagon Alley and stopped for a moment. It looked different than it had on Harry's last visit. Even more shops were boarded-up now. New ones, dedicated to the dark arts, had opened in their stead. Wherever he looked he saw his own face printed on posters, declaring him Undesirable number one. It was disconcerting.

Draco took a deep breath and set off towards Gringotts. Harry quickly followed him. They hadn't made it more than a few steps though, when they heard someone calling Lucius' name. A tall, thin wizard with grey hair and a long nose came striding towards them.


Then Travers had reached them. "What are you doing here?" he wondered aloud. "I thought the inhabitants of Malfoy Manor were still confined to the house after Potter's escape."

"The Dark Lord trusts and forgives those who have served him faithfully." Draco drawled in a perfect imitation of his father. "Of course he does." Travers agreed. "And what brings you to Diagon Alley today?"

"I need to visit Gringotts."

"Alas, I also. Shall we go then?"

And he set off, so Draco had no choice but to follow him. Harry felt his heart sinking. Their plan was going to shit, before they had even reached the bank. But it was too late to turn back now. They had to see this through.

When they reached the marble steps leading up to the great bronze doors, he got another surprise. The goblins at the entrance had been replaced by two wizards, clutching long, thin golden rods.

"Ah, Probity Probes – so crude, but effective." Travers commented lightly. He nodded left and right to the wizards, who raised the golden rods and passed them up and down his body. The Probes were obviously meant to detect spells of concealment and hidden objects.

Draco hissed: "Confound them." in Harry's direction, before following Travers up the stairs. Unable to come up with a better idea, Harry shot a Confundus spell at each of the wizards in turn. When they called out to Draco, he gave them a disdainful look.

"But you've just done that." he snapped.

The guards looked unsure, but then shrugged and let him pass. Harry breathed a sigh of relief and followed him into the bank. They had made it through the first obstacle.

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Travers had already reached the counter. He handed a small key to the goblin, who examined it and gave it back.

Draco stepped up to the counter and the goblin startled.

"Mr. Malfoy. How may I help you today?"

"I wish to enter my vault." Draco demanded.
Harry noticed with some trepidation that Travers had hung back to watch. The goblin was eyeing Draco critically.

“You have … identification?”

“I've never needed it before!” Draco snapped and Harry thought he could see him wavering slightly.

“Your wand will do,” the goblin let him know.

Harry had to stifle a groan. This was it. They were doomed. The goblin was obviously already suspicious and once Draco handed over his wand… Surely the blond knew this, but since Travers and a few of the goblins were watching, he could hardly refuse without causing a scene. He handed over his wand and Harry made a split second decision.

He pointed his own wand at the goblin and for the first time in his life murmured: “Imperio.” A curious sensation shot down his arm, a feeling of tingling warmth that seemed to flow from his mind, down the sinews and veins connecting him to his wand and the curse.

The goblin took the wand and smiled. “Ah, you've had a new wand made, Mr. Malfoy.”

Draco looked at him in surprise, but Travers came over, wondering aloud where he might have gotten a new wand made. Not knowing what else to do, Harry shot another Imperius at Travers, who fell silent and only smiled stupidly.

The goblin at the counter handed the wand back and asked another goblin to get him the clankers. A moment later he was handed a leather bag full of jangling metal. He jumped down from his chair and asked Draco to follow him.

“But Bogrod, the special instructions for the old vaults…” another goblin protested, only to be shaken off.

“Please follow me, Mr. Malfoy.” the goblin Bogrod asked pleasantly, walking towards the doors.

Harry started to follow them as well, when he noticed Travers still standing there, looking oddly vacant. With a flick of his wand he made the Death Eater follow them too, out through the doors and into a stone passageway lit with torches.

Once the doors had closed behind them, Harry pulled off the cloak. Travers and Bogrod didn't even blink.

“What the hell, Potter? Did you... did you imperius them?”

“I had no choice. They've noticed something's off.” the Gryffindor defended himself. “But I don’t think I did it strong enough.” he added, looking at Bogrod and Travers warily.

“What now?” Draco asked.

Harry hesitated only a second. “We go on. They already suspect something, so if we turn around now we probably won't make it out. And we've come this far. We won't get another chance.” he reasoned.

The blond sighed in defeat. “Okay. Make Travers hide somewhere. We can't drag him with us the whole way. And make the goblin get us a cart.”

Harry nodded and did as told. He was pretty sure he could hear shouting behind them in the main hall, but did his best to ignore it.

Once Travers had trotted out of sight, Bogrod summoned a cart and they got in.

“Take us to the Lestrange vault.” Harry ordered.

The goblin nodded and they took off, gathering speed quickly. The cart twisted and turned through the labyrinthine passages, sloping downwards continuously.
They took a hairpin bend at speed and zoomed through a waterfall. Water filled Harry's eyes and mouth, making it impossible to see. Then the cart flipped over and they fell out. He heard Draco shouting something and suddenly found himself gliding down as though weightless, landing painlessly on the rocky floor.

“Cushioning charm.” the Slytherin explained.
Harry nodded and mumbled a quick “Thanks,”, but then did a double take when he looked at Draco. Because the polyjuice had worn off and the blond was back to himself. Which shouldn't have happened for at least another hour or so.

“The polyjuice wore off.” he let Draco know.
“What? But that's... It must've been the water.”

“The Thief's Downfall.”
Both boys turned in surprise, to find the goblin watching them. He looked fully alert and pretty pissed. The Imperius curse must have worn off as well.

“The Thief's Downfall washes away all enchantments. They know that you are here. Impostors! Filthy thieves! You shall get what you deserve.” Bogrod promised.

A little helplessly Harry pointed his wand at him and muttered: “Imperio.” Again he felt the strange sensation as the curse took hold and the goblin's eyes became distant. He looked over at Draco, who nodded.

“Lead us to the Lestrange vault. Quickly!”

As they followed the goblin on foot into the darkness, Harry thought he could hear shouts in the distance. He had no idea how they were supposed to get out of here again, but decided to worry about that later. First they had to get into the vault. All this trouble couldn't have been for nothing. He would not leave here empty handed.

They turned a corner and stopped dead in their tracks. In front of them lay a dragon, blocking access to the deepest vaults. His scales were pale, his wings folded close to his body and his eyes milky pink. He seemed at least half-blind. There were heavy cuffs around his rear legs, chaining him to the floor with thick chains.

He turned his head and spat a jet of fire at them, forcing them to retreat.

“How do we get around it?” Harry asked the goblin.
Bogrod pulled out a metal instrument and started making horrible noise with it. The dragon recoiled.

They advanced slowly, but the huge beast seemed to be trembling in fear. Harry could see scars made by vicious slashes across his face.

“It must have been taught to fear burning swords at the noise.” Draco mused.
Harry only nodded, feeling sorry for the poor beast.

“Open the vault.” Draco ordered and Bogrod pressed his palm against the door, which melted away to reveal a cave-like opening crammed with coins and goblets, armour, skins of strange creatures, potions in jewelled flasks and a skull wearing a crown. Harry was strongly reminded of the room of requirement.

“Search fast.” he urged.
They hurried inside, only to be stopped by a muffled clank behind them. The door had reappeared, sealing them in total darkness.
“Don’t worry. The goblin can get us out again.” Draco assured, lighting his wand. Harry nodded and did the same. They both looked around at the heaps of treasure. The blond picked up a goblet, to get a closer look, but immediately dropped it again with a yell. It landed on the ground, where it proceeded to multiply.

“Shit! They’ve added Gemino and Flagrate curses. Everything we touch will burn and multiply, until we’re crushed to death.” the Slytherin explained with a pained grimace. “Okay, no touching then.” Harry reasoned.

But with the vault crammed to the brink, it was impossible not to touch anything. Harry sent a cascade of Galleons to the floor, until there was barely enough room to put their feet. Bogrod knocked over a flask and got half-buried beneath replicas, before they managed to pull him out. The heat from the enchanted treasure was rising in waves, making sweat trickle down their backs.

And then finally Harry spied it. On the topmost pile lay the cup of Helga Hufflepuff. “There it is! Accio cup!” He didn't really expect it to work, but it did. The cup smacked into his hand and he grimaced as his flesh sizzled and a shower of cups rained down around him.

On the other side of the door the dragon let out a mighty roar. They could hear shouting and clanging. The goblins were here. They were trapped. Bogrod tripped over a suit of armour and suddenly it was impossible to escape the burning hot metal.

And then the door opened and they slid out on an avalanche of fiery hot treasure, to find a group of goblins glaring and pointing daggers at them. Harry pushed the cup into his pocket and drew his wand. “Stupefy!”

Jets of red light flew into the crowd of goblins as Draco joined him. Some toppled over, but others took their place and kept advancing. There were just too many. The dragon was roaring in the background, obviously afraid of all the noise.

Harry saw their only chance of escape and grasped it. Pointing his wand at the thick cuffs chaining the beast to the floor, he yelled: “Relashio!”. They broke with a loud bang. “Come on!” he urged, sprinting towards the dragon.

“You can’t be serious!” Draco protested. “Dead serious. Come on, climb up.”

Without waiting for the blond to reply, Harry pulled himself up onto the dragon's back. He stretched out an arm and sighed in relief when Draco took it and hoisted himself up as well.

“This is madness, Potter!”


The dragon finally noticed that it was free. With a roar it reared, spread its wings, knocking aside the shrieking goblins and soared into the air. Both boys clutched the jagged scales, holding on for dear life.

“We'll never make it out. It's too big!” Draco shouted, as the dragon advanced upwards. It breathed flame again and the floors and ceiling of the tunnel cracked. Harry shut his eyes against the heat and dust and prayed that they'd make it out alive.

Over the dragon's roars and the crashing of rocks all around he heard Draco shout: “Defodio!” It took him only a moment to realize what the blond was doing and copy him. Together they blasted
the ceiling apart. They passed the underground lake and went higher up still, until they finally emerged in the marble hallway, amidst fire and crumbling stone.

Goblins and wizards shrieked and ran for cover. The dragon, obviously sensing freedom, forced its way through the metal doors, spread its wings and launched itself into the sky, with Harry and Draco still clinging to its back. It soared higher and higher, leaving London a mere speck below them.

“That was the stupidest, single most dangerous and reckless thing I've ever done in my life! I can't believe I agreed to that foolhardy plan of yours!” Draco shouted. He sounded completely outraged. The tone was so familiar that Harry couldn't stifle a grin. He glanced over his shoulder, unsurprised to find the blond scowling at him.

“What are you grinning about? We could have been killed!”
Adrenalin was still pumping through Harry's veins, mixed with giddy relief over their narrow escape.
“But we didn't. I got us out!” he yelled back, trying to hold back the laughter that was threatening to bubble out of him.

“It's not over yet. In case you haven't noticed, we're sitting on a bloody dragon! A blind, bloody dragon! We're Merlin only knows how many feet above the ground, with no means of steering and no idea where that beast is heading!”

“I know.” the younger boy replied, sobering a little. “But that's still better than getting locked into a Gringotts vault or captured by angry goblins.” he pointed out, shifting a little. His fear of slipping off the dragon's back was diminishing a little. It wasn't comfortable by any means, but at least they were still free.

“It has to land sooner or later.”
“Somehow that knowledge is not comforting. It also has to eat sooner or later. What if it decides we'd make a nice snack?” Draco seemed determined to be pessimistic about their situation.

Harry rolled his eyes. “Think positive, would you? We just robbed Gringotts, Draco! We got the Horcrux!” After months of futile search Harry was finally one step closer to achieving his goal.

“I'll think positive once we're safely back on the ground.” the blond grumbled. Harry grinned and said nothing.

Chapter End Notes

So what do you think? Did I copy too much from the book? I did, right? I'll try to do better in the next chapter.
Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

Thanks for all the lovely comments. Your feedback is very much appreciated.

Just a short update this time, but I hope you'll like it.

Over the course of the next few hours Harry's exhilaration faded. He was cold, tired and hungry and the dragon still showed no sign of wanting to land. Draco had gone silent, leaving him alone with his thoughts.

Yes, they had robbed Gringotts. Unfortunately they hadn't been subtle about it. How long would it take until Voldemort learned of their break-in? How long until he discovered just what had been stolen? And once he did, he would finally know that Harry was looking for Horcruxes. Which would make finding the rest of them all the more difficult.

“Hey, I think we're losing height.” Draco's voice shook him from his musings.

“You're right.” Harry agreed, glancing down.

He could see deep-green mountains and lakes below them. The dragon flew lower and lower in great, spiralling circles, honing in upon one of the smaller lakes.

“When it gets low enough, I think we should jump.” the Gryffindor decided.

“You... Shit, okay. I think you're right.” Draco agreed reluctantly.

They waited another minute or so, until Harry thought they were low enough.

“Okay, jump!”

He slithered to the side of the dragon and plummeted feet first into the lake. The water was icy cold, forcing the breath out of his lungs. He pushed up towards the light and noted with relief that Draco broke the surface of the water right next to him.

The dragon flew on and finally landed on a distant bank. Harry and Draco swam to the opposite shore. Luckily the water wasn't deep and soon they were able to stand and wade towards the grassy bank.

“Definitely the most reckless and foolhardy thing I've ever done.” the blond muttered, angrily fighting his way through reeds and mud.

Harry looked over at him. Sopping wet and dirty, with angry red burns on his face, Draco was still the most beautiful thing he'd ever seen. He knew that the thought should scare him. Terrify him, really. But somehow it didn't. And before he really knew what he was doing, he had grabbed the blond's arm, pulled him flush against his body and covered Draco's lips with his own.

The blond made a small noise of protest, but then wrapped both arms around Harry and returned the kiss. And what a kiss it was. It felt completely different than kissing Cho or even Ginny had.

With Cho it had been all awkwardness and nerves. She'd been the first girl Harry had ever felt attracted to and he hadn't known what he was doing at all. Ginny on the other hand had felt like
home, familiar and safe. He'd known her for years and they'd been friends above all else.

Draco was something else entirely. He was sharp angles, fear and darkness. He was biting wit and dry humour. He was clever and cunning, but also brave when it mattered most. He was infuriating and endearing in equal measure. He was gentle hugs and soothing touches, angry words and cutting truths. Draco was everything Harry had ever needed.

When they broke apart, both boys were breathless. “We should get out of the lake, before we freeze to death.” the blond broke the sudden, awkward silence and Harry finally realized that they were still standing waist-deep in muddy water. He'd forgotten everything around them.

They waded to shore and flopped down onto slippery grass. Across from them the dragon had drank its fill and launched itself into the sky again. Harry watched it flying away with a small smile. After catching his breath for a moment, he got up and started placing the usual, protective spells around them.

By the time he was finished Draco had gotten rid of the over-large robes, pulled his shrunken down rucksack out of the pocket of his jeans and returned it to its normal size. Harry quickly pulled out his own rucksack and did the same, rummaging around for dry clothes, while the blond spread out a blanket on the ground.

Now that the adrenaline had worn off, Harry really started feeling the burns from the enchanted treasure. His clothing was singed away in places, his skin covered in angry red blisters. The older boy looked no better.

“Here, that's dittany.” Draco explained, handing him a small flask, after applying some to the burns on his face and arms.

Harry took the flask and quickly dabbed some onto his own injuries. When he looked up again, the blond had turned around and was just taking off the rest of his clothes. He quickly averted his eyes and started undressing as well.

“Harry? There's a spot on my back I can't reach. Could you...?"

“Umm... sure.”

He scooted closer and hesitantly applied the dittany to the blisters marring Draco's pale back. It felt strange, touching the blond so intimately. Even more so since they were both only wearing boxers. He was all too aware that they had kissed only a little while ago.

“Thanks.” Draco murmured softly.

Harry saw that the skin was already healing and quickly snatched his hand away. He scooted back a bit, unable to tear his gaze away. Then Draco turned around to face him and he opened his mouth to apologize for ogling him, but the words died in his throat, once he caught sight of the blond's chest.

Fine, white scars criss-crossed over his chest and belly. Scars Harry had caused, with a spell he hadn't known the meaning of. “Oh god, Draco! I'm so sorry.”

The Slytherin gave him a questioning look. But then he followed Harry's gaze and understanding dawned.

“It's okay.”

“No, it's not. I didn't mean to hurt you so badly. I... I didn't know what that spell did. I would have
never used it if I'd known.” the dark-haired boy swore.
“I brought this onto myself. I tried to use the Cruciatus on you.” Draco reminded.

Yes, he had. But Harry was fairly sure that it wouldn't have worked. Even back then, Draco couldn't have hated him that much. An what he'd done was worse. He had scarred Draco for life. The blond would always be reminded of that day, whenever he looked into a mirror without his shirt on.

“I still shouldn't have used that spell. I nearly killed you. I'm so sorry.” Harry assured. Somehow they had drifted closer together. Mere inches separated them and he felt like he was drowning in those storm-cloud eyes. “Please, forgive me.” he whispered. “I already have.” the blond whispered back.

Harry couldn't tell who moved first. Who leaned in, to close those last inches separating them. He only knew that suddenly they were kissing again, clutching at each other. Tentatively he let his hands trace the blond's back, amazed that he was allowed to touch.

They sank down onto the blanket, their lips meeting again and again, their bodies fitting together like two pieces of a puzzle. Hands started to roam, hesitantly at first, but getting surer with every second. Harry felt like he'd stumbled into a dream. He wanted to say: “I've never done this before.” and “Is this okay?” or maybe “Am I doing it right?”, but the only sound that left his lips was Draco's name. Over and over again.

Later, after the sweat had cooled on their bodies, after they had cleaned up and gotten dressed again, they were lying together on the blanket, watching the sun pinking up the horizon. “I'm glad you're here.” Harry whispered.

Draco dropped a kiss onto his shoulder and wrapped his arms tighter around the younger boy. “So am I.”

Harry could have lain there like that forever, but their quiet reverie was broken all too soon, when they heard voices nearby. And it took him only a moment to recognize them. “That's Ron. And Hermione.”

Chapter End Notes

Yes, a cliffhanger. Sorry, just couldn't help it.

After a bit of consideration I decided to keep the sex scene (if that even was one) rather vague. I thought I'd leave it up to everyone's imagination to decide what exactly happened between our boys.
Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

Ron and Hermione are back. And not a minute too soon.

Chapter Notes

Thanks for the lovely comments. They made my day - as always.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Harry jumped to his feet and stared in the direction the voices were coming from. And only seconds later he saw them, walking along the shore, craning their necks, like they were looking for something. Or someone. His heart was beating wildly and a part of him just wanted to run over and hug them. Another part however, still felt bitter. They had deserted him, after all.

He took a hesitant step towards them, only to be stopped by Draco's hand on his arm. Turning around questioningly, he caught the blond's worried look.

"Just be careful. We're stranded in the middle of nowhere. It's one hell of a coincidence for them to show up here." Draco warned.
"You think...?"
"I think you need to be careful. Make sure it's really them."

Which was, of course, a good advice. Draco pulled out his wand.
"Just in case." he said.

Harry nodded and held his own wand at the ready. After taking a deep, fortifying breath, he stepped out of the protective wards and towards his friends.

Hermione spied him first. "Harry!" she yelled and came running towards him, Ron on her heels. They both skidded to a halt when the dark-haired boy took a hesitant step back, raising his wand.

"I need to be sure it's really you." he explained.
"What are you on about? Of course it's us." Ron insisted.
"He's right, Ron. It can never hurt to be careful." Hermione agreed, though she looked hurt as she turned to Harry: "Ask us something only we know."

He cast around for a question, blurring the first thing he could think of: "The day we met, on the Hogwarts Express... you were trying to show me a spell. What was it?"

Ron frowned. "You mean when I tried to turn Scabbers yellow?" he asked after a moment.

Harry nodded, a smile forming on his lips.
"Oh, I remember that. It didn't really work, did it? I came into your compartment just then, asking if you had seen Neville's toad." Hermione added.

Harry lowered his wand. "You came back."
“We shouldn't have left in the first place.” the bushy haired girl admitted.
“That's right. You shouldn't have.”
“We know and we're sorry.” Ron chimed in.

The dark-haired boy took another step back, feeling overwhelmed. He was happy to see them. He really was. They were his best friends and he had missed them. But they had deserted him when he would have needed them most and their betrayal still stung. He didn't even know what he was feeling right now.

“How did you get here? How did you find me?”
“It's a long story, mate.” Ron muttered.
“Can we talk? We've got a lot to tell you.” Hermione asked softly.
“Okay. Come on.”

Harry led them back into the protective circle without really thinking about it. Hermione's shocked cry made him whirl around, ready to face an intruder. Instead he saw his friends pointing their wands at Draco and he inwardly cursed himself for not mentioning the blond before.

He quickly stepped in front of the Slytherin. “It's okay. He's with me.”
“What? But Harry... that's Malfoy!” Ron protested.
“Yes, Ron. I've noticed. And I said he's with me. So put down your wand.”

The red-head complied slowly and without taking his eyes off Draco. Hermione followed suit, but she looked suspicious as well.
“Why are you out here with Malfoy of all people?” she wanted to know.

“Draco helped me. He saved my life. More than once.”
“What? You can't be serious.” Ron spluttered.
“But I am. So if you're planning to stay, I'll expect you to be nice to him.”

“You want us to make nice with the bloody ferret?”
“Don't call him that!” Harry ordered fiercely.

The red-head seemed about to explode, but Hermione intervened:
“Let him explain, Ron. I'm sure Harry has his reasons to trust Malfoy.” But despite her words, she still looked doubtful as well.

Harry sighed softly and flopped down onto the blanket, pulling Draco down beside him. He felt slightly overwhelmed and sought the blond's comforting presence without really thinking about it. His friends looked at him with matching frowns, but they kept silent and sat down as well. Harry couldn't help but notice that they were both still clutching their wands. This was going to be harder than he'd thought.

“After you left I went to Godric's Hollow. Which was a stupid idea. Because you were right, Hermione. He was expecting it. His Death Eaters were already waiting there for me and I got caught.”

She made a distressed noise, but Harry ignored her and went on: “They locked me in a cell in Malfoy Manor. And then... Draco came to save me. He helped me escape.” He decided against telling them about Rookwood and the torture, not wanting to relive those horrible moments. “We've been on the run together ever since.”

Stunned silence followed his words.
“But...” Ron spoke up again, only to be interrupted by Harry, who didn't want to listen to any more accusations.
“How did you find us?”

The red-head cast a glare in Draco's direction, but when Harry prodded again he reluctantly pulled out the Deluminator. “With this. We sort of... heard your voice. And it was coming out of this. But it didn't look any different. So I clicked it and the light in the room went out, but another light appeared. It was a ball of light, kind of pulsing and bluish. It was just sort of … hovering in the air. And then it drifted towards me and touched my chest and … it went inside me. And I knew that it would take me where I needed to go. So we disapparated.”

“That was last night. We arrived on the outskirts of a tiny village. There was a house... It was destroyed and … his symbol was hovering in the sky above the roof.” Hermione continued. “We thought we had gone wrong or were too late, so... we went back. And then we tried again today and … we ended up here.”

“A light went inside you?” Draco muttered doubtfully.

“Yes, it did! And I wasn't asking for your opinion!” Ron spat back.
“Stop it. Both of you!” Harry demanded.

“He started it!” the red-head insisted.
“He only asked you a question.”
“He was gearing up to make fun of me! And why are you siding with him? After everything he's done? That back-stabbing snake is probably just waiting for the right moment to deliver you to his master!”

“You don't know what you're talking about. He saved me!” Harry yelled, jumping to his feet.
“He's a manipulative bastard. You can't trust him!” Ron yelled back, jumping up as well.

Harry had heard enough. “Shut up, Ron! You don't get to come here and start sprouting accusations. Draco helped me. He risked his life for me, while you were sitting safely at home. He was there for me, after you had left. You just left. I could have been dead for all you knew!”

“We knew you weren't dead! You're all over the Prophet and the radio... They're looking for you everywhere. We would have heard it if you were dead.”

“We wanted to come back right away.” Hermione cut in.

Harry could see tears on her face and his anger deflated a little. He slumped back down next to Draco, who had watched the exchange silently.

“Then why didn't you?”

“Because we couldn't. We ran right into a group of snatchers. They're everywhere. Gangs trying to round up Muggle-borns and blood-traitors. There's a reward from the Ministry for everyone captured.” she explained. “We look like we might be school-age, so they thought we were Muggle-borns in hiding. Luckily they weren't the brightest.”

“One of them was definitely part troll, by the smell of him.” Ron added, glancing at Harry with a hopeful smile. But Harry didn't appreciate his attempt at humour, so he went on more somberly: “We talked fast and then they got into a fight over what to do with us. Somehow we managed to disarm two of them, grab our wands and disapparate. But I splinched myself again and we came out miles from where you were. And by the time we'd made it back to camp, you were gone.”

“And what did you do then?” Harry asked, a lot calmer now.

“We didn't know what to do.” Ron admitted. “At first we just waited for you to return, since you had
left the tent and lots of other stuff behind. But when you didn't, we finally went to see Bill and Fleur. Mum would've ripped us a new one. Bill wasn't happy about what we'd done either, but at least he didn't yell at us.”

“So we spent the holidays at their cottage.” Hermione took over again. “Tried to work out where to look for you. The only place we could come up with was Godric's Hollow. So we went there. Saw your old house and your parent's grave. But there was no sign that you’d been there. In the end we gave up and went back to the Cottage. And then the most wondrous thing happened.” She smiled a little at the memory.

“It was just getting dark and we were taking a walk along the shore, when we saw a silvery doe up ahead. Obviously a Patronus. We didn't see anyone nearby, but for some reason we both felt that it meant us no harm. That it was there to help. So we followed it. It led us to a pond and there was...” she stopped mid-sentence, eyeing Draco warily.

“What was there?” Harry asked. Hermione hesitated, still looking at the blond, who rolled his eyes and drawled: “I guess it wasn't another Horcrux. That would've been way too easy.”

Ron and Hermione gasped in unison, before turning questioning eyes on Harry. “Yes, he knows. I told him everything. He actually helped me get the next one. So what was there?” he prodded, getting impatient.

“It was the sword. The sword of Gryffindor.”

He looked at the girl in surprise. “Does that mean the locket...?”

“Yes, it's gone. Ron destroyed it.”

Another Horcrux gone. Harry felt elated.

“Well, once the locket was destroyed, we thought that our best bet of finding you would be to continue the search for Horcruxes.” Ron answered. “Hermione had found a weird symbol in the book from Dumbledore and I remembered that I'd seen it before. Once on a grave in Godric's Hollow and also at Bill's wedding. Xeno Lovegood had worn it as a pendant.”

“Grindelwald's mark.” Harry muttered.

The other three just looked at him sceptically.

“Krum told me. At the wedding. He'd seen it carved into a wall at Durmstrang and reckoned that Grindelwald put it there.”

“Oh, okay. Well, since we had no better lead, we decided to visit Lovegood and ask him about it.” Ron went on.

“And what did he tell you?”

“A lot of rubbish about the so-called Deathly Hallows.” Hermione grumbled. “There's this story. A tale of three brothers...”

“From the tales of Beedle the Bard? That's a children's story.” Draco cut in. At Harry's questioning look he explained: “It's about three wizard brothers trying to cheat death. They each get to choose a gift from death. So the first brother asks for an unbeatable wand. Death gives him the elder wand, but he brags about it and gets murdered in his sleep shortly after. The second brother asks for the power
to raise the dead. Death gives him the resurrection stone, which he uses to bring back his dead girlfriend. But the girl is only a shadow and he commits suicide in the end. And the third brother gets an invisibility cloak. He manages to hide from death and finally dies peacefully of old age.”

“That's true.” Hermione grudgingly agreed. “Mr. Lovegood claimed that those three items – the elder wand, the resurrection stone and the invisibility cloak, the Deathly Hallows as he called them - really exist and that whoever possessed them would be invincible.” she rolled her eyes. “Like I said, just a load of rubbish. I think he mostly wanted to keep us occupied. Because as it turned out, he had alerted the Death Eaters to our presence.”

“He did what?” Harry asked in shock.

“But... I thought he was on Harry's side.” Draco added. “He kept printing articles in that weird rag of his, telling everyone to help Harry.”

“Which was the reason we deemed in safe to visit him. But the Death Eaters were holding Luna captive. He did it to safe her.” Hermione let them know.

“How did you get away?”

“We didn't. They caught us and locked us up in a cell. We met Luna there. And Dean and Mr. Ollivander. By then one of the Death Eaters had figured out who we were. So they dragged me upstairs and questioned me about you. They...”

“They tortured her. Greyback and another guy.” Ron took over, when Hermione's voice broke. “We heard her screaming, down in the cell. It was horrible. When they figured that she either really knew nothing or wasn't going to talk, another guy came down to fetch me. We knew that it was our only chance. Somehow Dean and I managed to overpower him and take his wand. And then we stormed upstairs and... I guess we surprised them, because we managed to fight our way out.”

“And the others are okay? Luna and Dean? And Mr. Ollivander?” Harry checked.

“Yeah, they're fine. We all stayed with Bill and Fleur, until everyone had recovered. And now they're at auntie Muriel's, with the rest of my family. She has a big house and it's protected by the fidelius charm. Dad is secret keeper.” Ron reassured him. “We had to leave the sword behind, though. And we had this really weird chat with Ollivander. You-know-who had asked him all kinds of questions about a special wand. The death-stick, or whatever. Ollivander said that Gregorovitch was supposed to have it...”

“And Ron believes he was talking about the elder wand.” Hermione interrupted.

“It would make sense. And remember what Lovegood said about the invisibility cloak. I never really thought about it, but Harry's cloak is really special.”

“What, you think Harry's cloak is the one from the story?” Draco asked doubtfully.

“It could be. That would mean the cloak and the wand are real. So why not the stone, too?”

“It's just a story, Ron. And we shouldn't listen to Mr. Lovegood. He's...”

But Harry never heard what Xeno Lovegood was in Hermione's opinion. Because suddenly pain flared in his head, worse than ever before and he found himself standing in a dimly lit room, with a shaking goblin kneeling at his feet.

“It was... it was … the P...Potter boy and … the Malfoy boy... we tried to st.. stop them, but... they took … a s.. small golden cup.”

A scream of rage left his lips and his wand slashed through the air, slaying the goblin and every
Death Eater who didn't manage to run away fast enough.

It was impossible. Nobody had ever known. And yet... could the boy know of the others? The diary was destroyed and the cup was stolen. What of the others? Did the boy know? Had Dumbledore found out? He must know. He must be sure...

When Harry came back to himself he was lying on the blanket, with his head in Draco's lap. His three friends were all gazing at him worriedly, but it was the blond who spoke:
“He knows, doesn't he? That we stole the cup? That we're after his Horcruxes?”

“Yes, he knows.” the dark-haired boy croaked, his voice sounding strange to his own ears. “He knows and he's going to check where the others are. And the last one is at Hogwarts. I knew it!” He struggled to his feet and Draco was up in an instant, placing a steadying hand on his arm.

Ron and Hermione were staring at him, worry in their eyes.
“But how do you know?” the girl asked.

“I saw him finding out about the cup. He's seriously angry. And scared, too. He's going to check the others are safe. The ring first. He thinks Hogwarts is safest, because he alerted Snape that we might show up and it'll be so hard not to be seen getting in. I think he'll check that one last. But he could still be there within hours.”

“Did you see where it's hidden? Or what it even is?” Draco asked.
“No, he was concentrating on warning Snape...”

He pulled away from Draco and started gathering up his things. He'd been hoping to catch a few hours of sleep, but that was impossible. They had to act now. “We need to get going. We need to get there before he does. Before he has a chance of moving the Horcrux.”

“Wait!” Hermione cried. “We can't just go. We need a plan.”
“There's no time,” Harry argued. “You can stay here if you want, but I'm going. I'll go to Hogsmeade and work something out from there...”

“I'm coming with you. But she's right, Harry. We need a plan first.” Draco cut in. “And you can't just apparate into Hogsmeade. He's got Dementors stationed there. And all around Hogwarts. And you said he warned Snape. He'll be expecting us. He's going to be even more watchful.”

“But we can't waste any more time.” Harry insisted.
“It's not wasting time when we take five minutes to ensure we don't get caught right upon setting foot into Hogsmeade!”

They stared at each other, both breathing hard. He knew that Draco was right. That the blond's level-headedness was once again balancing his rash nature. But they had to hurry. Voldemort was already on the move...

“We could apparate into...” Ron spoke up timidly.
“I've told you a thousand times – you can't apparate into Hogwarts!” Hermione yelled.
“Oh... right.”

For a long, tense moment no-one moved. They all stood there, racking their brains for a plan.
“There has to be a way in.” Harry insisted.
“Maybe there is.” Draco murmured. “It's true that wizards and witches can't apparate into Hogwarts. But house elves can. And Mipsy told me to call her when I need help.”

Harry stared at him in awe. “She could get us in.”
“I believe so, yes. It'll still be dangerous. We don't really know what to expect and there's a high possibility we'll get caught. But that never stopped you.”

“Hey, it worked out last time.” the younger boy reminded. “And since this is your plan, I guess my reckless Gryffindor nature is starting to rub off on you.”

He blushed once the words had left his mouth, remembering what he and Draco had done before Ron and Hermione had arrived. Judging by the blond's smirk and the colour in his cheeks, he'd noticed the double-meaning of Harry's words, too.

“Obviously.”

Ron and Hermione were giving them funny looks, but Harry decided to worry about that later.

“I think it's our best bet. Call her.”

“Mipsy! Mipsy I need your help!”

They waited with baited breath and only seconds later there was the crack of apparition. Followed quickly by another. Mipsy had come. But she hadn't come alone.

“Dobby!” Harry gasped in surprise.

“Harry Potter, sir. Dobby came to help.” the tiny elf squeaked.

“Mipsy told Dobby how she's been freed.” the other elf let them know. “And when Master Draco called for Mipsy, Dobby wanted to come help, too.”

“That's great.” Harry said. “Listen. We need you to take us into Hogwarts. Can you do that? Without professor Snape noticing?”

Both elves nodded excitedly.

“Does Harry Potter want to go to the special hiding place of his friends?” Dobby asked.

“What hiding place?”

“Harry Potter's friends are hiding from professor Snape and the other bad people in the castle.” the elf squeaked, casting a quick look around, as if to make sure that no-one heard him talking bad about his employers. “The bad people can't get into the room. But Dobby has been helping Harry Potter's friends. He knows how to get in.”

Harry shared a quick look with the others, who nodded.

“Okay then. Mipsy, do you know how to get into the room as well?”

“Yes, Mipsy knows, sir.”

“Good. Then take us to this room. Maybe Dobby can take Ron and Hermione and Mipsy, could you take Draco and me?”

Again the elves nodded.

“Let's go then.”

They all grabbed their things and held their wands at the ready, just in case. Dobby took Hermione's and Ron's hands in his, while Mipsy took Harry and Draco. And they vanished into crushing darkness.

Chapter End Notes
So.... what do you think? Did the reunion go too smoothly? I think it did. Then again, they had to put aside their differences quickly, since Voldemort's on the move and all that...
They emerged in a large, brightly lit room. Harry saw coloured hangings, lamps and many faces, staring at them in astonishment. Several people yelled and seconds later they were surrounded by a crowd of students.

“Harry!”
“It's Potter! He's come!”
“Hey, it's Harry Potter!”

A dark-haired boy pushed to the front of the crowd. His hair was overgrown, his face cut and his robes ripped. Harry had to blink twice to realize he was staring at Neville, who grinned at him in delight, before crushing him in a hug.

“I knew you'd come. I knew it, Harry!”

He turned away to hug Ron and Hermione, too.

“Neville, what's...”
But Neville had just spied Draco and backed up a few steps, watching him warily.

“What's he doing here?”
Judging by the whispers of the people gathered around them, others had noticed the Slytherin as well.

“Draco is with me. He saved my life. I trust him.” Harry said loudly.

There were more whispers. Neville seemed a little uncertain now.

“Neville, what happened to you?” Hermione asked.

“What? This?” the boy dismissed his injuries with a shake of his head. “This is nothing. Got into it with the Carrows, that's all. Seamus is worse.”

Draco flinched at the mention of the Carrows. Harry looked at him questioningly.

“They're Death Eaters. They teach here, but they're also in charge of the discipline. At least they were before Christmas break. You know that I never returned after the holidays.”

“They still are.” Neville cut in. “They like punishment. Amycus teaches what used to be DADA. Now it's just the Dark Arts. We're supposed to practise the Crucius Curse on people who've earned detentions. I got punished when I refused. Some people are into it, though. Crabbe and Goyle love it.” He cast an accusing look at Draco, who blushed and looked away.

“Amicus sister Alecto is just as bad. The thing is, it helps when people stand up to them. I noticed that when you did it, Harry. So we kept going. Everyone in the DA. We used to sneak out at night and put graffiti on the walls and stuff. But it got more difficult as time went on. We lost Luna at Christmas and Ginny never came back after Easter. The three of us were sort of the leaders...”
“Luna is alright, Neville. We've seen her. And Ginny, too.” Hermione assured.
“I know. Luna sent me a message.” He pulled a golden coin from his pocket and Harry recognized it as one of the fake Galleons they had used for the DA.

“These have been great. They never figured out how we were communicating.” he said with a grin, but it quickly vanished. “But like I said, it's gotten more difficult lately. They know I was behind a lot. They even tried to go after Gran.” He chuckled. “Stupid idea. Dawlish is still in St. Mungo's and Gran's on the run. But I knew I had to disappear. And others soon followed and here we are.”

“Where exactly are we?” Harry wanted to know.
“Room of requirement, of course. It was a lot smaller at first, but it expanded as more and more of the DA arrived. As long as one of us always stays in this room, the Carrows can't get in. We're safe here.”

“But now tell us what you've been up to.” Seamus prodded and Harry winced. He really did look even worse than Neville.
“Yeah, we heard so many rumours.” one of the Patil twins said.
“Why are you suddenly friends with Malfoy?” Terry wondered.
“Is it true you broke into Gringotts and escaped on a dragon?” Ernie wanted to know.

“Yes. Well, Draco and I did...” Harry admitted.
“A dragon?!” Hermione shrieked.
A few people whooped and there was a smattering of applause. More questions arose. People were talking over each other.

Suddenly Harry felt a terrible pain in his scar. He quickly turned his back on the room and the many expectant faces, as the vision washed over him. With enormous effort he pulled out of Voldemort's mind again. Draco was looking at him in concern.

“He knows the locket's gone.” Harry whispered. The blond nodded. They couldn't waste any more time.
“We need to get going.” the dark-haired boy announced.

“Cool. What's the plan, Harry?” Seamus asked eagerly.
“What? No, there's no plan. We've ... got to do something and then we're off again. We can't stay.”

There was a lot of muttering at this. People kept insisting that they could help, that they wanted to fight. No matter what Harry said, they wouldn't back down. And then a door opened on the side and Luna and Dean entered the room.

“We got your message.” Luna announced.
“What message?” Harry asked.
“I sent for her.” Neville admitted, holding up the fake Galleon. “I sent for all of them. We thought... now that you're here... we're going to overthrow Snape and the Carrows.”

“How... how did you even get here, Luna?” Hermione wanted to know.
“Through the tunnel, of course. It leads directly to the Hog's Head. We just apparated into the inn and then walked through the tunnel.” Luna explained calmly. “Though I think Aberforth wasn't too happy to see us.”

And before Harry had a chance to protest, or ask who the hell Aberforth was, more people started arriving. Fred and George, followed by Ginny, Cho and their friend Lee Jordan. They were all looking at Harry expectantly, wanting to know what the plan was.
“There is no plan.” Harry tried to tell them again, overwhelmed with the situation. His scar was burning. It was getting harder and harder to block images from Voldemort's mind, despite Draco's occlumency training. And there were his two ex-girlfriends in the room with him. It was all very distracting. Seeing Ginny didn't make his heart race in the slightest, which still surprised him, despite what had happened with Draco at the lake. She also wouldn't meet his eyes and he wondered if she somehow knew.

Draco took his arm and pulled him back a bit. Ron and Hermione followed, looking apprehensive. “Why can't they help? We don't know where it is and time's running out. We don't have to tell them it's a Horcrux.” the Slytherin suggested.

“Hate to say this, but he's right.” Ron agreed.

“You don't have to do everything alone, Harry.” Draco whispered.

And he was right. Of course he was right. He had taken a chance when he'd chosen to trust the blond, but it had paid off.

“Alright.”

He turned back to the others. “There's something we need to find. Something that'll help us defeat Voldemort. We know that it's hidden here at Hogwarts, but we don't know where. Only that it might have belonged to Ravenclaw. Has anyone ever heard of an object like that?”

“You mean like her lost diadem?” Luna asked. “I told Ron and Hermione about it. It's very famous.”

“Yes, but it's LOST, Luna.” Michael Corner reminded, rolling his eyes.

The Ravenclaws started discussing this, but Harry heard none of it. His scar burned again and he saw that Voldemort was on the move. Though he didn't know where he was headed.

“She's wearing it in her statue. If you want to have a look, Harry, I could show you.” Cho offered.

“Okay. It's not much of a lead, but I'll have a look.” he decided.

Cho got up, but Draco cut in quickly: “Why doesn't Luna show us?”

“Ohh, yes. I'd like to.” Luna agreed happily.

Harry pulled out his invisibility cloak, ready to protest that they wouldn't all fit under it. But Luna had to show them the way and he didn't want to leave Draco behind with the others, knowing that they didn't trust the Slytherin. So he handed his rucksack to Hermione, asking her to keep it safe, hoping she'd understand that he meant the Horcrux.

“I will. But … shouldn't we come with you?”

“No, it's fine. I've got Draco as back-up. And more people wouldn't fit under the cloak.”

“And you're really sure you can trust him?”

“I am, Hermione. Trust me on this, okay? He's on our side.”

She didn't look happy, but she backed down. “Okay, but please be careful.” she warned.

“Don't worry. I'll see you in a bit.”

“What about us, Harry Potter, sir?” Dobby suddenly squeaked.

Harry had completely forgotten about the two elves.

“Go back to the kitchens. We'll call you if we need help, okay?”

They assured him that they'd love to help in any way and disappeared with two loud cracks.

Harry shook his head, slipped under the cloak with Draco and Luna and they crept out through a door. After checking the Marauder's Map, they set off towards Ravenclaw Tower.
Happy new year everyone. And thank you all so much for the encouraging comments.

I copied quite a bit from the book for this chapter, so I hope it's not too boring. I also changed a bit.

It was slow going, with the cloak barely covering all three of them. They had to stop a few times to let ghosts pass by, but they finally reached the entrance without incident. Luna solved the riddle to get the door to open. Once inside, Harry and Draco went to look at the beautiful statue of Ravenclaw.

Both boys jumped at a cackling laugh behind them, spinning around to face a dark-haired witch. Alecto Carrow. She laughed at them and pressed her finger to the Dark Mark branded on her forearm. Harry's scar burned anew. He felt Voldemort's vicious triumph at his capture.

Then there was a loud bang and Alecto collapsed to the ground. Luna had stunned her. Draco quickly pulled her and Harry back under the cloak, since the noise had woken the sleeping Ravenclaws, who were coming down and crowding around Alecto.

Only minutes later Alecto's brother started banging on the door, trying to get inside. His shouts alerted McGonagall, who finally opened the door for him, by answering the question. The Ravenclaws fled back to their rooms.

Upon finding his sister stunned, Amycus yelled in fear and started flinging insults at McGonagall. When he spat at her, Harry couldn't take it any longer. He burst out from beneath the cloak, raised his wand and used the Cruciatus Curse on Amycus, who was raised into the air and smashed into a bookcase.

"Professor, we haven't got time. Voldemort's on the way." Harry let her know.
Draco and Luna pulled off the cloak and the Transfigurations professor fell into a chair, staring at all of them in turn.

"You must flee, Potter." she whispered.
"I can't. There's something I need to find first. It's hidden here at Hogwarts."
"But... Potter it was utter madness for you to enter the castle..."

"I had to. Time's running out, professor." Harry insisted.
"Harry's acting on Dumbledore's orders." Draco cut in.
"You're acting on Dumbledore's orders?" McGonagall repeated in wonder.
"Yes, I am. There's something hidden here that he wanted me to find."

Again she looked at all of them in turn, though her eyes lingered on Draco the longest.
"Draco helped me. He's on our side." Harry felt the need to clarify.

McGonagall nodded slowly. Then she drew herself up to her fullest hight.
“Very well, Potter. We shall secure the school against He-who-must-not-be-named, while you search for this ... this object.”

Harry felt a wave of gratitude.  
“Thank you, professor. But we've got to get the students out. Voldemort wants me, but he won't care about killing anyone else.”
“I don't know how we should accomplish that. With the Floo Network under observation and...”

“There's a way.” Harry said and then quickly explained about the passage through the Hog's Head that Luna had mentioned. Luna filled in the blanks and finally McGonagall agreed and told them to get back under the cloak. She then led them back into the corridor, sending off three Patronuses to alert the other teachers.

They didn't get far however, before they ran right into Snape. Hatred boiled inside Harry, while McGonagall calmly faced the new headmaster. Draco squeezed Harry's arm in warning and mouthed: “Let her handle him.”

And before he really knew what was happening, McGonagall had started duelling Snape and the three teenagers had to seek cover from flying spells. Suddenly Flitwick and Sprout joined the fight, with Slughorn merely watching in apprehension. The fight ended as quickly as it had begun. Snape, realizing that he was outmatched, chose to flee through a window.

After that things became a bit blurry. McGonagall ordered everyone to meet in the Great Hall and sent Harry, Draco and Luna to fetch the others from the room of requirement. When they arrived back there, it was far more packed than it had been when they'd first entered. It seemed the whole DA was now gathered there, along with the members of the Order of the Phoenix.

Harry quickly filled them in about the evacuation and Snape's flight. Most of the students started for the Great Hall. While Harry reunited with Remus, who told him about his son Teddy and asked Harry to become the boy's godfather, the Weasleys finally made peace with Percy, who had come to join the fight. There was some discussion when Mrs. Weasley tried to send a protesting Ginny back home.

She sent Harry a pleading look, but he barely noticed it. Hermione and Ron were suspiciously absent and no matter who he asked, no-one seemed to know where they had gotten off to. He finally allowed Draco to steer him towards the Great Hall, when the blond reasoned that they'd probably find them there.

The hall was packed with chattering, frightened students, some wearing travelling cloaks, others only dressing gowns. McGonagall was explaining the situation and coordinating the evacuation. Harry and Draco moved through the hall, still looking for Ron and Hermione. A lot of people turned to stare at Harry and there was a great deal of whispering.

Suddenly a high, cold voice echoed throughout the hall. It seemed to issue from the walls themselves. Students screamed and looked around in fright, as Voldemort told them that he knew they were preparing to fight and that they wouldn't stand a chance.

“I do not want to kill you. I do not want to spill magical blood.” he hissed. “Give me Harry Potter and none shall be harmed. You have until midnight.”

An eerie silence descended upon the hall. Every head turned and everyone seemed to stare at Harry. Until Pansy Parkinson rose from the Slytherin table and pointed a shaky hand at him.
“He's there. Potter's there! Someone grab him!” she screamed.
Harry felt frozen in place. Before he could react, Draco had stepped in front of him and turned to glare at Pansy.

“If you want him, you'll have to go through me.”

There was a flurry of movement. The Gryffindors stood to join Draco and shield Harry. Then the Ravenclaws followed. And the Hufflepuffs. And after that even some Slytherins. Harry felt a rush of gratitude.

“How you, Miss Parkinson.” McGonagall said in a clipped voice. “You will leave the hall first.”

And with that the evacuation started.

When Kingsley stepped up to address those who would remain behind and fight, McGonagall turned to Harry.

“Potter, aren't you supposed to be looking for something?”

“What? Oh... yeah.”

“Then go, Potter.”

So he did. He ran out of the hall, with Draco on his heels. Once outside he stopped and took out the Marauder’s Map, but with so many people moving around, he couldn't find Ron and Hermione anywhere.

“Forget about them. We need to look for the Horcrux.” Draco reminded.

“I know. But where? If it is the diadem of Ravenclaw... where could it be? Where would he have hidden it?” Harry wondered, thinking again of the statue of Rowena Ravenclaw, with the stone diadem upon her white curls.

“I don't know. Where would you hide something at Hogwarts?” the blond asked.

The answer to that was simple. In the room of requirement, where he'd hidden Snape's old potions book. And with a sudden shock that nearly made him stumble, Harry remembered the ugly stone bust, on to whose head he had placed a wig and a battered, old tiara.

“I know where it is!”

“What?”

“I know where it is! Come on!”

And they took off again. The battle had started while they’d been arguing. Windows were splintering as they ran past and people were running around, shouting instructions at each other. They passed professor Sprout, who was leading Neville and a few others students and Fred and George, guarding one of the old passages into the school.

And then they skidded around another corner and nearly ran into Ron and Hermione, both with their arms full of large, curved, dirty yellow objects.

“Where the hell have you been?” Harry shouted.

“Chamber of Secrets.” said Ron.

“What?”

“It was Ron, all Ron's idea.” Hermione gushed breathlessly. “Wasn’t it absolutely brilliant?”

“Something to get rid of Horcruxes.” Ron explained and Harry finally recognized those strange objects as curved fangs, torn from the skull of a dead basilisk.

“But how did you get in there? You need to speak Parseltongue.”

“He did! Show him, Ron.” Hermione urged excitedly.
Ron made a horrible, hissing noise, then shrugged and muttered: “You talk in your sleep.”

“So...”
“We're another Horcrux down.” Ron said, before pulling out the mangled remains of the cup.
“Hermione stabbed it.”

“Genius!” Harry yelled.
“Harry knows where the next one is.” Draco let them know.
“Room of requirement. I saw it back when I hid my potions book.”

Without another word they sped back to the room of requirement. It was empty now save for three women – Ginny, Tonks and Neville's grandmother, who promptly went to join the fighting. As did Tonks, after inquiring about Remus. Harry sent Ginny out, knowing full well that she wouldn't come back in to hide. She would fight, too. It was her decision, he reasoned with himself.

They left the room and he was just about to wish for the room full of junk, when Ron suddenly remembered that the house elves would still be down in the kitchens and that they should have been evacuated as well.

Dropping the basilisk fangs, Hermione flung her arms around his neck and kissed him. The red-head dropped his share of fangs and responded enthusiastically.

“Is this the moment?” Harry asked weakly.
“Hey, stop it! There's a war going on!” Draco yelled at them.
As if to prove his words, the walls and ceiling shook and dust filled the air.

Ron and Hermione pulled apart sheepishly and started gathering the fangs. Harry shook his head and wished for the room. The door appeared and they hurried inside, leaving the sounds of battle behind.

The room looked exactly like Harry remembered it. Mountains of junk, piled up to the ceiling. Draco looked around warily and shuddered when they passed the vanishing cabinet he had mended last year, with such disastrous consequences.

“Let's split up.” Harry decided. “Look for a stone bust of an old man, wearing a wig and a tiara.”
The others nodded and they set off in different directions, going deeper and deeper into the labyrinth.

Finally, after what felt like an eternity of wandering around aimlessly, Harry saw the bust, right up ahead. He stretched out his hand and was about to grab the tiara, when a voice behind him ordered: “Hold it, Potter.”

He turned around to find Crabbe and Goyle standing there, wands pointed straight at him. He couldn't hear the others.
“What are you doing here?”

“We're gonna be rewarded.” Crabbe said triumphantly. “We decided to bring you to him.”
“How did you get in here?” Harry asked.
“We've been guarding this room for Draco last year. So we was hiding out in the corridor.” Goyle answered him. “We can do Diss-lusion Charms now. And then you turned up and we just followed you in.” His face split into a grin.

Deciding to throw caution to the wind, Harry lunged for the tiara.
“Crucio!” Crabbe yelled.
The curse missed Harry, but hit the stone bust, which flew into the air. The diadem dropped out of sight.
“Crabbe! Stop!”
Harry turned his head to see Draco standing there, his wand pointed at his former friends.
Goyle faltered slightly, but Crabbe only sneered.
“I don't take orders from you no more, Draco. You're a traitor!”

“Then you leave me no choice.” the blond concluded and shot a stunning spell at Crabbe, who
dodged at the last second.
“Traitor! Avada Kedavra!”

Harry saw Draco dive aside and the fury that Crabbe had aimed to kill wiped all else from his mind.
He shouted: “Crucio!” and watched in satisfaction as Crabbe was lifted off his feet and slammed into
a heap of junk behind him.

Hermione and Ron had obviously heard the commotion. They rounded the corner and managed to
disarm Goyle, who tried to run for cover, but was hit with a stunning spell by Draco.
“It's somewhere here!” Harry yelled. The blond nodded and disappeared. Harry started looking
around wildly.

“Harry!” Hermione suddenly screamed.
A roaring noise was all the warning he got. He turned and saw both Crabbe and Ron running
towards him. Flames of abnormal size were pursuing them, burning down everything in their wake.
“Run!” Ron yelled and he obeyed without a second thought.

It was apparent that this was no ordinary fire. Crabbe had used a curse Harry had never heard of.
The fire seemed to grow ever bigger and hotter and Crabbe had no control over it. The flames chased
them as though they were alive.

Harry stopped dead. Hermione and Ron were panting beside him and there was no sign of Draco.
The fire was closing in around them, solid as a wall.
“What can we do?” Hermione screamed.
Harry was panicking, looking around wildly for Draco and not finding him anywhere.

“Here!”
Ron grabbed a pair of heavy-looking broomsticks from the nearest pile and threw one to Harry,
before pulling Hermione on behind himself. They kicked off the ground and soared into the air. The
smoke and heat were becoming overwhelming. Below them the cursed fire was consuming
everything.

Harry swooped as low as he dared, looking around frantically. The black smoke was making it
impossible to see. Ron was urging him on to go. To get out of here. But he couldn't leave Draco
behind.

And then he finally saw him. With his arm around an unconscious Goyle, perched on a fragile tower
of charred desks. And clutched in his free hand, the tiara. Without thinking twice about it, Harry
dived.

“If we die for them I'll kill you, Harry!” Ron roared beside him. But the red-head was diving as well
and somehow he and Hermione managed to drag Goyle onto their broom. Draco clambered up
behind Harry.
“Get us out of here!” he yelled.

Harry sped up, following Hermione, Ron and Goyle through the billowing smoke, hardly able to
breathe. All around them the last objects burned to ash. The heat was getting unbearable and Draco

...
was holding him so tightly it hurt.

Then, finally, he saw a rectangular patch on the wall and steered the broom at it. Moments later they collided with the wall in the corridor beyond and fell off the broom, coughing and retching. The door vanished and Harry saw Ron and Hermione sitting beside the still unconscious Goyle.

“I think... compared to that, I preferred the dragon.” Draco panted.
Harry looked at him and felt hysteric laughter bubble out of him. Hermione just shook her head and cast a wary glance at Goyle.

“I know he's an idiot. But I couldn't just leave him in there to die. It's bad enough that Crabbe...”
Draco broke off, swallowing hard.
Harry squeezed his shoulder gently. It had been Crabbe's own fault, for using that curse and creating that fire, but he still felt bad for the boy.

“What's that you got there, Malfoy?” Ron wanted to know.

The blond held up the diadem, as if he'd just remembered that he had it. It was blackened with soot and a blood-like substance, dark and tarry, seemed to be leaking from it. As they all stared at it, it gave a sort of violent shudder and broke apart. Harry thought he heard the faintest scream.

“It must have been Fiendfyre.” Hermione whimpered.
“Sorry?”
“Cursed fire.” she explained. “It's one of the substances that can destroy a Horcrux, but it's extremely dangerous. How did Crabbe know how to...?”
“Probably learned it from the Carrows.” Harry guessed.

“But don't you realize?” Draco whispered. “That means if we can just get the snake...”
He broke off as shouts and the obvious sounds of battle drew nearer. Seconds later Fred and Percy appeared, duelling two masked and hooded men.

Harry, Ron and Hermione ran forward to help and in no time the first Death Eater crumbled at their feet.

“Hello minister. Did I mention I'm resigning?” Percy yelled at the other one, who had lost his hood, before hitting him with a jinx that made him crumble as well.

“You're joking, Perce!” Fred shouted in glee. “I think I haven't heard you joking since...”

A cracking sound drowned out his words. Seconds later the wall beside them exploded.
“Protego!” someone yelled. Harry felt an arm around his waist, pulling him back and he fell to the ground, stones and debris raining down around them.
Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

Thanks for all your sweet and encouraging comments. They really made my day. Well, days.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Harry jerked upright with a cough. The cold air made him shiver and he realized with a start that the side of the castle had been blown away. Something hot and wet trickled down the side of his head. When he touched the spot his hand came away stained with blood. The corridor had been almost completely wrecked. As the dust settled, he looked around frantically.

Draco was right behind him, a little battered, but thankfully alive and not badly injured. Harry realized that the blond must have pulled him out of harms way. A few feet to their left Hermione and Ron were already staggering to their feet. Both had a few nasty gashes on their faces and arms, but seemed otherwise unharmed. Then a pained moan drew his eyes to the side.

Fred was struggling to sit up, his left arm hung limply and uselessly at his side and blood was oozing from a wound on his head. Percy did his best to help him up, but he was injured as well. A dark red stain had formed on his right flank and was quickly growing.

“Oh god, Fred! Percy! How bad is it?” Hermione asked.
“Oh I've felt better.” Fred muttered, wincing and swaying when he was finally on his feet.
“We'd both be worse off if he hadn't reacted on time.” Percy said quietly, staring at Draco in surprise.
“He cast a shield charm on us. Otherwise that wall would have buried us.”

“It was the only thing I could think of.” the blond said with a shrug.
“Thank you.” Ron whispered. He looked ghostly pale.

The second of reverie was quickly broken. Curses were still flying around them and suddenly a huge Acromantula tried to climb in through the hole in the wall. Ron and Harry shouted together and the monster was blown backwards.

“We need to get out of here!” Hermione yelled.

Ron helped Percy steady Fred and together they made their way down the corridor as fast as they could, with Harry, Draco and Hermione stunning every Death Eater they came across. Thanks to the injured Weasleys their pace was slow and for every Death Eater that fell, two new ones seemed to pop up.

Rounding a corner they nearly collided with Bill and George, who were in pursuit of another group of Death Eaters. Both skidded to a halt when they spied their injured brothers.

“Fred! What happened to you?” George yelled, running over to his twin.
“A wall collapsed. Can you take them to Madam Pomfrey?” Hermione asked.
“Yeah, no problem.” Bill assured, slinging an arm around Percy, while George steadied his twin.

Hermione thanked them. Once they had disappeared out of sight, she yanked Ron behind a tapestry.
Harry and Draco followed cautiously, almost afraid they'd find them kissing again. But Hermione had other things in mind.

“We've got to kill the snake.” she said. “You need to find out where Voldemort is, Harry. He'll have the snake with him, won't he? Do it – look inside his head.”

Harry didn't think it would be that easy, but when he closed his eyes, the screams and other sounds of battle died away and he found himself standing in a strangely familiar room. Lucius Malfoy was facing him and Voldemort ordered the blond to fetch Snape.

With a gasp he pulled back and opened his eyes. The sounds of battle seemed even louder than before, after this brief moment of respite.

“He's in the Shrieking Shack. The snake is with him and he just sent for Snape.”

“What? He's not even fighting?” Hermione asked.

“He thinks he doesn't need to fight. He knows I'm after his Horcruxes. So I'll have to come to him, if I want to kill the snake.” Harry reasoned.

“Right.” Ron said. “So you can't go. That's what he's expecting. You stay here and I'll go and...”

“No way! You guys stay here. I'll take the cloak.” Harry decided.

“You're not going alone.” Draco protested.

“It makes much more sense if I take the cloak...” Hermione reasoned.

They all stopped and stared at each other, a little bemused.

“No really, I'll go.” Harry insisted.

“Alright. But we'll come with you.” Ron said quietly

The other two nodded in agreement.

“We're in this together, Harry. We're not deserting you a second time.” Hermione whispered.

“And you won't get rid of me that easily, Potter.” Draco joked weakly.

Harry felt eternally grateful to all of them.

“Okay then. Let's go.”

***

Easier said than done. At first they tried using the invisibility cloak, but it wasn't big enough to cover all four of them, so Harry stuffed it back under his sweater. They ran down a staircase and found themselves in a corridor full off duellers. There were Death Eaters everywhere, fighting students and teachers alike.

Somehow the four of them managed to fight their way through the fray, but there were more duels going on down the staircase and in the hall below. They stuck together, shooting stunning spells left and right as they went on.

Just as they reached the bottom of the stairs, the front-doors flew open and even more gigantic spiders forced their way in. The fighters scattered and started shooting spells at the Acromantulas instead. Harry's eyes widened in horror when Hagrid suddenly appeared, waving his pink umbrella and running right into the midst of the giant spiders, trying to protect the monsters.

The spiders retreated under the onslaught of spells, taking the half-giant with them.

“Hagrid!” Harry yelled and ran after them.

He could hear the other three following close behind, but by the time they made it out of the castle, the giant spiders had vanished back into the forbidden forest. And Hagrid with them.
Harry continued running, ignoring Draco's pleas to slow down, until suddenly the air turned cold. The Gryffindor finally stopped dead in his tracks, a sense of dread growing within him. About a hundred Dementors came gliding towards them.

But neither of them seemed able to produce one. Harry shuddered as the Dementors drew close.

All of a sudden a silver hare, a boar and a fox sped past them and the Dementors started to retreat. Harry turned around to find Luna, Ernie and Seamus behind them.

“That's right, Harry. Think of something happy.” Luna whispered. When he could only stare at her she pointed out: “We're all still here. Still fighting.”

His gaze slid from her over to Draco, Hermione and Ron. His friends still stood by him. They wouldn't desert him. And suddenly he was able to conjure his own Patronus. Together with the other three animals, the beautiful stag drove the Dementors back.

But the moment of triumph was brief. A giant came stumbling towards them, brandishing a huge club. Draco grabbed Harry's arm and dragged him out of harms way. The dark-haired boy glanced over his shoulder to see Ron and Hermione following them. Luna and the others however seemed to have re-joined the battle.

He had no time to worry about them now. They had to get the snake. It was the only way to end this. So he steered the others towards the Whomping Willow, while curses flew all around them and jets of red and green light illuminated the night.

“What the hell are you doing?” Draco shouted at him.
“You'll see.” Harry shouted back.

They skidded to a halt just out of reach of the whipping branches and Ron levitated a branch onto the knot at the foot of the tree. Harry hesitated briefly. What if it was a trap? What if he was leading his friends right into Voldemort's waiting arms?

“Come on, Harry.” Hermione urged.

There was nothing for it. Taking a deep breath he nodded and crawled into the tunnel. It seemed smaller than he remembered it. Then again, he'd been only thirteen when he'd last used it. He had grown since then.

It was slow going, with only his wand lighting the way. He kept expecting a barrier to stop them any time, but none came, which only made his unease grow. When he heard voices, he put out the light of his wand.

“Put the cloak on.” Hermione hissed from somewhere behind him and he struggled to comply. Then he crawled forward, until the reached the opening at the end of the tunnel. It was blocked by some kind of crate, so he crouched down and peered through.

There was Nagini, suspended in the air in some sort of enchanted, starry sphere. Harry wondered what kind of spell might penetrate that magical barrier. He wouldn't be able to try out more than one. Cloak or not, once he shot a spell at the snake, he'd give away his position.

Then Snape came into view and Harry also saw Voldemort. They were talking about the battle.
“I have a problem, Severus. The elder wand – why doesn't it work for me?”

Snape started to stammer and assure his master that he'd performed extraordinary magic with the wand. When Voldemort didn't seem impressed, he offered to find and capture Harry. But Voldemort
declined, still sure that Harry would come to him.

“My concern right now is what will happen when I finally meet the boy.” he said. “Both wands I have failed when directed at Harry Potter. So I sought the elder wand, the most powerful of all. I took it from the grave of Albus Dumbledore. And all night I have sat here, wondering why it refuses to perform as legend says it should for its rightful master. And I think I have the answer.”

Snape did not speak. He had gone marble white and completely still.

“I regret what must happen.” Voldemort said, though he didn't sound like he regretted anything.

“You have been a good and faithful servant. But the elder wand cannot serve me properly, because I am not its rightful master. You killed Dumbledore. While you live, Severus, the wand cannot truly be mine.”

“My lord.” Snape protested.

But Voldermort ignored him. He swiped the air with the elder wand. For a second nothing seemed to happen. But then Nagini was released from her magical cage and tumbled down onto Snape's shoulders.

“Kill!” Voldemort hissed in Parseltongue.

There was a terrible scream as the snake's fangs pierced Snape's neck. His knees gave way and he fell to the floor. Voldemort swept from the room without a backwards glance, the snake slithering after him.

With shaking fingers Harry pointed his wand at the crate and it slid silently to the side. Shrugging off the cloak he approached the dying man, a trembling Draco at his side. When Snape caught sight of him, his eyes widened.

“Potter... always been... on your side... believe me... Need to know... Take it. Take … it.”

Something more than blood was leaking from him. A silvery-blue substance was gushing from his ears and mouth. Harry could only stare in shock. But when Hermione thrust a flask into his hands – obviously conjured from thin air – he used his wand to pull the silvery substance into the flask, filling it to the brim.

Snape's eyes slid to the side and Harry saw a lone tear sliding down his cheek.

“Draco...” he whispered.

The blond gave a choked sob.

“Mipsy!”

His yell made all of them jump. The answering crack even more so. Mipsy stared at her former master with large, questioning eyes.

Draco seemed to hesitate for a moment. “Take him to Madam Pomfrey.” he ordered then, pointing at the potions master. “Save him. If you can.”

The elf nodded, grabbed Snape's hand and apparated away. Draco turned to face Harry.

“I know what he's done. I know you hate him, but... he's always been there for me.” he whispered, staring at the younger boy pleadingly, willing him to understand.

“It's okay. I get it.” Harry assured.

“I don't.” Ron grumbled.

But his voice was drowned out by another. Voldemort's cold, hissing tones filled the air, as it had
done earlier that night and they all jumped in shock.

“You have fought valiantly. Yet you have sustained heavy losses. If you continue to resist me, you will die, one by one. Lord Voldemort is merciful. I command my forces to retreat, immediately. You have one hour. Dispose of your dead. Treat your injured.”

Then he addressed Harry directly: “You have permitted your friends to die for you, rather than face me yourself. I shall wait for one hour in the forbidden forest. If you have not come to me, have not given yourself up by the end of that hour, I shall punish every last man, woman and child who has tried to conceal you from me.”

“Don't listen to him, Harry.” Hermione said at once. 
“She's right. You can't go. That's suicide and he won't spare anyone if you sacrifice yourself.” Draco agreed.

Harry just nodded. Quietly they made their way back to the castle. By the time they left the tunnel the spell fire had ceased. It was eerily silent. The dark lawn was full of bodies, but Harry was scared to take a closer look at them. Too afraid of who he might see, lying motionless in the grass.

Finally they reached the Great Hall and stopped in the doorway. The house tables were gone and the room was crowded. The injured were being treated by Madam Pomfrey and her helpers on the platform. The dead were lying in a row in the middle of the hall. Harry saw Remus and Tonks among them. And little Colin Creevey.

Ron and Hermione immediately went to join the other Weasleys. Fred's arm was in a sling, his head heavily bandaged. Percy and Bill looked not much better and George seemed to be favouring his left leg. But at least they were all alive.

Again Harry's eyes were drawn to the still form of Remus. He remembered the werewolf laughing and showing off baby pictures only a few hours ago. Remembered Remus naming him godfather of his newborn son. And now that son was an orphan. Just like Harry. His parents had died, trying to protect Harry. Just like his own parents had died protecting him.

And suddenly it was all too much. Too real. He couldn't take it. He didn't want to see who else had died for him tonight. He backed away slowly, then turned and broke into a run.

The castle was empty. It seemed that everyone had gathered in the Great Hall, so Harry didn't encounter anyone in his mad dash through corridors, up stairs and past gaping holes in the sturdy walls. He ran until he reached Dumbledore's office. The portraits there were empty as well. With shaking hands Harry pulled out the pensieve and emptied the vial with Snape's memories into it.

Chapter End Notes

Of course I couldn't let Fred die. Did you really think I would? His death is one of the things I'll never forgive J.K. Rowling (along with the deaths of Sirius, Remus, Dobby and Hedwig).

Still, some people had to die. Like Remus. I'm a wolfstar shipper, so since Sirius is already dead here, Remus had to die, too. Makes no sense, does it? Well, that's just how I feel. And I also wanted Harry to feel connected to Teddy.
Draco got up from where he'd been sitting, with his back to the wall, when Harry finally emerged from Dumbledore's office. The younger boy looked pale and shaken. And surprised to see him. He obviously hadn't noticed the blond running after him earlier in his mad flight from the Great Hall.

Harry stopped mere inches from him. For what felt like hours they just looked at each other. “I viewed Snape's memories.” Harry finally broke the silence. “And... he told the truth. He's always been on our side. Dumbledore was actually right to trust him.”

“He killed Dumbledore.” Draco reminded softly. “Because Dumbledore had asked him to do it.”

“He did what?” That just didn't make any sense.

“He had triggered a curse. He would've died anyway. I know it's crazy and I'd love to explain, but... I'm running out of time.”

A sense of dread washed over Draco at those words. “Please tell me you're not really planning on going to the forest.”

“I have to.”

“No! There's got to be another way. He was lying, Harry. He won't spare anyone...”

“I know. It's not about that.” the dark-haired boy interrupted.

“What then? If it's the snake...”

“There's another Horcrux.”

“Another one? Besides Nagini?” Draco asked.

“Dumbledore wanted Snape to tell me. At the last moment...” He swallowed hard, like it pained him to remember what he'd seen in Snape's memories. “There's another Horcrux. One even Voldemort himself doesn't know about.”

“But how is that possible?”

“He didn't mean to create it. He doesn't know that he did. The night... when he killed my parents, a part of his soul... latched onto me. I'm the last Horcrux.” Harry finished in a whisper.

Draco shook his head wildly. He didn't want to believe it.

“No! Harry, please...”

“As long as I live, he can't be defeated.”

“You can't go.”

“I have to.”
“But... I don't want to lose you.” the blond whispered. And he didn't care if he sounded like a frightened child. They had only just really found each other. It wasn't fair.

“I don't want to leave you. But this isn't about us. And you know it.”
Yes, he did know. But still he shook his head in denial.
“I have to do this, Draco. There's no other way.” Harry insisted. Tears were glistening in his eyes.
“Please... will you explain it to Ron and Hermione? They wouldn't understand. They'd try to stop me.”

“What makes you think I won't try to stop you?”
“I know you won't. Because this is my choice. Because you understand. And because you're strong enough to let me go.”

He closed the last distance separating them and gently cupped Draco's cheek, wiping away tears. The blond hadn't even noticed that he'd started to cry.
“I wish we could have had more time. But I'm still glad I got to know the real you.”

Draco surged forward and crushed their mouths together in a desperate kiss. Harry returned the kiss just as passionately, clutching at the blond like a drowning man in a storm. But he pulled back all too soon and with one last, teary smile he wrapped himself in his invisibility cloak.

Draco heard his footsteps fading away and once it was quiet he sank back down to the floor and started sobbing in earnest.

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He had no idea how long he just sat there, until the tears started to subside. After a while he got up mechanically and walked back through the silent castle to the Great Hall. He felt like a sleepwalker as he passed the rows of dead and finally climbed up onto the platform, where the injured were being treated.

Snape was lying on a cot, a heavy bandage at his throat. He was ghostly pale and sweating profusely, his breath coming in shallow gasps. But he was alive.

“Potter viewed my memories.”
It was not a question, but Draco nodded anyways. “He's gone.”
“I understand.”

Anger flared up inside the blond.
“No, you don't! I love him! I love him and now he's gone!”
It had taken him so long to realize what he was feeling. And now it was too late. He had gotten Harry only to lose him again. He collapsed down next to the cot, fresh tears leaking down his cheeks.

“But I do understand, Draco.” Snape said softly. “I've been in love with Lily Potter my whole life. And when I lost her, it crushed me.” he admitted.

Draco looked at him in surprise. “You loved Harry's mother?”

“Yes, indeed. I always have... and I always will. I did what I could to... save her. I ...betrayed the Dark Lord and became Dumbledore's spy. But... it was all in vain. She died ...and it felt like … my soul had died with her.”

The blond closed his eyes against the overwhelming grief he could see in his mentor's eyes. It mirrored his own pain.
“But I did not succumb to grief.” Snape went on, his voice stronger now. “And neither will you. Get up, Draco!”

“I can’t.”
“Yes, you can. And you will. You will get up and continue to fight.” he ordered, almost back to the commandeering tone Draco had become used to. “Let Potter's sacrifice not be in vain.” he continued softer.

Draco looked at him and finally nodded. Wiping the tears off his face he stumbled to his feet. Yes, he would fight. He would be brave one last time. For Harry. There was still a snake that needed to be killed. Snape was right. Harry would not have died in vain.

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Most of what happened after his talk with Snape was a blur. Draco got up and went back through the hall, passing Weasley and Granger on his way. They asked if he'd seen Harry and he just shook his head. He would explain later. If he survived the night. The thought that he might die tonight didn't even scare him. There was nothing left to live for anyway.

For the third time that night Voldemort's cruel, cold voice shook the walls and echoed through the castle. He was giving them another ultimatum. Trying to force everyone to join him. To kneel before him and pledge allegiance. But Draco heard none of it. He only heard the words: Harry Potter is dead.

People ran to the entrance doors then and Draco was pushed along. McGonagall's anguished scream made him flinch. Seeing the usually stoic professor lose her composure like that was frightening. But it was nothing compared to what he saw when he finally went out through the doors. Harry was lying limply in Hagrid's arms.

Draco felt his heart shatter. He felt ready to crumble to the floor and never get up again. Granger and Weasley stood somewhere beside him, crying out Harry's name as well. Draco wanted to cry out too, but his lips wouldn't move. He could only stand there, frozen to the spot, unable to do anything but watch.

For long moments everyone and everything seemed frozen in time. Then Neville Longbottom of all people broke away from the crowd and charged at Voldemort. He was stopped and disarmed before he even came close and yet he stood defiantly, unwilling to give in. Mouthing back against the Dark Lord.

Draco wasn't too sure what exactly happened then. Instead of watching Longbottom trying to take on the Dark Lord, his eyes were drawn back to Harry. Was it his imagination? Only a trick of the light? Had grief and exhaustion taken their toll on his frayed nerves? Whatever the reason, he could have sworn he saw the dark-haired boy twitch.

But it was impossible. Harry was dead. He was gone.

A shriek drew his attention back to Longbottom, who was struggling with something on his head that was burning. Draco winced in sympathy, reminded of the Fiendfyre in the room of requirement. It felt like a lifetime ago that he'd straddled that broom and held onto Harry. Harry...

He looked back at the younger boy, just as a herd of centaurs came charging out of the forest and what looked like hundreds of people came swarming over the walls, all of them attacking the Death Eaters. And this time he was sure. Harry gave a little twitch. And then he disappeared. Hidden beneath his invisibility cloak.
Draco’s heart soared. It was impossible and yet it was true. He knew what he had seen. Harry was alive. He’d come back.

Longbottom had pulled something silver and gleaming out of the burning object and charged at the surprised Death Eaters. And without thinking about it, Draco uttered a war cry and charged as well. Like a flood the other fighters of Hogwarts followed his lead.

It was mayhem and yet Draco’s head felt clearer than it had all night. He cast curses at every Death Eater he came across, fighting his way towards where he had seen Harry vanish. He could not see the dark-haired boy anywhere. But he saw something else. Slithering through the horde of fighters was Nagini. And she was only inches away from Longbottom, who was still wielding the sword of Gryffindor.

“Longbottom, kill the snake!”

To his credit, Neville didn't even blink at the harsh command, given by someone he must still consider his enemy. He merely turned in one surprisingly graceful motion, swung the sword and sliced off the snake's head with a single stroke. The last Horcrux was destroyed.

But the battle continued without pause. Giants had joined the fray, their thundering footsteps shaking the floor. Thestrals and even a few Hippogriffs were soaring overhead, attacking the giants, trying to claw at their eyes.

Somehow the fighters were forced back into Hogwarts. Draco fought like a man possessed. His heart was thundering in his ears and one thought kept repeating in his head. He’s alive. He’s alive. Like a mantra. Like a charm, that was protecting him. He felt invincible. Death Eaters fell before his wand. Rookwood was blasted halfway across the room, collapsed in a heap and lay motionless.

And still the fighting continued. More and more people swarmed into the Great Hall. Wizards and witches, Centaurs and even what looked like an army of house elves. Draco saw Mipsy among them, hacking at Death Eaters with a kitchen knife.

He also saw his parents, running through the fray, calling out his name, making no attempt to fight. But before he could decided whether or not to answer their call, his attention was diverted by Molly Weasley, of all people, duelling Bellatrix. And before his astounded eyes, his mad aunt fell.

Voldemort yelled, but Draco barely noticed. Because finally, finally Harry pulled off the cloak and the blond heard nothing over the thundering of his own heart. He’s alive. He’s alive.

All the fighting ceased, as Harry and Voldemort circled each other. They weren't fighting yet. Merely talking, taunting each other. Draco felt captivated by this new version of Harry. This confident warrior, who faced the Dark Lord without a hint of fear. Like he knew that he was going to win. Like it couldn't be any other way.

And still Harry was talking. Mocking Voldemort, even. He talked about Snape, who had been Dumbledore's spy from the moment the Dark Lord had targeted Harry's mother. He talked about Dumbledore, who had shared his secrets with Harry. And he talked about the elder wand.

“That wand still isn't working properly for you, because you murdered the wrong person. Snape never defeated Dumbledore. Someone else removed the wand from Dumbledore against his will, before Snape even showed up on the scene. The true master of the elder wand is Draco Malfoy.”

The breath left Draco's lungs in a single gasp. Was Harry telling the truth? Yes, he had disarmed Dumbledore that night. That much was true. But did that really mean that the wand was his now?
That it had given its allegiance to him, who had never even touched it? In this moment he hoped it, with all his might. Because if the wand Voldemort was holding had really given its allegiance to Draco, than it would never harm Harry.

He held his breath as Voldemort dismissed Harry's words and finally raised the wand, casting the killing curse at the dark-haired boy. And Harry, of all the stupid things, responded with an Expelliarmus.

A sound like a cannon blast echoed through the silent hall, as the two curses collided in the middle. The elder wand was ripped from Voldemort's hand and sailed through the air. With the skill of a born seeker Harry caught it. The Dark Lord fell backwards as his curse rebounded, arms splayed wide. He hit the ground with a dull thud and moved no more.

For a moment everything was silent. Then screams and cheers filled the air and Draco found himself moving, running, without even meaning to. He was the first to reach Harry. He threw his arms around the younger boy and pulled him close, felt Harry's arms encircle his waist.

“You came back to me.”

Other people joined them only seconds later. Granger and lots of Weasleys, Luna Lovegood and Longbottom and hundreds of others. It seemed that everyone wanted to touch Harry, to hug him, pat him on the back, congratulate him. Draco loosened his hold only reluctantly. He took a hesitant step back and watched as Harry was swallowed by the crowd.

Chapter End Notes

So, what do you think? To tell the truth, I only left Snape alive so he could have that conversation with Draco.
Soo... this is the last chapter. I think I re-wrote it about three times and I'm still not sure if I'm happy with the result. But yeah, here it is, so see for yourself.

Once again a massive thank you to everyone who took the time to leave a comment. You made me very happy.

Draco was sitting on a stone facing the great lake, staring off into the distance. He had no idea how much time had passed since the end of the battle. He'd fled from the noise in the Great Hall. All those people celebrating their victory or mourning their dead. And Harry stuck in the middle of it all. The great hero.

For once the blond felt no resentment at everybody worshipping the younger boy. Harry deserved it. After everything that he'd done. But the noise in there had been too much. All those people swarming around Harry, while he could only watch from afar, feeling like an intruder, despite everything. So he had sought solitude outside.

He turned around when he heard soft footsteps drawing nearer. For a moment he felt frozen. Could only stare at the pale, blonde woman. Then he shakily got to his feet and all but threw himself into her arms.

“Mother!”
“Draco...” she whispered, holding him tight.
“I'm sorry. I should have come to find you...”

Narcissa pulled back so she could look at him. “It's alright. Don't apologize, darling. I saw you with Mr. Potter earlier. So I knew that you were alive and unharmed.” She smoothed his hair back from his forehead and gave him a smile. “I'm so proud of you, my son.”

Draco didn't know what to say. He realized only now just how much he had missed his mother. How much he had feared for her safety.

“Your father choose to … retreat, once the Dark Lord had fallen.” she let him know. “Though I'm sure that the Aurors will catch him in no time. And I doubt that he will manage to escape a sentence in Azkaban this time. Everyone knows of our allegiance with the Dark Lord.”

“What about you?” Draco asked.
“I have no doubt that they will be looking for me as well.”
“Then you should go. Now. While there's still time.”

“I will not run away.” Narcissa declared. “I have decided to follow my son's example and be brave.”
“But mother...”
“No, Draco. Your father and I, we have brought this onto ourselves. When the Aurors come for me, I shall go with them willingly and subject myself to the Wizengamot's judgement.”

“And if they send you to Azkaban?” he asked shakily.
“Then I will serve my sentence with my head held high, secure in the knowledge that this time, at least, you did not have to take the fall for the bad choices we've made.”

She turned away from him with a smile. Draco followed her line of sight and was surprised to find Harry standing there, looking sheepish at interrupting their family moment. When Narcissa looked back at her son, her smile was all-too-knowing. She kissed his cheek and whispered again:
“I'm proud of you, Draco.”

And he knew that this time her words held a different meaning. She was giving him her blessing. Him and Harry.

“Thank you.” he whispered back.
Narcissa smiled again, nodded to Harry and walked back to the castle.

Harry approached him cautiously. They both sat down on the large stone, just staring at each other for what felt like hours.

“They're not going to chuck her into Azkaban!” the Gryffindor blurted finally. “Not if I have anything to say about it.”

“Harry...”

“She helped me, you know? Out in the forest. She protected me. She even lied to Voldemort. I probably wouldn't have beat him, if she hadn't helped me. And that's what I'm going to tell the Aurors and the Wizengamot and... everyone.”

“Thank you.” Draco whispered.

His hand found Harry's and he linked their fingers together. Their eyes met. They both leaned in and then their lips met as well. The kiss was different than those they had shared before. It was slow and gentle. A promise of more.

“Oi, could you stop that?”

They jerked apart to find Weasley and Granger standing behind them, hand in hand. The red-head looked slightly sick, while his girlfriend was frowning thoughtfully.

“Can you forgive us for deserting you all those months ago?” Granger asked hesitantly.
“I already have.” Harry assured. “You made a mistake. It happens. And you came back. You fought at my side. I couldn't have done any of this without you. All of you.”

“In the end you faced him alone. You're the one who defeated him.” she pointed out.
“Okay, yes. But I wouldn't have gotten that far without help.”
“Why don't we just agree that we're all awesome war heroes?” Weasley chimed in.

They looked at each other and dissolved into laughter, though it was short lived. Already Granger was frowning at Draco again. But it was Weasley, who spoke up:

“So... you and Malfoy...” he said, looking at Harry with a grimace. The Slytherin tensed and felt Harry squeezing his hand reassuringly.
“Yes. I can't explain it. It just ... happened.”
“Harry...” Granger started, but the dark-haired boy cut her off.

“He risked his life to save mine, Hermione. He's been there for me. Hell, he even broke into Gringott's with me! And I ... I'm sorry, but I don't care what you think. You don't know him like I do.”
Tense silence followed his outburst. Draco felt his heart racing at those words. At the fact that Harry was defending him. Despite their past. But he also knew the younger boy well enough to realize how hard this must be for him. It would crush him if he was forced to chose between the blond and his best friends. It was this knowledge that made him address Weasley and Granger.

“I know you both despise me. You have every reason to. I made a lot of mistakes in the past. I hurt a lot of people, because I was spoiled and selfish. And I know that I can never hope to make up for my mistakes. But I'm still going to try.”

Granger gave him a searching look. “You really mean that, don't you?” she muttered.
“I do. And... I'm sorry. For the way I treated you. For the horrible names I called you. I was an arse.”
“Yes, you were.” she agreed readily. “But … since Harry believes that you've changed, I'm willing to give you a chance. So I accept your apology.”
“Thank you.”

She inclined her head and took a seat on another large rock, pulling Weasley down beside her. He didn't look happy, but he also didn't say anything.

“So... does that mean you're okay with me and Draco?” Harry asked cautiously.

She sighed softly. “Give us some time, okay? I mean... it's a lot to take in, considering your history. When I realized I... I was shocked. I didn't understand how you could trust him. How you could forgive him. But even I can see that he has changed. He fought at our side. He saved Fred and Percy. And he was crushed when he thought you were dead.”

The Slytherin bristled at the fact that she was talking about him like he wasn't even there. But he didn't want to aggravate her, only minutes after she'd accepted his apology, so he forced himself to stay calm.
“I was. And I mean it. I really am sorry about all that I've done to you.” he said again.

“I believe you. What Harry said is true. We don't know you like he does. But maybe … we can get to know each other.” Granger suggested. And though she looked like she didn't like the thought of spending time with Draco any more than he liked the thought of spending time with her and Weasley, he could also tell that she meant it.

“I'd like that.” the Slytherin answered. Not because he really wanted to get to know them, but because he knew it would make Harry happy. And, as pathetic as it was, by now he would do just about anything for the younger boy.

“Good. And we'll try to be accepting about your... relationship. Right Ron?”
“Yeah. Even if we don't really get it... Ow, Mione don't hit me! I said I'll try, didn't I?”

Harry chuckled and Draco found himself smiling as well. Maybe this wasn't going to be so horrible after all. Granger seemed truly willing to play nice and it looked like she'd be able to keep her boyfriend under control.

“And Ginny's going to be so relieved.” she claimed suddenly.
“Ginny?” Harry asked cautiously.
“Yeah. She was scared of telling you, since she though you'd want her back and all, but... she kind of .. fell for Neville.” Weasley explained.

“Longbottom?”
All eyes turned to Draco, who shrugged.
“Wasn't meant as an insult. In fact, I think I'm really starting to like Longbottom.”
He wrapped both arms around Harry and pulled the younger boy close. Harry shook his head, but cuddled against him with a smile.

They were quiet for a moment, until Weasley once again broke the silence. Draco was getting the impression that the red-head couldn't keep his mouth shut for more than a few minutes.

“What you said to … him, … about the elder wand and stuff... was it true? The Deathly Hallows really exist?”

“They do.” Harry answered. “Dumbledore had the wand. He won it from Grindelwald. I had the cloak. It's a sort of family heirloom that's been passed on through generations. And Dumbledore left me the stone. It was hidden in the snitch. I... I used it. In the forest. I saw my parents. And Sirius and... Remus. And I saw Dumbledore. He told me what to do.”

“What happened out there?” Draco found himself asking.

The younger boy hesitated. “I'll tell you all some other time. Okay?”

“Okay.”

“But that reminds me...” Harry murmured. “This is yours.”

He pulled the elder wand out of his pocket and handed it to Draco, who took it cautiously. It felt strange in his hand. Alive. Like he could feel the power thrumming inside the wood. And it scared him. His father had always sought power and Draco had seen where it had led him.

“I don't want it.”

Weasley made a shocked noise, but he ignored him.

“I'm very happy with the wand I have. I don't need another one. And maybe... maybe it's better if this wand disappears. Maybe we should put it back where it belongs.”

“In Dumbledore's grave.” Harry murmured.

The blond nodded. And he knew that his decision was right. If only for the blinding smile the younger boy gave him.

“Guess you're really no longer the git you used to be.” Weasley muttered.

Draco snorted. “Thanks for the compliment.”

“Doesn't mean I like you.”

“Do you think we can get away with staying out here for a while?” Harry cut in, before they could start an argument.”

“I'm sure we can.” Granger answered.

“We're war heroes, as Weasley so aptly put it. We deserve a moment of peace.” Draco muttered.

“More than just a moment, I hope.” the red-head added.

And it did feel surprisingly peaceful, just sitting there, watching the sun glistening on the great lake. Draco had no doubts that there was still a hard time ahead of them. The war might be over, but there were still Death Eaters on the loose. His parents would face a trial and he himself would at least be questioned. He had the Dark Mark, even if he'd chosen to turn his back on the Dark Lord and help Harry in the end. And not everyone would be as accepting of his and Harry's relationship as his mother and Harry's friends had been.

But in that moment none of it mattered. The only important thing was the boy in his arms and the fact that they had both made it through the war alive. Everything else would work out - one way or another.
End Notes

Comments would be very much appreciated.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!