Title: His Anchor

Author: ???

Pairing(s)/Characters: Harry/Draco

Summary: Everything changes for Draco when, after Sectumsempra, Potter visits him in the infirmary.

Rating: PG

Word count: 4,100

Warnings: Spoilers from HBP and DH.

Author's notes: This fic starts mid HBP after Sectumsempra, so AU from there; however sticks as close to canon as possible from Draco's POV. EWE.

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HIS ANCHOR

Draco's chest tingles unpleasantly where the wound is healing, Dittany and whatever it was Madame Pomfrey has done to fix him knitting his severed flesh together. It's not pain, it's just discomfort. Draco can't help it that he feels there should be pain.

He nearly died today, at Potter's hand.

Draco's certain Potter will think this will make them even; he is all about justice and 'the right thing' after all. One quickly fixed broken nose for Potter and an almost fatal wound for Draco. As far as Draco is concerned, it's not even close; he hopes Potter feels the guilt of what he's done to him for a long time to come and packs away his own for what he nearly did.

Night has fallen now, Pansy has been and gone, and Draco has made sure she knows that Potter put him in here. Draco has to face the night alone with his thoughts. He's never going to be able to sleep, not with what has happened, what could have happened and what he still has to do spinning around in his

head.

He keeps his eyes closed, blocking out the blue tinged moonlight and the whole fucking world. He doesn't want to think, doesn't want to feel.

His head is a whirlwind of contradictions. Is it so terrible that a tiny part of him wishes that Potter had succeeded tonight? If he'd fallen in to the veil then it would all be over. He can't decide what's worse – being alive and burdened with such a heavy responsibility, one that if he succeeds could mean the death of so many others - or being dead and no longer able to succeed in his task and not being here to give a fuck about this war that he's long since realised he's on the wrong side of but is in too deep to escape from.

He used to think that the world was his for the taking, but now he'd gladly give it all up for it all to be over and-

The door to the infirmary clicks open and without even having to open his eyes, Draco knows it's Potter. He's learned over the last few months to recognise his footsteps. Potter has followed him often enough, and as always he brings the almost imperceptible rustle of that damned cloak that he's long since wished he'd taken from Potter that day on the train.

What does he want? Has he come to finish Draco off, because if he has, Draco's not sure he's going fight him. Even as he thinks it he knows that's not what Potter wants at all. He wants to make sure he hasn't finished Draco off; he doesn't want his death on his conscience.

Merlin, how he hates Potter; always the Golden Boy always pulling through on sheer luck. What Draco would give for a fraction of that good fortune...

Keeping his eyes closed he waits, there's no doubt that Potter has to be here for him, there's no one else in the infirmary tonight; just Draco, alone with his thoughts.

The footsteps are barely there as Potter clearly tries for subtlety, something which has never been one of his talents. Draco can hear his own heartbeat speeding up, pounding in his ears like waves crashing over

broken rocks. Potter cannot be allowed to know he is awake.

"Oh God," Potter says in a whisper as the footsteps come to a halt on the right hand side of Draco's bed. "Oh God, what have I done?"

Draco had not been expecting that response from the boy who'd almost killed him only hours earlier, though now he supposes it's not exactly a surprise; Potter is a Gryffindor after all, and hadn't Draco wanted him to feel guilt…regret? Even though, after all, Draco had been about to Crucio him and Draco wasn't so naïve that he didn't realise that Potter had acted in self-defence. He just hadn't expected that to hear that pained tone in Potter's voice, after all, Draco's actions merely gave him justification for hurting Draco and getting him back for everything. Six years of everything's.

Draco almost jolts his eyes open when a gentle hand touches his as it lies on top of the covers at his side. Potter's hand covers his own, its warmth seeping through Draco's near permanent coldness and making him want to whisper a plea for more.

"I'm sorry," Potter says, his voice echoing around the empty infirmary, despite the low volume. "I didn't know what it did – the spell... I would never have…if I'd known." Potter's thumb is stroking the underside of Draco's wrist, tracing a circle on the soft skin there and Draco doesn't know what's happening, but for this moment, with this oddly intimate touch; he feels safe.

Draco doesn't remember a time when he's felt so conflicted; caught between the desire to let Potter carry on because it feels so good – comforting - or to open his eyes and let Potter see that he's awake and that he knows Potter is touching him, because he's certain that Potter would never come near him if he knew.

He decides to remain as he is to see if Potter says anything else. The curiosity is almost painful. He doesn't have to wait long.

"I thought I hated you," Potter says, the pressure of his thumb on Draco's tender flesh increasing, making it more difficult for him to remain passive. "Until today. I see now. I understand."

Something snaps inside at the pity and Draco's eyes fly open. "Get your filthy hands off me, Potter!" He yanks his hand away from Potter's warmth and cradles it to his chest as if Potter has hurt him. It's on the tip of his tongue to say, 'You refused my hand in first year, it's too late now!' but he refrains, even in his agitated state he knows that that gives away far more than he would like. Potter's rejection still smarted nearly six years later, and wasn't that just pathetic? Instead he says, "Haven't you done enough damage?"

Draco feels a curl of satisfaction as Potter flinches. "I came to apologise."

Draco pretends he hasn't heard him and that he didn't hear the first apology either. If he can get away with it then Potter won't ever know that he heard Potter saying that he didn't hate him; that he understood.

Draco doesn't want Potter's sympathy. "Save it," Draco sneers, glaring at Potter through the moonlight. In the darkness he can't see Potter's green eyes, and for a moment he mourns that before snapping backwards – Potter's eyes? What the fuck? "Leave or I'm screaming for help. After what you did it won't be difficult to persuade Snape that you've come back to finish the job."

Potter sighs heavily "Fine. I see there's no permanent damage done; you're still the vile git you always have been." He backs away and turns to go, stilling himself and turning back to appraise Draco. "Look, I don't know what you're up to, Malfoy, but – before you do something that you can never take back - I can help you."

Draco ignores the tug inside him and spits, "I don't think that is ever going to happen."

Potter nods and engulfing himself in the cloak again he vanishes from Draco's sight, his footsteps to the door faster than those when he had arrived. The door clicks closed behind him.

Draco rubs his wrist and shudders. He was so cold.

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Draco stares at Dumbledore and his mind flashes to Potter and his words from before. He's barely seen him since that day but he still feels Potter's eyes on him from across the hall, and he knows he's still following him. Something perverse inside of him wishes Potter had found him out, despite his efforts to ensure that he wouldn't because then the decision would be out of his hands; he doesn't want to be here, now, with his wand pointed at Dumbledore, old fool that he is. He doesn't want to kill him.

He doesn't want to kill anyone; but if he doesn't…

"It is my mercy, and not yours, that matters now," Dumbledore says kindly.

He could take the old man's offer, he could let Dumbledore help him, let Potter help him – but it's too late, they're on their way – and there's his mother – yet all he can hear is Potter's voice saying, 'I can help you' and he feels faint with nerves and adrenaline and almost paralyzed with fear, and he can't do this, he can't do this…before you do something that you can never take back… His wrist burns with the memory of Potter's caress.

He lowers his wand.

It's too late of course; everything has already been set in motion and Draco's whoops of joy when he'd realised he'd finally fixed the cabinet ring hollowly in his ears. It's too late for Dumbledore too; Draco watches in horror as Snape finishes the task that should have been his.

Draco's only consolation as he flees the castle is that Dumbledore didn't die at his hand.

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It's him, it couldn't be anyone else.

His father is agitated, excited that this could be his moment of glory. Draco simply feels sick.

Draco would know Potter anywhere. Harry Potter haunts his dreams these days, when he's not dreaming of blood and torture. He remembers the intimate caress of Potter's thumb on his wrist, how warm he felt; how for a moment he didn't feel alone anymore.

"I can't – I can't be sure," he stammers, knowing that he can't out and out deny that this is Potter, that would bounce back and bite him, but he can help delay the inevitable. Potter had once said he could help him. Maybe the offer still stands. Draco's had enough of all the killing and the fear; he's had enough of being in his father's shadow. Even his father seems to have had a change of heart, but it's too little too late for Lucius, he's in far too deep and Draco and his mother are being dragged down with him.

Draco wishes he was braver, but he's not, this is all he has to offer. This kneeling figure is most definitely Potter, and if there was ever any doubt about that, the fact that he's with Granger and Weasley would give him away to anyone who knew Potter at all.

When he lets his eyes linger on Weasley a traitorous voice in the back of his head whispers, 'that should have been you' and he shakes his head, backing away from Potter, hoping that the small delay will be enough for Potter's luck to come back to him. Potter is the only hope now; the only one who can get them out of this mess they're all in.

Lucius becomes desperate, "Draco, come here, look properly! What do you think?"

"I can't be sure," he lies, feeling sick with nerves at being found out.

He tries not to look at Potter as he gets dragged away into the bowels of the manor to the dungeon. Aunt Bella glares at him in accusation and Draco ignores her. He turns away from them all – refusing to look at Granger - and moves to the corner, sitting in the chair there with his knees tucked under his chin, rubbing furiously at the burning spot on his wrist. He's got nothing left to pretend with.

When Aunt Bella starts on Granger, Draco has to weigh up the odds – if he intervenes she'll likely kill them both – she's crazy enough. Draco has bought Potter this small amount of time; surely if he's as amazing and powerful as they say, he'll find a way out of this?

When a short time later, after being sent down to the cellar to fetch Griphook and forcing himself not to look at Potter, he finds himself struggling for his wand against him. His heart is not in the fight and Potter and the others are gone before Draco has gathered his thoughts.

His silent plea of, 'Take me with you' disappears into the ether unheeded.

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The words that fall from his lips when he faces Potter in the Room of Hidden Things are all about saving face in front of Crabbe and Goyle – they can't ever know what's really going on inside his head. He's on Potter's side now, even if he can't say as much to another living soul, he has been for a long while. He still doesn't like him, but he can't say he hates him either, not anymore. Potter has been the bane of his life since he was eleven years old, but he knows he doesn't want to live in a world ruled by a crazed madman. He wants to live, but not like that, never like that. That would be no life at all, he knows that now.

Sharing his family home with a psychopath does wonders for a person's outlook; has them questioning their motivations and finally forcing them to get off the fence. His father was wrong – delusional in fact, and his mother was weak, lost in Lucius Malfoy's shadow.

Draco doesn't want to be like that any longer.

As he's flying through the hungry flames, Crabbe's demise reeling through his mind, his arms tight around Potter's waist and he knows Potter's going to win. He knows.

It all happens so fast, they're safe from that danger, with a bigger one to face - and Potter's gone again with the urgency of a boy with a madman to kill. He has no more time to waste on Draco.

Potter is going to save them all.

Draco rubs his inner wrist, an action that never fails to calm him – his anchor - and wishes he'd tried harder that day all those years ago when he'd offered his hand to Potter. If Potter can risk his life save someone he hates as much as he does Draco, then what must it be like to bask in the glory of being his friend?

Draco knows he'll know the answer to that question. He shivers, suddenly cold.

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The Dark Lord, red eyed and triumphant announces Potter is dead, and something familiar tugs inside Draco, and he doesn't know why or how, but he knows that it isn't true. Potter is still alive and Draco can feel that life still flows through his veins. It is the oddest sensation, yet it is a certainty. Potter lives.

Draco rubs his wrist and waits, watching for it all to fall apart. Around him most are shocked into silence. Draco starts to count down from one-hundred.

When he is proved right, Draco hides his feelings as he always does; he cannot be seen to be smiling that Potter lives and the Dark Lord has fallen – besides, he doesn't think he knows how to smile, not anymore. He finds his parents, lets them hug him to them, their joy in his being alive by far the strongest emotion regarding the outcome of the battle from their point of view. They are finally free.

Draco watches Potter; he looks lost. People come at him from every angle, clapping him on the back, shaking his hand, kissing him… Is Draco the only one who can see he is falling apart? Potter catches his

eye and Draco feels the world stop turning, the tugging sensation in his belly screaming at him to go to Potter, but Potter's lips turn in the barest parody of a smile and he turns away to be engulfed by sea of grieving red-heads, the girl Weasley's arm going possessively around his waist.

Draco shivers.

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Two months after the war the owl arrives, and Draco sits staring at the message for what feels like eternity.

'Malfoy, I have something of yours and I would like to return it. If it's convenient I will call at the Manor tomorrow afternoon at noon. Harry Potter.'

Draco doesn't know how to respond. Potter has his wand, but Draco has a new one now. He doesn't need the old one, and he doesn't think he wants it either, not after the things he was made to do with it. He's starting over and his new wand is part of that.

Yet – he wants to see Potter. He needs to see him. He wants to thank him for saving his life that day, and he wants to accept the apology he offered all that time ago in the infirmary. Potter's actions with the Fiendfyre proved once and for all that his intentions that day in the bathroom weren't to kill Draco; as if Draco hadn't known that all along.

Yet he sometimes finds himself wondering… If he'd taken Potter's offer of help back then, what would have happened? Potter would probably still have found himself at the mercy of the snatchers and Draco wouldn't have been there to buy that time. Who knows how everything could have changed if he'd listened to his gut.

Does everything happen for a reason, just like his mother used to tell him when he was a child?

He rubs his wrist and composes a reply. 'Potter, the Floo will be open. Draco Malfoy.'

When Potter arrives Draco notices immediately that he stiffens when he's led through the hall where they faced each other before, when Potter won his wand from him. He takes him to his own private wing and settles him in his personal sitting room, calling an elf to bring refreshment.

They have yet to utter a word to one another past their one word greeting as Potter straightened himself after tumbling through the Floo.

"What can I do for you, Potter?" Draco asks, ignoring the slight tremble in his hands. This is Potter for Merlin's sake! What is wrong with him? Something is his gut is rejoicing at Potter's nearness, which is ridiculous. He doesn't even like Potter, and Potter certainly doesn't care for him.

Potter reaches into his robe and pulls out, as Draco expected, his old wand. He proffers it to Draco. "I thought you might want this back."

Draco stares at it but can't bring himself to take it. He doesn't want it back and he doesn't even want to touch it.

"Draco?" Potter's green eyes are searching his and – did Potter just call him Draco?

"I don't want it," he says, meeting Potter's questioning stare with a challenging one of his own. "Destroy it…please."

Potter's eyes flick to the wand and back to Draco. "Are you sure?"

"Yes. I want you to do it; you're its master now anyway."

He looks away as Potter hesitates before snapping it in two and throwing it onto the fire.

Tension Draco hadn't realised he was carrying leaves his body.

"Thank you," he says, staring into the fire as it crackles and engulfs the remains of his wand. "Was there anything else?" He doesn't look at Potter. He doesn't know what he wants. His hands twist in his lap and he absently runs his thumb over that spot.

Potter doesn't speak, and when Draco turns his head to face him, he's staring at him intently. At Draco's movement he snaps out of it. "Is your mother here?" Potter looks hopeful and Draco's heart sinks. So that's the real reason Potter is here. He wants to thank Narcissa for lying for him.

"No, she's gone to visit Father," Draco replies, watching Potter's face for a reaction to the mention of Lucius Malfoy who has not escaped prosecution as his wife and son have.

Potter merely nods and says, "That's good, because I wanted to talk to you, Draco, without the chance we might be interrupted." It's all Draco can do not to gape. He's getting everything wrong these days; his instincts don't seem to work at all since the day of the final battle. He's been dead inside for so long that trying to start again isn't easy and he's taking each day one moment at a time. Now Potter's here, he feels something stir, like he's waking up again; and it's there again, the feeling in his gut that he gets when Potter's around. He first felt it at eleven, in Madame Malkin's, the excitement of making a new friend, someone who hadn't been introduced to him by his parents who could be his…but he'd said the wrong thing and before he knew it, he'd blown his second chance as well. He'd had to suppress the feeling, the slow unfurling excitement that Potter's nearness brings. He'd twisted it into something else, something dishonest and cruel.

At eleven he'd put the feeling down to nerves, and in the intervening years, he'd ignored it in favour of hurting Potter. Now here he was, eighteen years old, finally admitting what that feeling really meant.

Hope gushes through him at Potter's words. "Talk away," he casually invites, gesturing at the refreshments that appear. "Tea or coffee?"

"Black coffee, please," Potter says, and Draco can feel his gaze on his hands as he pushes the plunger and pours the dark liquid from the cafetiere. He hopes Potter doesn't notice the tremor.

Draco hands the coffee to Potter and says, "What did you want to talk about?"

Without taking a sip of his drink Potter draws a deep breath and says, "I want us to start again. You've saved me, I've saved you – I want us to try to be friends, or at least hospitable to one another."

Nervous satisfaction almost strikes Draco mute as the hope hit its bull's eye. "Why?" he asks, even as the voice in his head is telling him shut-up, to take the offer.

"We go back to school in a couple of weeks to finish our N.E.W.T.s. I don't want it to be 'us and them' anymore, Draco. If you and I can show united front, then we're setting an example for everyone else."

It's not about Draco after all then, it's about the bloody 'greater good' or whatever, and it's on the tip of his tongue to say no, but Potter's looking at him with those amazing green eyes, and Draco's stomach is in knots – how can he say no him, after everything that's happened?

"I-" He freezes as Potter's hand closes over the top of his and that craved for warmth seeps through him.

"Before you answer, Draco – it's not just about that. It's about us. I've thought a lot about how things would have panned out if I had taken your offer of friendship in first year, and no matter how many times I play it out, it never ends well for us because you're you, son of Lucius Malfoy, and I'm Harry Potter and it had to be the way it was, I had to follow the path I did in order to beat Voldemort." His thumb traced a circle on the back of Draco's wrist as it had that day in the infirmary. "We don't have to follow those paths anymore, I fulfilled a prophecy and I'm free now – so are you - if you let yourself be."

There was a tingling in Draco's chest, his instincts knitting back together – he leans forward and presses his lips to Potter's. They feel firm and warm, with clear intention. Potter does not respond, nor does he

pull away.

Potter has to know that Draco has this inside of him, this need to be close to him, this connection to him that was formed on first meeting and twisted into something else for so many years. They cannot present a 'united front' if this isn't out in the open. They cannot form some kind of friendship on a lie. Draco's turned a corner, he's starting again, he's going to be the person he wants to be and not the one his father expects of him. He's going to make his mother's sacrifices for his sake worth something.

As Draco pulls back, Potter leans forward slightly, chasing the contact and Draco smiles. "I feel free," he says. "This is me, Harry, take me or leave me."

It feels like forever before Harry answers, the hand that still covers Draco's tightening its grip. "This isn't quite what I meant by 'united front'," he said as his actions belie his words and he pulls Draco towards him. "I always was obsessed with you, it's only now I realise why." His lips close over Draco's and his other hand threads through the hair on the back of his head.

Draco feels warm again – connected. He has hope again; this could work.