The Long Walk Home by dracoredeemed

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Chapter 1: The Long Walk Home

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A/N: This story is dedicated to my dear friend, sa1boy, who always makes me laugh like a lunatic.

The Long Walk Home

By dracoredeemed

Chapter 1

The water was lapping idly over the pebbles, washing across the sea-moulded stones before being drawn inexorably back by the tide. It was barely sunrise and the soft rays of pink and orange light that glazed the horizon cast a shimmer over the rippling water of the little bay, reflecting back in a million tiny pinpoints of light as they danced across its dark blue surface. It was quiet still, and although lights blinked out of the windows of several of the seaside houses, most were still in darkness, for it was summer, and those who had enough sense to know, were still in bed, savouring the residue of sleep in preparation for another long, warm day.

In this tiny seaside village, which meandered along the coast for barely a kilometre, there was very little to catch the eye. A lone shop, it's hand-painted sign weathered and slightly askew where it had lost a nail; a small brick church, its neighbouring cemetery dotted with mossy gravestones that rose out of the grassy plots as if they had sprouted and grown there; a long cobbled road that wound its way through the village, past the church and a small dark pub, on down to the sea, where it swiftly turned and meandered again onto the next village, barely acknowledging the rickety old jetty that stuck out across the water where it stood like a sentinel, guarding the beach and those who lived beyond it.

This summer morning, which held the promise of a fine and sunny day, a lone figure made its way along the beach toward the shadowy stumps that rose out of the water at the far end of the cove. He was a familiar figure, the only animation in this pleasant landscape, and he walked a familiar path across the pebbles before climbing the water worn steps of the jetty, an old fishing rod in one hand and a pail in the other. Setting down his pail and rod at the end of the pier, he lowered himself down and dangled his legs lazily over its edge. His face had an air of contentment that spoke of easy familiarity and, as he settled his back against a wooden stump, the line from his rod wafting lazily back and forth with the tide, he reached up and absently brushed his hand through dark, wavy locks in a well-practiced motion that had no impact whatsoever on the state of his unruly mane. After a few moments the hand dropped of its own accord, brushing against dark morning stubble on its way before coming to rest against the care-worn softness of his faded dungarees.

None of this was remarkable in the slightest. Indeed, one would be hard pressed to find a more practised morning routine than that which was currently playing out across the little village and its stony cove… unless one looked back over the meandering road, past the pub and the church, up and over the hill towards the grassy knoll that separated the town from the neighbouring farms. For it was at that spot, which was marked by a sign that read, Busselton, pop.276, that the peace and quiet of the little village was shortly to be held to ransom.

As if sensing a change in the air, the man on the edge of the pier lifted his head and gazed about him curiously as unseasonal clouds began to roll in from the north in fluffy grey pods, buffeting against the accompanying breeze that, without warning, was now brushing thick locks of hair into his eyes. If you'd ever looked into those eyes, you'd be surprised at their hue, which might be called green, if one was crass enough to label such a luxuriant shade with such a mundane word. A more romantic soul might think they were jade, tipping almost into emerald, but with a fire behind them that was reminiscent of absinthe in flames… if one were romantic enough to think that way. The man himself had often cursed those absinthe eyes, the dead giveaway that they were, being the bane of his existence for as long as he could remember. He could change his name, he could disappear into blessed seclusion, but he couldn't disguise those eyes.

At this moment, those eyes were scanning the tiny cove with some apprehension. The breeze that had only so recently arrived to disturb the grass and the leaves at the edge of the beach was now picking up, lifting and swirling the air around him into invisible whirlpools and tugging at the tide to draw foamy waves from its heretofore undisturbed depths. Furrowing his brows, he pulled his jacket closer around him and began to reel in his line. There'd be no fish to catch in this blustery weather; the depths of the water now churning enough to warn them off to deeper environs. Sighing heavily, he picked up his gear and trudged the length of the jetty and down the steps, which were now wet with foam, and made his way quickly across the beach toward the little white cottage that stood at the far edge of the cove.

As the wind grew in strength, and darker clouds rolled in, the man picked up his pace, and had almost reached the white picket fence that framed the yard of his home when the skies opened and the first heavy drops made their decent towards the earth below. The man looked up when he felt a splash across his cheek and silently cursed the heavens for choosing this day, this hour, to deliver her aqueous bounty.

“Better get in out of the weather, Jim!” He glanced over at the words to see his elderly neighbour leaning out to grasp the edge of the casement window, pulling it in quickly to block out the inclement weather.

“Morning Mrs. Bayliss,” he replied with a quick wave. “No fish today!”

“No, indeed.” She leaned out quickly as she pulled the window shut. “Be seeing you at the Pig and Whistle tonight, then?”

He nodded and waved as she disappeared behind the curtains and he hurried through his own gate and up the steps of his house, thrusting the unlocked door open as he carelessly dropped his fishing gear on the landing. Once inside, he shut the door behind him and leaned against it. He was breathing heavily from his hasty journey across the beach and he made an effort to slow his breathing, to bring himself back to some semblance of calm.

The sense of utter powerlessness that suddenly overwhelmed him took him by complete surprise. Looking out the window nearby, he forced himself to regulate his breathing as he took in the torrent of rain that was presently assaulting his little piece of earth. It was relentless, inescapable, as unyielding as the tide. But the tide was predictable, its continuous ebbing and flowing a comforting daily presence in his life. But this storm—it was distracting; it was annoying; it clanged against his nerves like fingernails on a blackboard. He didn’t expect it and he couldn’t stop it. It forced him into action, completely disregarding his plans, his hopes, his inner need for sameness.

He couldn’t stop it. It came regardless. Finally giving in to his emotions, he slid down the door and collapsed on the shabby wooden floorboards, his unkempt head in his hands. All he wanted was peace and sameness. To know what to expect and to have the expected happen with monotonous regularity. To know that his expectations and his wants had a place in the world. He was so tired of being at the mercy of cruel fate—had thought that fate had finally forsaken him. But here he was, in a sodden heap in

his front hallway, crying. Because it rained.

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The Harley Davidson slowed and moved over to the side of the road as the first heavy drops of rain began to fall. It's rider frowned and looked to the heavens in disgust. He'd never make it to London at this rate. Why he hadn't taken the train, only Merlin knew. He could have Apparated, of course, but he didn't want to arouse suspicion, what with the Magical Detection Charms that had been cast upon him only having been lifted barely two weeks ago. He didn't trust the Ministry one bit; though he had served his penance for supposed war crimes, he still felt like a fugitive, as if they were watching him every moment of every day, trying to catch him at some Dark deed or other.

Lifting his leg over the bike seat, he leaned back and settled against it, regarding the sign before him. Busselton, pop. 276. Well, this is a roaring little town, by the looks of it. He grimaced in disdain and reached down to adjust the straps of his boots. Several more drops of rain spotted his pale cheeks and he brushed them away as he considered his options. He could continue to ride through the inclement weather and be in London by dark. Or he could accept his fate and just camp here in this dinky little town for the night and make an early start tomorrow.

Busselton, eh? It wasn't long before the rain was falling in earnest and he pulled his visor down in irritation as he slid his leg back over the seat and thrummed the motor into action once again. Gunning the engine, he leaned back as he eased the bike back onto the road and headed towards Sweetbury Central. Well, there had to be a pub, at least. A few pints and, hopefully, some nice, solid country grub, and he'd sleep like a baby. Lowering his head against the continuing onslaught, he moved the bike swiftly along the old country road, pulling up outside the Pig and Whistle barely five minutes later. The rain had eased a little by then, but the road was still wet and slippery and, as he parked the bike in front of the pub and pulled his helmet off, he was suddenly glad he would have a chance to relax for awhile. Grabbing his pack, he secured the bike and sauntered through the front door into the cool dark within.

TBC....

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Chapter 2: The Long Walk Home

A/N: This story is dedicated to sa1boy. Thanks to the gorgeous Aandune for her beta work and endless patience. :-)

The Long Walk Home

Chapter 2

The inside of the pub was dark, lit only by several small wall sconces and a couple of tiny windows, and he blinked several times as his eyes adjusted to the dimmer light. After a few moments, he could make out a bar across the room, the space between himself and it crowded with tables and chairs that seemed to jostle against each other for the little room that was available. It was still early, not quite lunch time, and the several customers that dotted the tables appeared to be guests, like himself—sole travellers stopping on their way through, perhaps, or itinerant workers employed by local farms. They were all male, save for one young couple seated towards the back corner, and they all wore expressions of blank indifference as they attended to their solitary meals. Moving carefully between the tables to avoid contact with any of them, he made his way towards the bar and scanned the chalkboard menu with interest. There wasn't much choice, but the food looked hearty at least, and he felt a warm kind of comfort at being here and taking the time to relax and enjoy a proper meal.

"I'll have the steak and kidney pie, please." He smiled at the barmaid as he removed his gloves, revealing long, pale fingers that moved swiftly but gracefully to retrieve his wallet from the back pocket of his leather pants. He looked at her questioningly as he opened the wallet, the fingers poised over the notes.

"Would you like a pot of tea as well?" she asked amiably as she looked up at him through her lashes, her hand poised on the pad in front of her. He paused for a minute, undecided, and her gaze moved slowly from his eyes down to his lips and on to the pale stubbled chin, taking in the windswept blond hair that was now tucked behind his ears, its ends tickling the skin around the prominent adam's apple that

bobbed up and down seductively every time he swallowed. He smirked slightly when her eyes dropped to the space where his open jacket revealed a black t-shirt stretched tautly across the well-defined muscles of his chest, before dipping in and tucking neatly into the waist of his trousers.

"I'll take a pint, actually," he replied, and her eyes snapped up, a slight blush creeping over her cheeks. She held his gaze for several seconds before dropping her eyes to finish writing down his order and he relaxed again as he handed her several notes. "Keep the change." Her eyebrows rose at that and he smiled at her again before turning to scan the tables for a suitable place to sit. Choosing a table toward the back under one of the windows, he stowed the gloves in his pack and then moved across the room to settle in. He sighed in relief as he slid his wet jacket off and dropped it, along with his pack, into one of the chairs, before sliding into the one next to it and stretching his long legs out under the table, crossing his booted feet at the ankle and leaning back lazily to survey his surroundings.

He nodded gratefully when the barmaid brought over his pint, gulping from it thirstily as she returned shortly after with his meal and placed it on the table before him. The aromas arising from the steaming plate wafted upwards and he breathed in deeply, his tastebuds salivating in expectation. He hadn't had a proper home cooked meal in a long while and he savoured each and every bite, chewing thoughtfully as he considered his plans for the rest of the day.

A quick glance out the window confirmed that the rain appeared to have set in; it was coming down in sheets that looked almost solid. Thick rivulets ran down the glass, catching at the corners of each leadlight pane and pooling, before trickling down again and dripping wetly against the slick, white painted sill. He could barely see his Harley parked a mere two metres away and the street itself was deserted, save for the occasional car splashing slowly through the puddles, causing them to wash against the curb in muddy waves. He sighed and sat back, stretching his arms back behind his head and carefully kneading the back of his neck with his fingers. The truth was, he could really do with some sleep and, as he downed the last of his pint, he decided that this was the afternoon for some quiet self-indulgence. God knows he'd done little of that lately.

Pushing back his chair, he stood up lazily and sauntered over to the bar to ask for a room. After he'd paid and signed the register, the barmaid handed him a key and pointed to the stairs on the other side of the swinging kitchen doors. He made short work of gathering his gear and then headed up the stairs, checking each room number against his key tag and stopping at the very last one. It was a largish room, furnished sparsely but comfortably with a huge bed and nightstand, a chest of drawers and an overstuffed armchair, which stood near a small fireplace. There was a tiny ensuite attached, and one smallish window, framed with chintz curtains, overlooking the street below. He stood at the window a moment, looking out at the rainy landscape, before dropping his gear and heading for the bathroom to

wash. There was barely room to move between the toilet and bath, but he finished his ablutions quickly, noting the tired pallor of his face as he glanced in the mirror. Yes, a long nap was just the ticket. There was no point going anywhere in this weather, so he might as well make the most of it.

Returning to the room, he slipped out of his leathers and t-shirt, throwing them carelessly over the armchair, and rubbed his arms roughly as the cool air hit his bare skin. His nipples contracted and gooseflesh suddenly spread across his torso, so he rubbed his hands in circles over the scarred muscles of his chest and abdomen to warm them as he moved quickly to the bed. Pulling back the soft, white, quilted coverlet, he slipped beneath the sheets and shivered momentarily until his body heat had warmed them. Snuggling down contentedly, he closed his eyes, pulling the blankets up and nestling into the pillow. With a contented sigh, he rolled onto his back and slid his now warmed hand down his chest and under the waistband of his shorts, languidly stroking the wiry curls and reaching down to cup his balls before tracing his fingers up the length of his shaft.

He was already sleepy, but he knew this would ensure a deep, restful slumber. Arching his back slightly as the first wave of pleasure washed over him, he began moving his hand, slowly at first, then faster, pulling slightly at the base on each stroke. Soon he was thrusting gently into his curled fingers, the friction sending wave after wave of sparking lust over his groin, pooling slowly up into his abdomen and snaking down his thighs to envelop them in warmth as he came closer and closer to orgasm. Trying to prolong the delicious feeling for as long as possible, he slowed down a little and began grazing his fingers more gently along the shaft and over the tip, spreading the liquid oozing from the leaking slit along its length. He continued to pleasure himself, his mind's eye wandering to the image of the pretty barmaid who had looked at him so coquettishly, but as the tension built, he found her morphing into a faceless, genderless body, whose fingers reached out to push his own hands away so they could grasp his throbbing erection, pulling it gently but expertly until he was begging for mercy. When the faceless image dropped down to take his erection in its mouth, he pulled his cock sharply several times and his pleasure spiked, his orgasm ripping through him like a bolt of lightning, leaving him breathless and sweating against the soft folds of the bed. Muttering a wandless Cleaning Charm, he stretched lazily and settled back down into the blankets.

After long moments, his breathing slowed and he drifted contentedly off to sleep.

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He could hear the rain beating down on the tin roof above, the noise almost deafening here at the front of the house where the thin ceiling traced the same arc as the roof. The sound assaulted his ears, pounding in his head like the roll of a drum; like a herd of deer stampeding across his brain, echoing through each and every synapse at full volume.

Like war.

He closed his eyes and tried to block it out, clutching his hands to his ears in a futile attempt to stop the roaring. His heart was pounding against his chest and he was trembling violently. A feeling of doom overtook him and he felt as if he needed to run from it, to get away before it crushed him beneath its leaden fist.

His pulse quickened and he began to sweat, but he didn't move. He knew from long experience that running would not stop the iron fist from clutching at his chest or pounding at his head. Calling all his strength, he tried to remember what to do. The pounding, the roaring, the trembling were threatening to overtake him and he pulled his knees up and hugged them tightly, his head buried against them and his eyes shut tight as he fought the panic that flowed through his veins.

Breathe.

A flicker of recognition poked through the roaring and pounding and he lifted his head and leaned it back against the door. Breathe…. He had to breathe…. Concentrating with all his might he took one deep breath and let it out slowly, counting as he exhaled, then another, and another…. The iron fist around his chest loosened a little as he continued to focus on inhaling and exhaling, until eventually, after long minutes that seemed to go on forever, the fist melted away and his heart pumped slowly in relief.

When finally he opened his eyes, the rain had eased a little and he felt calmer. Pushing himself forward with extreme effort, he lifted himself to his feet and walked down the hall towards the kitchen, thinking he would make himself a cup of tea. Tea is good. Fill the kettle, then boil the water, then light the stove and wait for the whistle. The routine sameness of the activity soothed him, and by the time he was sitting at the table with his steaming mug, he was feeling almost like himself again. Calm, content, with just the tiniest rippling of something around the edges, something niggling, but nowhere near strong enough to intrude. As he swigged from his cup, he mentally pushed the niggling thought firmly into the

depths of his consciousness and leaned back against the chair with a sigh.

His anxiety attacks had decreased considerably since the war, but every so often, like today, it hit him with force, and he was almost as unprepared for the onslaught as he had been that first time. He knew what to do and most times he remembered to do it, but he wished with every cell of his body that he could be strong enough to keep the attacks at bay forever.

The psychologist had told him it was Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, and that he needed to process his trauma before he could get completely better. The breathing exercises were just a temporary way of coping, rather than a cure. But he couldn't face the memories, not then… not now. It was ten years later and he still recoiled at the very idea of exposing that raw, vulnerable part of himself. It was too painful. He used to say it was too soon. Now, he just admitted that it was too hard—if he dared open that part of his mind to scrutiny, whether his own or someone else's, he might lose it altogether; an entire piece of his mind gone missing, slipped away like sand through his fingers, leaving a gaping hole where his sanity used to be.

He stood up and peered out the window at the rain as he rinsed his cup under the running tap. It didn't look like the rain would let up any time soon and he sighed as he thought about the model ship he'd been building in his spare time. He really didn't feel like being cooped up, but he supposed that this was a good opportunity to make some headway on the project, which had been sitting untouched for some months now. Setting his cup on the draining board, he moved into the living room and settled himself at the desk, pulling out the drawer that contained the implements he would need, before setting to work. Glue this piece here; paint that piece there; check the blueprint; glue that piece next….

It was several hours before he noticed that the rain was easing and, as he sat back and admired his handiwork, he realised his back hurt from sitting for so long. Turning toward the clock on the mantle, he noted it was almost five, so he carefully put away his project equipment and stood up stiffly, raising his arms and stretching the kinks out of his back as he did so. His stomach rumbled noisily, reminding him that he hadn't eaten since his early breakfast. Padding into the kitchen, he opened to fridge and tutted in disgust. There was butter, milk, strawberry conserves, a couple of tomatoes and a six pack of ale. Hardly an appetising repast. Sighing to himself, he headed towards the bathroom to fill the tub. It would be the Pig and Whistle tonight and he might even stay for a game of cards, if it wasn't too noisy.

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The blond-haired man awoke to find himself in the same position in which he'd fallen asleep, his hair falling slightly across his cheek so that the huffs of his breath disturbed it, causing the stray locks to tickle his chin. The room was dim but he didn't think it could be too late. It was still raining, of course, though it had slowed to a nice drizzle and he toyed with the idea of rolling over and attempting to doze off again, so comfortable did he feel in the soft warmth of the bedclothes. Drowsily, he cast a Tempus Charm and, discovering it was already five-thirty, determinedly hauled himself out of bed, stretching luxuriously as he did so, until the muscles of his back and torso snapped back in appreciation. Yawning expansively, he headed for the bathroom, where he proceeded to relieve himself before stepping into the shower and letting the warm water trickle down over his body. It felt so good against his skin that he stood there for long minutes before reaching for the soap and proceeding to clean himself.

He didn't waste too much time in drying off and getting dressed, however, as he had planned on a few ales and another nice meal that evening, his last chance to really relax before the reality that was his task in London returned to claim him. Gazing at his reflection, he cast a Drying Charm on his hair and gently brushed the loose strands behind his ear before stroking his chin thoughtfully. He contemplated whether he should shave, and decided that it probably was the wise thing to do. He wouldn't feel like it in the morning and he didn't want to arrive in London looking too scruffy. He cast a Shaving Charm, adjusting it several times before he was satisfied, then nodded at his reflection in approval. He wondered if the pretty barmaid would be working again tonight, though he usually tried to avoid getting too involved with Muggles. It was just too messy all round. Shrugging to himself, he pulled on a pair of blue jeans and zipped them up, not bothering to tuck in his tight black t-shirt, which barely covered the waistband of his pants anyway. Lastly, he slipped on his tan leather riding boots and pocketed his wallet, before slipping out the door and carefully locking it behind him.

The bar was already filling up with happy patrons, noisily chatting around tables as they sipped from pint mugs or wine glasses. Making his way over to the bar, he leaned on its edge and smiled at the barmaid—it was a different one tonight—when she came over to take his order.

"Just a pint, thanks." He dropped a note onto the counter and picked up the frothing mug, taking a sip as he replaced his wallet in his back pocket. Propping himself on a stool, he placed his drink back on the counter and turned to lean back against the bar, the better to observe his surroundings. It was an unremarkable little pub to say the least. Several burly men were throwing darts over in the far left corner, arguing over the score. The tables were filling with ruddy-faced patrons, each looking more or

less the same as the nest—buxom women in sensible shoes, balding men with beer bellies and pants that didn't quite fit, drinking and smoking and generally engaging in animated conversation, fuelled by the many empty glassed that were being picked up by wizened, middle-aged waitress.

As he sipped from his glass and lazily scanned the room, his gaze lighted on a table over by the wall where a group of men were playing cards, their faces earnestly blank as they bluffed and played each other, seemingly oblivious to the revelling around them. There were four of them, all unkempt—straight from work, he surmised. He sneered slightly as he regarded the cigarettes dangling from their mouths and the crass way they jeered at each other when someone won a hand. Then one of the men turned to call the waitress and he stopped dead, his heart leaping into his throat. It couldn't be. Carefully, he placed his drink on the counter and dropped his eyes to his trembling hands. When he lifted his gaze he found himself staring directly into the familiar green eyes of Harry Potter, who appeared to have frozen in mid gesture.

Draco regarded him for a moment, taking in the stubble and the messy hair, the dungarees and faded t-shirt. Ten years, it had been. Ten long years since he'd seen those eyes, felt those rough hands on him. He wanted to run, lock himself in his room and block out the hurt. Better still, he should jump on the Harley and get the hell out of there. God. Why? Why here? Why now? He blinked several times, then suddenly came back to himself. He stood up and, as if being drawn by an inescapable force, walked slowly over to the table, his eyes still locked on those of his erstwhile nemesis. When he reached the table, the green eyes were wide-eyed with shock—or was it fear? Reaching out a hand, he brushed his fingers against Harry's cheek. The touch was like an electric shock and he was suddenly filled with a passionate fury. Leaning forward, he reached down and roughly fisted the top of Harry's t-shirt in his hand, yanking him upward and crashing their lips together. After several moments, he pulled back and brusquely shoved the other man away.

"Where the fuck have you been?" he growled, his voice dripping with venom. "I waited for you, you arsehole, and you fucking never came back!"

TBC….

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Chapter 3: The Long Walk Home

A/N: This story is dedicated to sa1boy. Beta'd by the gorgeous Aandune.

The Long Walk Home

Chapter 3

Harry stared at him in shock. He blinked several times, thinking he should say something, but he couldn't move his mouth—nor any other part of himself. He was rooted to the spot, as if someone had cast a Binding Curse on him. As he watched Draco's hand reach out to touch his cheek, a voice inside his head screamed at him to move, to say something—to do something! Oh, God! He felt as if his whole world was crashing down around him, shattering into a million pieces, the shards rising up to stab his heart again and again, until it twisted and haemorrhaged, flooding his chest so that he couldn't breathe.

Then suddenly he was being yanked upwards and that face, those lips, were on his, and he was being crushed under their passionate onslaught. The air around him turned thick, pressing against him, suffocating him even more, and there was a buzzing in his ears. Draco's lips were white hot where they pressed against his and the heat sizzled through him like a rush of electricity, igniting every nerve ending as if it were on fire. He felt a soft moan at the back of his throat. God, he had missed these lips more than anything else. But it wasn't right; he shouldn't be here. He needed to get away; he needed to stop—but he didn't ever want it to stop. He wanted to hold onto those lips forever and never let them go, ever again. He was shocked at how desperately he missed them.

But then he was being pushed away and Draco was cursing him. He fell back into his chair, continuing to gaze into those grey eyes, his desperation turning into utter despair as the vituperative words washed over him. He couldn't breathe—his chest was refusing to move; his lungs shut down in protest. His head felt light from lack of oxygen and he swayed slightly as he tried to force himself to breathe. Then the darkness began to creep across his consciousness and he welcomed it like an old friend. The last thing he saw before slipping into oblivion was those lips forming the words that echoed in his brain like a death knell. You never came back.

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Within seconds of Harry's collapse, the three other men had leapt out of their seats and were standing over him worriedly. One bent over and began to tap him gently on the cheek.

"Jim. Jim, mate?" He turned to his friends. "He's blacked out."

Draco stared at Harry's prone form in horror as the other men rounded on him.

"What did you do to him?" One of the men, a burly bloke with hairy arms and a bald head, grabbed Draco's arm and growled at him.

"Who are you? What business do you have here?" The other man, who was tall and thin with a shock of blond hair, was suddenly in his face.

Draco looked from the man back to Harry in confusion. Jim? He wasn't sure what had happened. One moment he was confronting his ex-lover, whom he had thought dead, and the next moment Harry was lying on the floor, seemingly unconscious. It was too much to process and he struggled to wrap his mind around the events of the past few minutes. But the man in front of him wanted answers.

"Who are you, anyway?" He poked Draco in the chest several times as he spoke. Draco didn't back off, though, suddenly angry again at these intruders into what should have been a very personal reunion.

"Get out of my way!" he shouted, pushing the man in the chest and nudging him aside so he could get to where Harry was lying on the floor. But the man grabbed him by the arm and angrily shoved him up against the wall.

"Oh, no you don't. You leave him alone!" Pinning Draco with his thick, muscled arms, he turned to the blond man. "Better get Jim out of here while I sort this bloke out." Turning back to Draco, he narrowed

his eyes and snarled. “You’ve got sixty seconds to get out of here before I throttle you.”

“Wait.” They both turned to see Harry pushing himself up into a sitting position. “It’s okay. He’s an old… friend.”

“You need to lay down somewhere, love.” The barmaid was hovering over him, a worried look on her face.

“No, honestly, I’m fine,” Harry replied, struggling to stand up. When he got to his feet, he swayed a little and she grabbed his arm.

“Come on, let’s go through to the parlour. There’s a couch in there.”

“Fine, okay, but I can walk by myself.” Harry shook her hand off his arm and walked over to Draco, who was still pinned to the wall. “Let him go, Mike. He’s not going to hurt me.” Draco looked at him coldly, brushing himself off when Mike let him go. Harry gave him a pleading look, then walked across the room and disappeared through a door.

Draco sneered at Mike and made to follow Harry.

“You watch yourself, or you’ll have me to answer to.” Mike growled before turning back to the others, who were now dispersing, and moving back to his table.

Draco glared at his back as he turned the handle on the door and entered the parlour, closing the door softly behind him

Harry was sitting on a couch on the far side of the rather large room, his eyes closed. Draco walked over to him and stood with his arms crossed. They stayed like that for several uncomfortable minutes before Draco took a deep breath and began to speak, his voice tense.

“Harry?” He spoke quietly, making a concentrated effort to keep his agitation under control. “Harry,” he repeated, when the other man’s eyes remained closed

Harry slowly opened his eyes and looked up at him, and the icy fury that had wrapped itself around Draco’s heart thawed slightly. The green eyes were tired and care-worn, and Draco wondered just what had happened to make them that way.

“Harry, what happened to you? I thought you were dead.” He was conflicted—angry and concerned and relieved all at the same time, and it made his head hurt. He was so unbearably ecstatic to see Harry again, to find him alive and seemingly unharmed; happy even. But the fact that he had disappeared without a trace all those years ago, leaving Draco full of hurt and pain as he imagined every kind of terrible fate that might have befallen him. Looking at Harry, though, tended to cloud his thinking, and he couldn’t decide whether he wanted to strangle him for all the pain he had caused, or take him in his arms and smother him in kisses.

So he did neither; he just stood there expectantly while Harry sat against the dusty cushions, frowning and shaking his head slightly, as if trying to come to terms with the situation. As Draco watched, the other man appeared to go through several rapid changes of emotion, each clearly reflected in his facial expression. The initial shock was still there, gnawing around the edges and accented by the continued slight trembling of his hands and the pallor of his cheeks. But there was also confusion, judging by the knitted brows, and finally, the softening of the features into something more passive, yet still pained. After a few moments, Harry looked up into his eyes again. He opened his mouth to say something, but no words came, and Draco started to get impatient. Surely he deserved some kind of explanation? He could tell that Harry had been through a lot, but, damn it, so had he, and he was damned sure he was not leaving that room until he had some kind of an explanation.

“I’m sorry….” Harry’s voice broke and he leaned his head on his hands as the tears came for the second time that day. “It was the only thing I could do. I had to get away. I-I didn’t know what else to do.” Draco’s anger thawed completely as a rush of compassion filled him. He dropped to the couch beside Harry and pulled the dark head close, wrapping his arms around his trembling shoulders and muttering soothing endearments. Draco held him tightly as he rocked them gently back and forth, silently praying for solace, not only for Harry, but for himself as well. He felt like he was mourning once again, as he had done all those years ago—the wound had been reopened and was seeping blood and tears and pain, and it hurt just as badly and just as deeply. All the anger and denial, the yearning, the bargaining, the promises… the resignation… all came flooding back to him. He clung to Harry like a drowning man and

suddenly wondered who was soothing who. Closing his eyes, he leant back against the cushions, Harry cradled against his chest, and gave himself over to the raw emotion that tore at his gut.

They sat like that for a long while, until Harry finally sighed and pulled away to stare into Draco's eyes. He waited for Harry to say something, but what hung between them appeared to have left him speechless. Finally, his gaze dropped and he sighed again.

Draco brushed his fingers across the stubbly cheek, then pushed several unruly locks away from where they had fallen haphazardly across his eyes. He was older and more weary, but he was still Harry—the fire in his eyes still burned and his heart was still sewn in patchwork right there on his sleeve, and when he lifted his hand to place it over Draco's own where it rested on his cheek, Draco was suddenly completely undone. Those eyes drew him in and held him in their thrall and suddenly his lips were on Harry's again. This time, they didn't crush; there was no anger poisoning this kiss. It was chaste and yet it said everything.

It was several moments before Harry realised what was happening, but when he did, he responded in kind, gently teasing and sucking at Draco's lips, not wanting to break the fragile reconciliation that was blossoming between them. They lapped at each other's mouths for several minutes, neither wanting to pull away, until their sweet reverie was abruptly interrupted by the door opening.

They quickly pulled away from each other as the barmaid's head appeared around the corner.

"You okay, then, love?" She stopped dead, taking in the tableau before her. Draco still had his arms around Harry and it was obvious what they had been doing. She opened the door wide then and moved forward, her hands on her hips. "Jim? What's going on?"

Harry quickly pulled out of Draco's embrace and stared at her for a moment before speaking. "Er… This is Draco. He's an old friend."

"Friend, my arse! What the bloody hell were you doing kissing him?" Her face was flushed and she looked incensed. "I turn my back for one minute and you're off with someone else!"

“Wait! It’s not what it looks like!” Harry stood up and looked between Elsie and Draco in confusion. “He’s just a friend. It was just a bit of a shock—”

“What do you mean, it’s not what it looks like?” Draco cut him off as he stood up and glared at Harry. “Running off again, are we? I should have bloody known it was all an act!”

“No! Wait! That’s not what I meant!”

Elsie began tapping her foot, her features morphing into a scowl. “I’m waiting for an explanation, Jim.”

But Draco had spoken at the same time. “I’m waiting for an explanation, Harry.” He and Elsie looked at each other, then at Harry.

Elsie’s eyes narrowed. “And it better be bloody good.”

TBC….

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Chapter 4: The Long Walk Home

A/N: This story is dedicated to sa1boy and was beta’d by the lovely Aandune.

The Long Walk Home

Chapter 4

Harry looked between the two very irate people before him and blanched. He had no idea what to say; it was all happening so fast. Seeing Draco again had aroused so many of his old feelings; he literally ached with the need to be close to him, to talk to him, to rediscover him again. He knew he owed Draco an explanation, but standing here in front of his ex and his current lover, he didn't know how much or how little, or even what to tell. Elsie and he weren't serious, but she had been keeping him company on and off for several years now and he had grown comfortable with her. She didn't know him well, though. In fact, she knew very little about him at all, and he wasn't about to spill his deepest fears and past mistakes in front of her. But the truth was, he owed her an explanation as well. She had shared part of his life here in Busselton and he knew he couldn't just ignore all of that.

Turning back to Draco, he cringed inwardly at the look of hurt and anger reflected in his furrowed brow. The beautiful, pale face was rigid, the normally soft rounded lips pulled into a taut line. After several moments of continued silence, Draco finally threw his hands up.

"Well, I suppose there is no love lost between us, then. Why don't you just go off with your little bosomy friend here and I'll leave you to it!"

"No! Draco, please don't go! I need you! I—" Draco's face visibly relaxed at the words and he took a deep breath as Harry's hand reached out for him.

But Elsie had rounded on Harry. "Bullshit, you do." She tugged him toward her and kissed him squarely on the mouth. When she pulled back, she looked over at Draco and smirked. "Come on, love. You don't need him. Let's leave this barmy bastard and get you back inside." She pulled on Harry's arm, but before he could respond, Draco had whipped his wand out of his sleeve and pointed it in her face.

"Obliviate!" Her hand dropped away from Harry's arm and a confused look passed over her features. She blinked several times and then dropped into a nearby chair, her eyes blank. Moving quickly, Draco

launched himself at the surprised Harry, wrapping his arm around his waist and Apparating them away before she had a chance to come to her senses.

When they Disapparated into Draco's room upstairs, Harry pulled away with a frown. "I'm not sure that was such a good idea."

"Nonsense. She'll be fine in a few minutes and she won't remember a thing."

"But the others will. They'll want to know what happened to me."

"The others will just think you've gone home or something—that you were ill, maybe." Draco shrugged. "It doesn't matter, Harry. What matters is that you talk to me. I need to know what happened to you and what you've been doing all this time." Harry collapsed onto the end of the bed and Draco moved closer to stand in front of him. Brushing back the dark hair from his eyes, he lifted Harry's face towards him. "I've missed you. You have no idea how much."

"God, I've missed you too," Harry groaned as he wrapped his arms around the other's waist and buried his face in Draco's soft, t-shirt covered stomach. Inhaling deeply, he breathed in the scent that was uniquely Draco and let out a long sigh as he rubbed his face against the fabric. They remained like that for what seemed like hours, Draco stroking the messy strands of his hair with one hand while rubbing gentle circles on his shoulder with the other.

After awhile, Harry sighed again and regretfully lifted his head to look up into grey eyes. "I suppose I owe you an explanation."

"That would be nice."

"I've wanted to get in touch with you so many times, but in the beginning, I couldn't—I couldn't go back. Then, later, I felt it was too long, that you wouldn't want me, especially after what I did."

“But why did you leave? I thought we were happy? You killed Voldemort, we graduated—we had good jobs… I don’t understand.”

“It was too much. Just—too much. The war, the killing, the reporters… just… everything. It made me panic; I—I couldn’t handle it.” He looked into Draco’s eyes, willing him to understand. But Draco was still frowning. “I just… needed to get away from everything. I’m sorry.” His shoulders slumped and he dropped his head into his hands.

“And that everything included me?”

Harry’s head shot up at the hurt tone in Draco’s voice. “No! No, of course not. It wasn’t you… not at all. Ever.” He reached out for Draco, but the other man stepped backwards.

“Then why didn’t you confide in me? We could have gone somewhere—anywhere! I would have done anything, gone anywhere for you!”

“I didn’t want to burden you. You’d been through so much already with the war and everything.”

“But we were a couple, Harry. We lived together! You just walked out!”

“It wasn’t—I… I thought you’d want to stop me.”

“Well, you’re right there. Of course, I would have tried to stop you. I loved you! I would have tried to help you. But you didn’t let me!” Draco’s anger and hurt were palpable and Harry cringed as he felt the bitterness seep out between the words. “You and your bloody hero complex—always helping everyone else, but too damned proud to accept help yourself!”

Harry jumped up from the bed and was in front of Draco in two paces, his hands clutching at Draco’s shoulders. “No, you don’t understand! It wasn’t that! I just thought you deserved to have a quiet,

peaceful life."

"Oh, and my lover leaving me without a word was going to induce peace and contentment, I suppose?!"

"I was confused! I wasn't thinking straight! Honestly, I didn't know how else to cope." Harry stopped and took a deep breath. He needed to calm down. He needed to make Draco understand. Looking deeply into Draco's stormy eyes, he continued. "I thought I was going crazy. Do you know what that feels like?"

Draco shook his hands off and walked over to the window. It was still raining and the lights that had come on up and down the street glowed weakly through the steamy windows, which were all shut against the heavy grey sheets of rain.

"I know what it feels like." He turned then. "It feels like your world is crashing down around you, like nothing is real… like you're an observer looking in from the outside. It feels like crushing pain in your chest and your head—every minute of every day. It was your voice around every corner, Harry; your face in every window, every shop… everywhere."

Harry looked at him, stunned. He'd known that Draco would suffer when he left, but he hadn't realised just how much.

"I thought some escaped Death Eaters had taken you down—exacting their revenge on you for killing their Master." Draco walked back over to Harry, but didn't touch him. He just stood there, a pained expression on his face. "I mourned you, Harry. For months… years…. I threw in my job to go looking for you. I estranged myself from my family, from everybody."

"God. I'm so sorry."

"And what have you been doing all this time? You've been here the whole time?"

"I came here because it was quiet. They needed someone to help out around the pub. They gave me a

room and I did odd jobs around the place. After awhile, I decided I liked it here, so I bought a small house by the beach. I helped out the owner of the pub when he was in trouble and now I own a share of it." He shrugged his shoulders. "Not much else to tell. I still work around here, helping out. And I like to fish."

"And what about Elsie?" Draco replied tightly. "You looked like a nice little couple."

"It's not serious."

"How long have you been seeing her?" Draco crossed his arms, the cold steel glare returning.

"Four years…." Harry's eyes dropped to survey the floor. He knew it didn't sound good.

"But it's not serious." It wasn't a question. Draco's look could have cut through glass.

"No. Look, Draco, she's good company, but I don't love her."

"And are you sure she doesn't love you?" Draco arched an eyebrow and Harry blanched.

"What? Of course not. We're just friends!"

"Friends who shag."

"Yes! No. Wait!" Harry shook his head vigorously. "I don't even see her that often. Yeah, we shag sometimes, but that's all it is."

But Draco wasn't to be put off so easily. "She looked pretty possessive to me, Harry."

“Well, she has no right to be. I’ve never made her any promises.”

“God, you are so fucking oblivious! She fucking adores you, and you’re too fucking full of yourself to see it!”

Harry rubbed his eyes tiredly and sighed. He knew what Draco was saying was right, but why should he be blamed? She was nothing more than a friend; albeit a friend with benefits. But that’s all it was. Draco was making too much out of it. “Look, can’t we get past this?” Harry asked him, pleadingly. He gazed longingly into Draco’s eyes and, after a moment, thought he noticed them soften just a little. “Please, Draco. Just give me a break, okay?”

Draco’s eyes narrowed at the words and his nostrils flared. “You’ve got a fucking nerve, Potter,” he growled and advanced upon him, his eyes still glowering. “Giving me that soppy, pleading shit.” Harry began to back up as Draco moved forward, unsure of whether the other man was going to hex him into oblivion or beat him to a pulp. Draco’s pupils were dilated so much his eyes looked almost black, a striking contrast against the pale cheeks and lashes. His lips curled into a sneer as Harry inched away from him and Harry cursed himself for not bothering to carry his wand these days. Suddenly, he stumbled as his foot hit the wall beside the night stand, and Draco took the opportunity to grab his wrists and shove up himself against Harry’s chest, pinning him to the wall, their faces just inches from each other. Harry knew he should have been scared—Draco was a formidable opponent, especially with a wand—but the smell of his hair and that powerful gaze caused his breath to hitch as Draco insinuated himself harder against Harry, until their bodies were aligned from chest to knee.

“Think you can win me over with prissy whining, do you?” Draco’s eyes fairly bored into him as he whispered the words menacingly. “Think again, Potter. I’m not some oversexed barmaid with a crush.” He leaned in even closer and Harry closed his eyes, ready for the onslaught to come. Leaning his head back against the wall, he felt some relief that he would finally be able to atone for what he did to Draco. God knows the guilt had been tearing at his insides for these ten years past, gnawing at him and tainting every relationship he had formed ever since. If truth be told, he not only deserved Draco’s wrath; he wanted it—needed it, like oxygen.

When Draco let go of one wrist and flicked his wand teasingly against Harry’s neck, Harry opened his eyes again so he could see the satisfaction in the other man’s face when he took his revenge. Draco’s eyes narrowed again and he felt the grip on his other wrist tighten momentarily. But then Draco pulled

back slightly so as to focus more readily on the panting wretch that was now Harry. “Prepare to meet your match, Potter.” He smirked derisively. They were so close Harry could see a vein throbbing in his pale temple through the almost translucent skin, and he closed his eyes again and breathed in deeply in an attempt to ease the lack of air from that crushing chest.

Draco flicked his wand, muttering something inaudible under his breath, and suddenly Harry was naked against the wall and Draco’s equally naked and hard body was writhing against his as he nibbled against Harry’s neck. Fuck, but if that wasn’t the most erotic thing he had ever felt. Draco’s skin was soft against his, but the muscles underneath were hard and unyielding and the friction caused as their bodies slid against each other was nothing short of ecstasy. Then teeth were nipping at the skin of his throat and a swollen length was rubbing deliciously against his hip, triggering his own erection, which swelled and throbbed achingly against the bony protrusion of Draco’s hip.

“So, you need me, eh?” Draco laughed gutturally as he sucked the skin under Harry’s ear. “Well, your wish is about to come true.” He ground his hips against Harry’s, bringing his wand down at the same time to brush across the tender skin of Harry’s right arse cheek, muttering something that Harry didn’t recognise. He felt a strange sensation in his nether regions, and groaned as Draco’s magic circled his ring and inserted itself, first gently, then more and more ferociously, over and over again, until Harry was thrusting back hard against its inexorable rhythm.

“Fuck….” Harry threw his head back and continued thrusting and groaning as the sensation of his prick grinding against hard flesh, combined with the thrusting magic in his arse, brought him close to screaming. He was so close he could feel the spiral of release building up inside him. He didn’t want it to end and yet he couldn’t stop its inevitable course. He tried to get himself under control, but found that he was helpless against this onslaught of passion. “Draco—I…”

But Draco had wrenched him away from the wall and thrust him down upon the bed, stilling his protests with a scorching kiss. The magical thrusting had ceased, but Harry’s eyes flew open when Draco pushed his legs back against his chest and stretched them out so he could grasp Harry’s ankles. Draco stopped for a brief moment to look down into Harry’s wide eyes, the look of triumph evident on his face. Pushing the ankles forward even further, his gaze bore into Harry’s as he thrust into him in one long swift stroke. Harry’s back arched as the pain wrenched through him. He hadn’t felt this in a decade and it tore through his insides like a burning fire. He gasped at the pain, but then he felt a burning rip of desire as Draco’s cock brushed against his prostate and he keened and arched his back, needing more. Pain and pleasure fought with each for long minutes until eventually, pleasure won over, and the pain was numbed and forgotten in the ever-quickening thrust of Draco’s cock inside his arse.

Harry was overcome with the feeling, and as the tension built in his groin and moved down to his thighs, he closed his eyes tight and thrust against it with all his might, and his orgasm was wrenched from him with the force of a Killing Curse, arcing and plateauing, before spreading over him, wrenching the very life from his muscles, his bones. He collapsed into a boneless heap as Draco cried out above him, his own face a study of ecstasy, of sheer bliss, his face contorted as his orgasm ripped through him relentlessly.

Moments later, Draco collapsed against him with a groan. “Fuck, Harry. You’re mine and don’t you ever forget it.”

Harry thought he would be happy forever if he could just lay there with Draco atop him, his weight anchoring him, keeping him stable. This is what he’d been missing for the last ten years. This was the piece of the puzzle that was holding his sanity in the balance. Draco was his centre and the world was suddenly beautiful, sane and relaxed again.

“Yes, yours….” He wrapped his arms more tightly around the man on top of him and sighed contentedly.

Draco’s breathing had returned to normal by the time he lifted himself and moved to lay next to the softly sighing form of his lover. Harry’s breathing was low and regular and it wasn’t long before he drifted off into a dreamless sleep. Draco marvelled at how little he had changed really, succumbing to his nostalgia by gently brushing his thumb over his lover’s cheek.

Harry was so beautiful—he really was the same gorgeous man, except perhaps that he was much more melancholy. Draco sighed as he contemplated what he had to do. Harry had a new life here. It was clear he still had feelings for Draco, but there was no question of Harry going back to the wizarding world. And then there was Elsie. Harry had denied his feelings, but it seemed clear to Draco that Harry and Elsie had something special. After all he had suffered, Harry deserved some normality.

It was with a heavy heart, then, that some time later, when Harry was gently snoring against the pillows of Draco’s bed, that Draco rose and quickly dressed, gathering his things into his pack. He looked at the window and, noticing that the rain had stopped, nodded his head in resignation. It was a sign—time to move on and let Harry live his new life. Stopping to regard Harry with fond eyes, he steeled himself for what he knew was the right thing to do and quietly let himself out the door, padding down the stairs and out the front door with nary a sound. Not wanting to arouse the neighbours, he kicked the brake and

quietly rolled his Harley down the street and around the corner, before turning the key and kicking the engine unto life.

It was all for the best. At least he knew that Harry was happy, had friends, a lover. It was more than he could have hoped for. He chastised himself gently for his feelings of loss as he glided out onto the road and headed for London, not stopping even to cast a last glance at the place that held the soul of his existence.

TBC….

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Chapter 5: The Long Walk Home

A/N: This story is dedicated to sa1boy and was beta'd by the lovely Aandune.

The Long Walk Home

Chapter 5

Harry awoke to bright sunlight in his eyes. Blinking a couple of times, he moved out of the stream of light and rolled over to greet his lover. The bed was empty though, and he surmised that Draco was in the bathroom or perhaps had gone to get them breakfast. Stretching lazily back against the pillows, he arched his spine, feeling his muscles stretch taut before snuggling down into the blankets again. It was still early and there was time to snooze for a bit, at least until Draco came back to bed. He grinned to himself as he remembered their fight the previous evening, not to mention the passionate sex afterwards, and sighed contentedly, letting his eyelids droop and close as he slid into a comfortable doze.

He must have drifted off again because the sun was no longer falling across the bed when he finally jerked awake. He frowned when he realised that Draco still hadn't come back. Surely he couldn't take that long in the bathroom. Raising himself up, he slipped out of bed and padded over to the bathroom door, which was very slightly ajar. A quick glance inside revealed the room to be empty. Harry turned back to look for his clothes, his brow still furrowed. If Draco had gone downstairs for breakfast, he should have wakened Harry. Feeling slightly miffed, he stopped dead in his tracks as he gazed around the room. His clothes were folded neatly on the armchair, his shoes on the floor below, but there was no evidence of any of Draco's gear anywhere. Last night his pack had been sitting on the floor by the fireplace and his leathers had been draped across the back of the chair, his boots lined up alongside the pack. There had been bits and pieces of other clothing hanging on the knobs of the wardrobe and some keys and other stuff on the mantle. Now there was nothing. The mantle was bare save for a small clock and another careful sweep of the room confirmed the fact that Draco's belongings were indeed gone.

Harry's chest clenched in fear as he quickly ran to the window to look down at the street. He didn't know what kind of bike Draco rode, but it was obvious that whatever it was, it was gone. The street was bare save for a lone Mini Cooper parked across the road. The band around Harry's chest tightened. He closed his eyes against the onslaught of pain and leaned his burning forehead against the cool glass. Slowly, the fire in his head burned down through his body, razing his organs and reducing them to ashes as realisation dawned. He felt consumed by regret and guilt. He wasn't worthy of Draco and Draco had left him. How could he have ever believed that he could make up for ten years of hurt and pain caused by his selfishly indulgent actions? He had known his leaving would hurt the people he loved most, would tear Draco apart most of all. And yet the knowledge hadn't stopped him. He had let his silly fears and anxieties get the better of him; had let them reduce him to a pathetic, cowardly excuse of a man. He'd had love, affection, the esteem of the entire wizarding world, and he had thrown it all away because of his precious insecurities and emotional immaturity.

And now he was paying for his sins. And he deserved every penalty. With stark realisation, he knew that this was pure karma; fate was repaying him for his thoughtless acts and that realisation flowed over him like a wave of ice. He closed his eyes as he felt the ashes of his insides grow cold. Suddenly, he felt completely hollow—devoid of any feeling whatsoever. Where there once had been fiery passion and breathless fear, now there was nothing. He doubted he could even summon the energy to feel depressed. Depression was a response to hurt and pain. But this—this was emptiness; a sheer and utter nothingness. He was barren.

Pulling his forehead away from the window pane, he contemplated his reflection and thought how ironic it was that his life had come to this. He had sought to run away from pain, but pain would not be shunned; it had consumed him and berated him for a decade until finally, when he had been confronted by the very thing that might have saved him—the very thing that he had had in ample quantity before he

had so thoughtlessly turned his back on it—it had been snatched away.

Resignedly, he turned away from his reflection and gathered his clothes, dressing himself slowly and methodically, his fingers working robotically to pull on his boxers and jeans, his baggy t-shirt and runners. He dressed automatically, his clothes slipping onto his frame just as they had countless times before and would countless times again. What did it matter? The fabric may just as well have been fashioned from cobwebs for the amount of protection it gave him. He was completely exposed and the worst part of it was that there was nothing to see. Nothing inside. Had it always been like that or had this nothingness crept up on him? It felt natural, like an old friend; yet, paradoxically, unlike himself, as if he were observing himself from outside the frame of a photograph or slow-motion movie—watching himself walk seamlessly out of the door of that room, down the stairs and out into the street, not stopping to wave to or chat with anybody in the bar, but continuing on, as if in a dream, across the cobbled street and down the hill to his cottage by the sea.

He felt a sigh escape him when his key slipped into the lock and turned, the door clicking open gently to reveal the cool inner quiet of his familiar home. Dropping the keys onto the bench, he absently filled the kettle and lit the stove, locating cup and teabag as he waited for the familiar whistle to sound. It was a sunny day and he supposed he should gather his fishing gear and head for the pier. He could bake a fish for dinner. Carrots, peas and potatoes would make a nice accompaniment. Yes, and perhaps even a nice white sauce. He could do the fish in foil, steam it to perfection. He liked it that way. Maybe Mrs Bayliss would like a plate. God knows her arthritis prevented her from cooking much. She was probably living on cold cereal and frozen dinners for all he knew. Yes, that was the ticket, baked fish and a plate for Mrs. Bayliss. Maybe even a nice glass of white wine with the meal. The thought of food stirred his salivary glands, so he reached for the toaster and popped two slices of fruit bread in. Tea and fruit toast was his favourite breakfast. With maybe a little strawberry conserves. When the toast popped, he dropped the slices onto a plate and went to the refrigerator to retrieve the butter and jam. Yes, lots of butter on fruit toast, and a drop of milk in his tea. Finishing the preparations, he picked up his plate and cup and moved to sit at the kitchen table.

He miscalculated the distance, however, hitting his knee against the table leg as he lowered himself into his chair. The hot tea spilled over his hand and he cursed as he quickly placed the dripping cup and plate on the table. Shoving the chair back, he huffed in annoyance as he stormed over to the sink to grab a dishcloth. The tea had left scalding marks on his arm and long, wet dribbles across the tablecloth. God, he was so clumsy! Shaking his head in frustration, he dabbed first at his reddening arm, then at the caramel coloured stain spreading across the table. What a fucking dolt he was—couldn't even carry a bloody plate and cup to the table. Draco always used to chide him about his clumsiness—he'd always seemed to have food or drink stains on his shirt or trousers. Draco had laughed and chucked him under

the chin like a small child and Harry had always grinned sheepishly at his own gauche movements. Then Draco would lean across the table and kiss him gently on the lips and tell him that his clumsiness was endearing. Harry huffed at the thought of anything about him being endearing. He was stupid and ungainly and just—well, what did it matter, anyway? Draco was gone. Harry was here. End of story.

Suddenly, his eyes clouded over. Draco was gone! Fucking gone! And Harry was left to pick up the pieces of his broken self—yet again. Fucking, fucking gone! He walks in like he owns the whole town, tears down everything and then he fucking walks off as if nothing happened. Ten years—TEN YEARS! Harry had thrown himself at his ex-lover's mercy and what had he received in return? A fucking empty bed and no note. Nothing! And after berating Harry for walking out! It was too much, too fucking ironic to even bear thinking about. The man had played him, had worn him down, made him grovel, and then walked off, gloating at his victory.

Suddenly, Harry saw red and the cup that he had picked up abruptly flew through the air, as if of its own accord, and smashed against the tongue and groove wall next to the stove, shattering loudly into countless fragments on the hardwood floor. The sound of shattering china reverberated through him and thrummed against his battered psyche and before he knew it he had picked up the plate of toast as well and hurtled it towards the kitchen window. The glass shattered spectacularly and Harry felt a surge of triumph at the feeling of power that washed over him. He wanted to break everything in the house! The fucking window, the fucking stupid china plates that were lined up on the hutch by the door, the awkward fucking chair that lay tipped over against the floor like some drunken sentinel. He hated all of it, all of it! The tongue and groove walls, the big square fridge, the broken window, the curtains, the table, the fucking stove, for Christ's sake!

His whole fucking life was one long, sorry, pathetic story. And it was about time that things changed! So Draco had left him. The fucking arsehole did it on purpose! The blood in Harry's veins began to boil as he realised that Draco had played him like a puppet, had turned the tables on him to show him what it was like to be loved and left. What a fucking nerve! And after that whole diatribe about how hard it had been on him, and how wrong Harry had been to leave! Much as he hated to admit it, he never would have taken Draco as one to kick a man while he was down. But kick he did—and hard. Harry was bruised and battered and left to lick his wounds, and Draco was probably laughing about it all as he sailed off to wherever he was going, his next conquest an easy fuck away.

Harry seethed as he remembered Draco's words—those words that now cut deep, leaving him raw and aching; You're mine and don't you ever forget it. Well, he may have unwittingly succumbed to the Malfoy charm yet again, but there was no way he going to let Draco get away with it. Draco was cruel; he was heartless and mean, and it would be a cold day in hell before Harry would let that bastard move on

without putting up a fight. He had waited ten years for sanity, and now he had it, he wasn't about to let it go.

Reassured by his new resolve, Harry marched into his bedroom and yanked open the top drawer of his duchess. Reaching in amongst the socks and underwear, he felt around until his fingers lighted upon the rough surface of his holly and phoenix wand. He grinned with satisfaction as he pulled the instrument from its long-time hiding place and flicked his wrist. Sparks shot out of the end of the wand and kernels of smoke twirled into the air at the movement. He gripped the wand possessively and marched back to the kitchen. The window was a gaping hole, the edges of the glass jutting raggedly out from its frame, sharp and menacing. Harry stood for a moment and contemplated the jagged edges that contrasted so sharply against the soft flap of the lace curtain. It had been many years since he had used his wand, a long time since he had even thought about magic, but his grip held no hesitation is he lifted his arm and flicked it expertly. "Reparo!" He actually felt the magic fly out of the tip of the wand and circle the broken pane, ebbing and flowing around it until it knitted itself back into place. With a contented sigh, Harry held the wand in front of his face and gently stroked its irregular surface. It felt right again somehow. There would be no more running away, no more backing off from this magical side of him. It was a part of him—more so than anything he had ever felt and, as he continued to stroke the seemingly simple piece of wood between his fingers, he vowed that he would never run away again.

He stretched his wand arm out and flicked his wrist, muttering the spell again at the broken china cup, which rose up off the floor and repaired itself before sailing back into his hand. Another flick and the mess on the table was gone and Harry moved confidently back over to the stove to relight the eye under the kettle before locating another tea bag. He felt lighter somehow, as if his new resolve had buoyed him up, acting like a cushion between him and the world.

As the kettle began to whistle, there was a knock at the door, and Elsie's head appeared around its edge. "Hey, hon, how are you doing?"

He smiled at her as she walked in. "What was all that noise? I could hear it from way up the hill," she added.

"Oh, I just dropped a tray of china. Nothing serious; it was old stuff I hardly used anyhow." He pulled down another cup. "Tea?"

“Yes, thanks. That would be lovely. I’ve got to start work at noon, but I’ve got time for a cuppa.” She sat herself at the table and looked at him worriedly. “So, how are you feeling today, love? That was a bit of a turn you took last night. Where did you disappear to?” She looked at him questioningly.

“It was nothing, really. I was just a bit shocked at seeing my old friend. We didn’t part on the best terms a few years back,” he said by way of explanation, shrugging his shoulders as he did so. “That and probably too many lagers.” He grinned at her and she sat back and sighed, evidently reassured.

“So, what was the commotion all about? Mike said your friend tried to snog you!” She raised her eyebrows and Harry breathed in sharply. Draco had Obliviated Elsie, but the others would no doubt remember that glorious moment in shining technicolour. He searched his mind for something to say that wouldn’t be too damning, but all he could think about was how wonderful Draco’s mouth had felt against his; how absolutely incredible his hard body had felt when they had lain skin to skin on the bed in Draco’s room upstairs at the pub. After some moments, he realised that Elsie was waiting for an answer, so he steeled himself against her reaction, deciding that his new resolve required nothing less than the truth.

“We were lovers when we were young.” He looked at her warily, not certain how she would take the news that he was bisexual. “I left him ten years ago, before I came here.”

Elsie’s eyes opened wide and her mouth dropped. “You what? But you’re not gay, Jim!” she finally sputtered. “What on earth are you talking about? You’re the blokiest bloke I’ve ever met!”

“What’s that got to do with anything?” He frowned at her. “And I’m not lying. We were a couple. For three years in fact. We lived together for two and a half of those.”

“Bloody hell, that’s a bit of a shock!” She stood up from the table and went to the sink. Pouring herself a glass of water, she sipped from it as she turned to regard him suspiciously. “So where were you last night? Did he come back here with you?”

“Well, actually, I stayed with him at the pub.”

“What do you mean ‘stayed with him’?” She advanced toward him, a menacing look in her eye. Harry backed up and quickly moved over to the counter to make the tea, his back to her so she couldn’t see his face.

“Well….” He trailed off, not sure exactly how to tell her of his infidelity. True, he had never made a commitment to Elsie, but they had been shagging on and off for some years now and he knew that she likely would interpret his behaviour as cheating. “We, er… slept together.” Finally, he turned back to see her reaction, the two cups of tea in his hands.

Elsie stared at him in shock for a full minute before finally coming back to herself. “You what?” she yelled, her eyes blazing with fury. “You cheated on me? With a man, for God’s sake?”

Harry sat the two cups on the table and walked over to her. Placing his hands gently on her shoulders, he tried to remain calm. “Elsie, listen, we were never a couple; you know that.”

“You friggin’ arsehole! How dare you?” She shoved him and started to back away, as if she were afraid to be near him.

“Elsie, wait. You’re overreacting.” He moved toward her again but she threw her palm in his face.

“Stop right there. Don’t come any closer.”

He stopped and waited, not sure what to do. She looked furious and he searched his mind for something to say that would diffuse the situation. He hadn’t realised she would take it so hard, but he wasn’t certain whether it was his alleged infidelity or the bisexuality that was the problem. Certainly in this little seaside haven sexuality was a given. The women were feminine, if robust, and the men were all rough, macho, and straight as they come - at least as far as he knew.

As he watched Elsie continue to back away, he suddenly knew this was the end of his quiet existence. There would be no more fishing quietly off the pier, no more friendly waves from neighbours, no more

cards at the pub. He had laid down his hand and now the whole town would know. It was just a matter of time. He rubbed his brow as he thought about what he had to do, and sighed.

“Love, I’m sorry.” He looked at her pleadingly, but her expression was hard and cold. “I never intended to hurt you. Honestly, I-”

“How could you have lied to me all this time?” Her face flushed pink and a tear escaped from the corner of her eye. “I trusted you. I loved you.”

Harry inhaled sharply at her words. He was more than taken aback; he’d had no idea she felt that way towards him. His heart clenched at the evident pain in her face. God, what had he done? All he ever wanted was a quiet, peaceful life and now he had wrecked two people’s lives, not to mention his own. How could he not have known how she felt for him? Was he that insensitive? Draco seemed to think so, and rightly, it seems. He scanned back in his mind to their conversation the night before and frowned as he tried to remember how Draco had acted. He had been angry, very angry, for which Harry didn’t blame him. And their lovemaking had been hard and urgent. Harry had welcomed it in penance for having hurt Draco all those years ago. It had been painful, but also exciting beyond belief, because underneath the anger he had seen something else—possessiveness. Draco had claimed him, had said as much afterwards. But then he had left.

Harry’s brain hurt as he thought about why Draco would be so possessive, but then leave. He had thought the other man was punishing him, but now he wondered. Perhaps he just didn’t want Harry to hurt him again—God knows Draco had little enough reason to trust him. He had acted thoughtlessly ten years ago, and now, with this heartbroken woman in front of him, he knew he had done the same thing again. In both cases, he’d been oblivious to what was staring him virtually in the face. Taking a tentative step forward, he held out his hand.

“Why didn’t you tell me?” he asked softly, moving to touch her shoulder lightly. She cringed, but didn’t pull away and he stepped forward again and drew her into his arms. “I am so sorry….” Her head dropped to his shoulder and she began to sob. Harry closed his eyes and berated himself for the tenth time that day as she let out all her hurt and pain against his neck. He didn’t love her—he’d never loved anyone but Draco—but he could feel her pain and it rent him in two. No wonder Draco had left. Harry’s track record in relationships was sadly bereft of anything even remotely approaching understanding, self-knowledge, or insight. He sighed and stroked her back until the sobs subsided and she pulled away. Wiping her eyes quickly, she stared into his eyes for several moments before speaking.

“I have to go.” She turned and fled through the back door, leaving him standing in the middle of the kitchen, his hands and his face completely empty. The door slammed and he sank into a nearby chair and closed his eyes. He willed himself to remain calm. He had caused a lot of hurt and he knew there was nothing he could do to fix it—at least not in Elsie’s case. But Draco…. He could fix that; he knew he could, if only given the chance. He had let one chance slip through his fingers and he wasn’t about to let it happen again.

God damn it, but he was a complete fool! An ignorant, self-indulgent fool, and it was about time he woke up to himself! It was damned time to put his life on track again and make good what had gone bad. He’d been wallowing in self-pity for too long and now he knew he had to do something about it. Oh, yes, he would find Draco, if it was the last thing he ever did; even if it meant going back to the wizarding world. As much as the thought terrified him, he would grow a spine and face it like a man! He had to find Draco! Had to make him believe that Harry would never, ever hurt him again. With firm resolve he got up and put the cups in the sink, slipped his wand under his shirt, and wrenched the door open. He had some people to face and it was now or never. Stepping purposefully through the door, he slammed it behind him.

TBC….

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Chapter 6: The Long Walk Home

A/N: This is for the ever gorgeous sa1boy. Beta’d by the ever supportive Aandune.

The Long Walk Home

Chapter 6

The sun was beginning to rise over the sea to his left as Draco's Harley sped down the road, his full helmet preventing the damp morning air from chilling his face. He would be in London in a few short hours and the thought of what he had to do there lent a determined rigidity to the way he manoeuvred the bike, the wheel spokes of which now glimmered in the early morning sunlight. It was not as if he hadn't prepared himself for what was to come; on that front, he had schooled himself with great care. But he found himself continually allowing sighing breaths to escape as he recalled what he had just left, and those thoughts made his journey that little bit more challenging. What cruel fate had bestowed upon him, recent events in Busselton only heightened, and he berated himself for his inability to block out the overarching emotional pain that had followed him as he had made his early morning escape.

So distracted was he that he didn't notice when the road became slightly less smooth and so it was with considerable surprise that he was jerked out of his reverie when his front wheel clipped the side of a stray rock, sending the bike skidding towards the grassy edge of the road. Quickly taking control, he banked to the left and just managed to stop the bike from falling to the ground with himself underneath. Wrenching the handlebars up with effort, he managed to right the Harley and proceeded to wheel it further off the edge of the road, stopping near a low stone wall. He flipped the kickstand down and perched himself on the wall to regain his equilibrium.

Pulling off his helmet, he rubbed his eyes tiredly. He couldn't stop thinking about Harry, about their night together, and the knowledge of what he was leaving ripped at his insides the further away he travelled. He was constantly second guessing himself and Harry both, wondering if he really had done the right thing in leaving like he did, without a word or a note. He pondered briefly whether he should go back. Hadn't he just the night before scolded Harry for leaving without saying goodbye? And now he had done exactly the same thing. Dropping his head into his hands he groaned softly. What had he done? Harry must be devastated—or furious! How could he just throw ten years of endless longing away with barely a thought? Maybe he should just go back. Harry probably wasn't even awake yet—hell, he probably still slept like the dead. Draco could be back there and slip into bed beside him and no one would be any the wiser. He lifted his head and stared out across the road and the stony beach and on out across the water, which was glinting here and there were the sunlight reflected against its choppy surface. The spasmodic movement of the waves echoed his thoughts, which continued to shift back and forth, nearly sending him crazy.

He knew Harry still loved him. But Harry had seemed happy in the little town, comfortable and content

with his friends in the pub and his cute barmaid girlfriend. Draco had imposed himself out of the blue, and even if Harry did seem to have feelings for him still, that didn't mean anything. Did Draco have the right to just intrude on what had otherwise been a quiet and content life?

As for himself…. He sighed heavily and raised his face to the sun to help thaw the icy foreboding swirling around in his head. He had an appointment in London, one that could not be missed or even put off. In just a few short hours he would be meeting his intended for the first time and would be setting in motion the string of events to which he had already committed. The arranged marriage would go a long way to placating his father and restoring the family name. Not only was his betrothed of aristocratic birth, but her family came from a long line of middle European pure-bloods with a flawless history. That their family fortune had dwindled significantly in recent years had been fortunate for the Malfoys, giving them the leverage they needed to arrange the marriage for their wayward son.

Draco had fought against it for some time before deciding that being disowned and disinherited would make life much more unbearable than being legally tied to a woman for life. In fact, he had argued with his father tooth and nail to get out of it at first. But Lucius had kept at him, trying everything from threats to cajoling without any success. Draco had given back as good as he got, threatening to expose family secrets that would have dragged the Malfoy name down even further into the mud, if that were at all possible. Lucius was tenacious, but Draco was determined not to give in. He was sick and bloody tired of always having to be a Malfoy first, always putting his own wants and needs aside for the sake of the family. So he had stood his ground, until finally one night several weeks ago, his father had exploded in a fit of anger, drawing his wand and aiming it menacingly at Draco. His magic had crackled around him like an electrical current and Draco suddenly knew it was time to back down. He had never seen his father so angry before and he had felt fear course through him as the other man's wand had pointed just millimetres away from his bare throat. He knew then that if he ever wanted to have any kind of a decent life he would have to give in, and so he had, but not without first spitting his disgust at Lucius' methods of persuasion. He may have given in, but he would never forgive Lucius for that. And he would never forgive himself for giving in.

Since that night he had managed to resign himself to the situation for the most part. The Manor was large and he reasoned that he wouldn't have to spend that much time with his wife, and once she had produced an heir, he wouldn't even have to sleep with her. Since love didn't come into the equation at all, perhaps she would even be amenable to a discreetly open relationship. He briefly entertained the idea of having a relationship with Harry at the same time, but quickly dispensed with that thought as he realised how utterly demeaning that would be for the man he loved. To expect someone to play second fiddle, to never be able to enjoy going out in public, to have to hide their love for each other, would be unthinkably worse than living without that love. A love in chains would breed resentment and enmity, might even shatter that love to pieces. He couldn't do it. And he couldn't go back. He knew that now. It

was time to move on, to show some sense of responsibility and to do what had to be done.

Pulling himself to his feet he slapped his helmet back on his head and resolutely straddled the bike, turned the key, and pushed it back off its kickstand. He revved the motor and took off down the road at breakneck speed as if sheer velocity could dissipate his uncertainties. As he barrelled down the road towards London he deliberately kept his mind focussed on the task ahead. He would meet the young lady at the Dorchester Hotel, where she and her family would be staying until their wedding the following week. He would escort her around London for several days, pick out wedding bands and a new set of formal robes, and generally appear engaging, before heading back to the Manor to help his mother with the final preparations. At the Manor, a suite had already been renovated and redecorated to accommodate the newly married couple, though Draco had refused to give up his personal suite. The garden and front terrace were being prepared for the ceremony, which was to be held at two o'clock on Saturday next. By all accounts his intended, a Miss Aurora Barrilleaux, was quite a beautiful young woman, so sleeping with her might even be enjoyable, though he knew he would quickly tire of her, as he had all of his other lovers. Except one. He shook his head to empty it of such thoughts and tried to focus again on the upcoming meeting. But images of Harry, his ankles hooked over Draco's shoulders, his hair in dark contrast against the white of the sheet and his face a study in pure pleasure, kept drifting across his consciousness, refusing to be ignored. Resigned to these captivating but excruciatingly painful memories, he steeled himself as he cruised into London and headed for the Dorchester.

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The pub was packed when Harry finally pushed his way through the door. He had to excuse himself repeatedly as he made his way across the room and towards the bar. It was only four, but the usual Friday evening crowd had already gathered for Happy Hour and it would be like this until at least six, when many of the patrons would toddle off to join their families in the nearby farms and villages. Elsie was pulling beers behind the bar, her face still slightly flushed and her eyes decidedly puffy. Determinedly, he walked over to the bar and stood waiting until she had deposited the glasses of lager in front of the people beside him. She avoided his gaze, but picked up a glass and poured another beer, placing it in front of him and quickly moving on to the next customer. He stared after her for a minute, wondering if he should say something, but in the end decided that the bar was really too crowded and noisy—too public—for the conversation he wanted to have with her. So he picked up his beer and turned to survey the room. Les, the big burley bloke from the night before, was seated at a table in the corner with Mike, so he squeezed past the tables and made his way over to them. He had no idea whether Elsie had already spilled the beans on him or not, or how he was going to explain what had happened the night before, even if she hadn't. But he knew he couldn't live a lie anymore. If they took the news badly,

well, that was their problem, not his.

“Heya,” he said as he pulled out a chair and placed his glass on the table.

“How are you, mate?” Mike grinned at him. “Get over your little fainting fit, did you?” Well, if Elsie had said anything, it hadn’t fazed Mike.

Harry smirked at him. “Better watch out or I might do it again.” He plonked himself down in the chair and looked at Les, trying to gauge what he was thinking.

“What are you two up to?” He directed the question at Les, who was usually the one to suggest cards or darts or whatever.

“Nothing much. Just relaxing for a change.” Les was looking around as he spoke and Harry got the distinct impression that he was avoiding his gaze, much like Elsie had.

Harry drank from his glass and sat back in his chair without saying anything further. Les looked slightly uncomfortable, as if he wanted to say something. Harry waited, but he was not forthcoming. Mike lifted his glass and drained it, then stood and pushed his chair back. “Another round, lads?”

Harry shook his head. “I’ll catch you next time.”

“Thanks, mate.” Les drained his own glass and handed it to Mike, who strode of towards the bar. Les sat back and eyed Harry warily. “Elsie told me what happened,” he said, his face solemn. “She was in a right state, let me tell you.”

Harry frowned and looked over to the bar, where Elsie continued to pull beers and serve glasses of wine to the customers. “It’s not what it looks like,” he replied as he shifted his gaze back to Les, who was now looking at him intently. “I hadn’t seen him in….”

Les cut him off. “Save it, mate.” Harry started to protest. He’d known they’d be upset but he’d thought he’d at least get a fair hearing. But Les held up his hand to cut him off again before he could say anything. “Look, you don’t have to explain anything to me.”

“I thought we were mates? Won’t you even listen to what I’ve got to say?” Harry looked at him, the hurt evident in his eyes.

Les stared back at him for several minutes, his expression reflecting some sort of inner conflict. Finally, he cast his eyes away and stared at the wall, his face turned from the crowded room. “I know how you feel, mate.”

Harry’s brow furrowed as he tried to understand the meaning behind the words. “What? What do you mean you ‘know how I feel’?”

Les hesitated briefly, then turned back to him, his features now softened slightly. Sighing heavily, he looked down at his hands as they rested on the table. “I’m gay, too.”

Harry blinked rapidly several times and almost did a visible double take. Quickly gathering his wits, he closed his mouth and moved his hand over the table to touch Les’s wrist. “I had no idea,” was all he could think of to say. It sounded lame to him, and when Les pulled his hand away from Harry’s grasp and leaned back in his chair, Harry sighed and bit his lip.

“You know me and Mike have been living together for years?” he continued as Harry took a sip from his drink to calm himself. “Well, we’ve been lovers for most of that time too.”

Harry nearly choked on his drink, managing to spill lager all over the table as he put the glass down with force. “Bloody hell, mate! How could I not pick that up?”

“You’re oblivious, mate, that’s why. Everybody around here is.” Les smirked at him.

“Well, you’re not exactly a flaming queen, are you?” Harry began to wipe the table with a napkin, throwing the sodden thing into the ashtray when he was done.

“Who’s a flaming queen?’ Mike arrived back just then and placed fresh drinks on the table.

“You are, love.” Les smiled at him affectionately and Mike flushed in confusion, looking from Les to Harry and back again. “I told him.”

Mike sat and turned to Harry questioningly. “He told you I was a flaming queen?” he asked, a mock shocked look on his face.

Harry laughed. “Course not, we were just having a joke.” He turned to Les and winked. “Everyone knows it’s Les who’s the bloody fairy princess around here.” The other two cracked up at that, and the tension in the air melted away. Finally, their mirth subsided and Harry leaned forward, looking serious. “I wish you’d told me sooner. It would have made my life a lot easier, I can tell you.”

“So, are you going after him, then?” Mike asked, sipping from his glass. “He’s a right looker. Bet he’s a bloody good shag too.” Harry nearly choked again, but this time managed not to spill his drink.

Regaining his composure quickly this time, he waggled his eyebrows at Mike. “Well, you’ll never know, will you? And yes, I am going after him.” He sighed then, flopping back against his chair and fingering his glass distractedly. “I have no idea where to find him, though. I think he was going to London, but beyond that, I know nothing.”

“Where did he come from, then?” Les asked, frowning, obviously concerned for his friend.

“I’m not sure. His family lives in Wiltshire, but I don’t even know if he lives with them. I suppose that would be a place to start though.” He rubbed his chin thoughtfully. The Malfoys had never liked Harry. The fact that he was Harry Potter and a male, made him doubly unsuitable for their precious son and

they had taken no pains to keep their opinion from him.

“Well, then, what are you waiting for, mate?” Mike grabbed Harry’s forearm and regarded him seriously. “The longer you wait, the further away he gets.”

“His parents hate me, though.” Harry dropped his head into his hands as he contemplated showing up at Malfoy Manor ten years after disappearing without a trace. “They’ll throw a fit,” he groaned, looking up again.

“Is he worth it? Elsie said you were together a couple of years.” It was Les’s turn to speak, and though his tone was gentle, his look was pure determination. “Get off your arse, mate, and go after him now. Take it like a man.”

Harry downed the rest of his drink and thumped the glass onto the table. “You’re right.” He stood up then. “I’m off. Tell Duke I’ll be back in a couple of days or I’ll be in touch.”

Les winked at him. “Go get ’im.”

Mike nodded. “And bring him back here. I want to have a word with that young lad!”

Harry laughed as he pushed his chair back. “You keep your bloody hands off him.” Moving the chair into the table again, he lowered his voice. “Thanks. I appreciate it.” Mike and Les both smiled at him affectionately as he turned and walked into the night.

“Ah, young love. Ain’t it grand?” Les sighed and patted Mike’s knee.

“God, don’t get all gooey on me!” Mike grimaced and Les cuffed him one.

When Harry walked out into the early evening air, it was with a lighter step. Decision made, he knew it

would be difficult, but he also knew it would be worth it. “Hell, maybe I’ll even bring him back here to live with me.” He chuckled to himself at the thought of Draco living in Busselton. “Well, maybe not.”

TBC….

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Chapter 7: The Long Walk Home

A/N: This is a gift fic for sa1boy. Beta’d by my very good friend, Aandune.

The Long Walk Home

Chapter 7

It didn’t take Harry long to gather a few necessities into his backpack and to secure his house. Although he had no idea where to find Draco, he hoped it wouldn’t take too long to track him down, and so he made do with throwing in a change of clothes, his Gringott’s key (just in case), a bag of Galleons and some Muggle cash, and his Sneakoscope, which he had retrieved from the old school trunk he had stored in the attic. He had considered Owling Draco and asking to meet, but was fairly certain such a move would be completely ignored. If Draco had been at all amenable to discussing their relationship, he would have done so, rather than sneaking off into the night as he had. He knew Draco had gone to London, but for what purpose he had no idea, and the thought of Apparating straight to the Leaky Cauldron and exposing himself in Diagon Alley after his long absence, was something he preferred to avoid. So he chose the path of least resistance—he hoped—and, securing his wand inside the sleeve of his jacket, Apparated instead to the front gates of Malfoy Manor. He knew that facing the elder Malfoy would not be easy, but he was, after all, just one wizard. And Harry knew what to expect.

The moon was just rising as his feet hit the coarse gravel surrounding the driveway leading up to the intricately carved gates, making it light enough to be able to see where he was going without being in full

view to anyone who might be watching. The Manor was heavily warded of course, and it wouldn't be long at all before someone would be alerted to his presence. He waited patiently and was rewarded within minutes by the pop of Apparation as a house-elf appeared on the other side of the gates.

"Who is seeking entrance to Malfoy Manor?" the tiny elf asked in a squeaky voice.

"Naesy!" Harry smiled in recognition and almost laughed when Naesy's eyes opened wide and she gasped.

"Harry Potter!" Her eyes rolled back in her head and she swooned dangerously. Harry knelt quickly and shot a hand out through the iron lace of the gates, grabbing her shoulder before she could topple into the gravel.

"Naesy, are you all right?" he asked anxiously.

The elf blinked several times and shook her head before righting herself and moving forward to stare at him. "You's be dead!" she whispered incredulously. "Master Draco said so. He said you's be…." Suddenly remembering herself, she stood up very straight and Harry's hand dropped as she backed away. "Master Draco is not here." She said with effort.

"I know," he replied, raising himself to his feet again and dusting himself off. "I want to see Master Lucius or Miss Cissa." Harry looked at her pleadingly. "Please, Naesy. I mean no harm. I am looking for Master Draco."

The elf bobbed up and down nervously for a moment before looking over her shoulder at the lit windows of the house behind her. "Master Lucius is entertaining guests, Harry Potter. He is not to be disturbed."

"I am sure if you tell him it is me, Naesy, that he will want to see me." He knelt down in front of her and tried to look sincere. "I know it is a shock, but I really have to find Master Draco, and Master Lucius can help me."

She regarded him for a moment before seeming to sigh in resignation. “Please wait here. Naesy is coming back soon. “Another pop and she was gone. Harry leaned against the stone gate post and waited. He had no doubt his sudden appearance would cause a furore, and steeled himself for what was to come—if Lucius deigned to see him, that is….

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“Master Lucius has a visitor at the gate,” Naesy bowed low in front of Lucius and awaited instructions.

Lucius stopped talking for a moment and frowned at her. “At this hour? Naesy, you do know better than to interrupt one of my meetings for unannounced visitors.”

“But this visitor is most insistent, Master Lucius. He is saying that Master Lucius will be wanting to see him as a matter of urgency.” She wrung her hands in anticipation of her Master’s wrath, but was instead surprised to see him lean forward and look at her intently. Perhaps it was the expression on her face, or the sheer nervous manner in which she had addressed him, but something had made Lucius take notice.

Turning to his companions, he bowed. “Please excuse me for one moment.” They nodded and he turned and strode through the door of the library and into the front receiving room, Naesy scampering after him. “What is this about, Naesy?”

“Master Lucius, sir, it is Harry Potter. He is at the gates and awaits your permission to enter.” She twisted her hands nervously in her tea towel and waited.

“Potter? Here?” he almost sputtered. “But that’s impossible! The man has been dead for years!”

“Oh, no, sir, he is being at the front gates, sir. Yes, oh yes, it is Harry Potter, sir.”

Lucius gaped at her for long moments in consternation. Then, seeming to resign himself, he looked back over his shoulder towards the library door, which stood slightly ajar. Moving over to it, he closed it softly and then leaned over to whisper to the house-elf. “Show Mister Potter into my private sitting room.” He turned with a flurry of robes and ascended the stairs towards his private suite as Naesy obediently Disapparated back to the front gates.

Whispering a short incantation, Naesy stood back as the gate swung open and gestured for Harry to follow her. “Master Lucius is waiting.” She turned and he followed her up the path and through the front doors. “Master Lucius is being in his private study.” She cocked her head to one side as if she couldn’t quite believe the master would even deign to see him. “Naesy is to take Mr Potter there.”

Harry held out his hand and Naesy took his wrist before Apparating to the second floor hallway. Knocking at a large, engraved oak door, she meekly stood aside when the door swung open, and Harry ventured forward into the dim room beyond.

Lucius was seated at his desk, his back to the door. The room was lit by a fire and several candles, but the atmosphere was still rather muted. Harry moved forward tentatively and dropped his pack onto the carpet with a soft plop. Lucius’ shoulders stiffened at the sound, but his face was a study in calm when he turned to regard Harry.

“Mr. Potter, to what do we owe this…” He looked Harry up and down and pursed his lips. “…honour?” He regarded Harry coolly. “I must say, this is rather a surprise,” he added, raising his eyebrows slightly.

“Hello, sir. Yes, I know it must come as a shock to you to see me after all this time.” Harry shifted uncomfortably under the scrutiny of the older man.

“We had given up hope, Mr. Potter.” His amused expression belied the sad tone of his voice. “You disappeared and we had thought you…” he hesitated and Harry squirmed. He was rather taken aback that Lucius would consider himself worthy of speaking for the entire wizarding world. Moreover, he was more than certain that Lucius would not have joined in whatever collective grieving that may or may not have occurred after his disappearance. He sneered inwardly at Lucius but refrained from commenting on that point.

“Yes, sir, I realise my hasty departure caused not a little commotion in the wizarding world.” Harry pulled himself up straight then, determined not to be intimidated. When Lucius continued to regard him disdainfully, he moved forward, his hands out in a pleading gesture. “Look, it doesn’t matter. The fact is that I need to find Draco. Urgently, sir. I need to talk to him.”

But Lucius raised his cane to stop him from coming any closer. “Draco is not here.”

“I know, sir. I thought you might help me contact him.”

“Draco is not available, Mr. Potter. He is otherwise… engaged.”

“Yes, I know he is in London, but if you could just tell me—”

“I don’t think so, Mr. Potter. Draco will not want to see you, I am sure. He has a new life now, and that life has no room for disappearing… friends.”

“But I did see him—just yesterday! I saw him in Busselton and we talked. But he left before I had a chance to say what I wanted to say.”

Lucius stared at him coldly for several minutes before turning back to his papers. “I am sure you must be mistaken, Mr. Potter. Draco is currently in London escorting his betrothed prior to their imminent nuptials.” He smirked when he saw a look of horror cross Harry’s face.

“But—that can’t be true!” Harry rushed forward and grabbed Lucius by the lapels. “You’re lying!” he almost screamed. “Draco can’t be getting married. He—he would have told me!” Lucius flicked his wrist and Harry sailed across the room, landing with a soft thud on the carpet near the fireplace.

“I fail to see what this has to do with you, Mr. Potter. Now, if you’ll forgive me.” He stood then and walked over to where Harry lay, still sprawled on the floor. “I must be getting back to my guests. Naesy!” The little house-elf appeared and bowed. “Please see Mr. Potter to the front gates.” With one last look of

triumph, Lucius turned on his heel and strode out the door. Naesy clutched at Harry's arm and, before he knew what was happening, he was sprawled yet again in a heap in the gravel on the wrong side of the front gates, his bag at his feet.

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Draco paused for a moment to smooth down his tie. He was used to wearing Muggle attire—his leathers were his stock favourites—but he felt slightly uncomfortable in the formal suit his mother had insisted he wear for his first meeting with his intended bride. Although the Dorchester had a private wizarding floor that was, for all intents and purposes, impervious to the eyes of Muggles, they still needed to be discreet. Muggle attire was therefore a given for all wizard guests. Nevertheless, after his leathers and t-shirt, the shirt and tie felt restrictive, and Draco hooked his forefinger under the stiff collar and tugged at it, wishing it didn't feel so much like a noose around his neck.

Finally, he dropped his hand and sighed and, standing straight, he schooled his features into a polite smile and knocked on the door in front of him. Presently, it was opened by a uniformed maid, who ushered him in and bade him take a seat in the foyer of the suite. Draco lowered himself onto the crisp chintz sofa and looked around cautiously. The room, small though it was, was tastefully furnished in delicate hues of eggshell and taupe, and he couldn't help feeling that the carefully neutral tone of the room was a harbinger of the destiny that awaited him from that moment on.

He didn't have long to ponder this, however, as it wasn't long before an elegant woman appeared in the doorway to his right and swept her way over to him, her hand outstretched. "Ah, young Master Draco, how very lovely to meet you, finally." Draco cringed slightly as he recalled the several previous occasions on which he had failed to abide by his father's orders to meet with the Barrillieaux family. He sighed inwardly at his lack of conviction, but took her hand and bowed slightly as she continued. "I am Mme. Barrilleaux. I am afraid my daughter is not quite ready. Please make yourself at home and I will have the maid bring you something to drink."

"Thank you, Madame," Draco replied, reseating himself as the woman swept just as quickly out of the room in a flurry of sheer blue chiffon. He found himself thinking that if the daughter was anywhere near as striking as the mother, then he might actually find the whole arrangement quite bearable. If one must be subject to marriage, at least one ought to have something pretty to look at over breakfast, he mused. He sighed again as he thought of the many years ahead looking across the breakfast table at the same face, day in, day out, with no hope of reprieve. Then, with an almost perceptible shake of his head and a deep calming breath, he just as quickly acknowledged that it was not the day in, day out that bothered

him; rather, it was the absence of the one face that he really wanted to have peer across at him in the dappled morning light. But such thoughts wouldn't do, and he mentally scolded himself for his flight of fancy, shaking himself out of his reverie just in time to stand politely as the most beautiful woman he had ever seen swept into the room. Her hair was long and black as night, sweeping over her almost bare shoulders and providing a stark contrast to the translucent paleness of her skin and the redness of her full lips. Her rose coloured dress flowed softly against her hips and thighs as she stopped and held out her hand to Draco, and he smirked as he stood and took it, lifting it to his lips.

"Bonjour, Mademoiselle," His lips lingered slightly over the long pale fingers and, when he looked up, the woman was blushing slightly, her pert breasts rising and falling quickly against the soft fabric of her bodice. "It is so very lovely to meet you."

"Bonjour, M. Draco. Welcome. It is such a pleasure to have you here." She inclined her head and a tendril of her onyx hair fell charmingly across her cheek.

Draco smiled his most winning smile and lowered his lids slightly. "Thank you, Mademoiselle… but the pleasure is all mine."

To be continued....

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Chapter 8: The Long Walk Home

A/N: Sorry it has taken me so long to update, Mart. Hope this makes up for it. As always, this chapter was beta'd by the gorgeously talented Aandune, for whom I am eternally grateful.

The Long Walk Home

Chapter 8

After rising to his feet and dusting himself off, Harry walked over to where his backpack lay on the ground and pulled it up over his shoulder by the strap. Naesy was still standing there, watching him intently, as if afraid he might try to force his way back through the gates. He frowned as he watched her twist her fingers in her tea towel and wondered if she could help him find Draco. A wedding is a big event, especially for purebloods, and there was little doubt she would have intimate knowledge of the preparations. The problem was whether she would be willing to part with the information, especially given his recent reception by Lucius. At the thought of Draco's wedding, his stomach clenched as the full force of the knowledge hit him like a rock. Suddenly, the world was being pulled out from beneath him and he was plummeting through space and time, the ever present threat of the black oblivion of his subconscious threatening to overtake him at any moment. He closed his eyes and felt himself sway for a brief moment, but then called in all his energy against the onslaught. Regaining his equilibrium, he opened his eyes again and regarded the little elf before him. It was several long moments before he found his voice.

"So…er, Naesy… I don't suppose you can tell me where Draco is staying?" His look was half hopeful, half resigned.

She nervously continued to twist her tea towel and avoided his gaze. "Er… Naesy is knowing where Master Draco is staying, Master Harry, sir, but Naesy cannot tell." She shook her head balefully and wiped her tearful eyes.

Harry sighed and ran his fingers through his hair in frustration. It was nothing more than he'd expected, of course. "No, that's okay, Naesy. I'll find him myself."

Breathing a sigh of relief, Naesy disappeared with a loud pop, and Harry was left standing before the iron lace gates, wondering where the hell he should look first. He knew that Draco had gone to London, of course, but he doubted he would stay anywhere as mundane as the Leaky Cauldron, especially if he was supposed to be meeting his bride to be. He also knew that some of the more upmarket Muggle hotels had wizarding floors that catered to visiting witches and wizards, though he had been away from the wizarding world long enough to doubt his memory on which ones they would be. Merlin knew he had never had a reason to stay at any of them.

He wracked his brain for several more minutes before deciding that he should probably just head to London and play it by ear. It was getting late and he needed a place to stay—the Leaky Cauldron would be a good place to garner information, if he could perform a good enough Glamour Spell to hide his identity. There was no way he could handle the response that would be elicited by his sudden reappearance in Diagon Alley. No, it was better to remain anonymous for the time being. He frowned as he realised that Lucius would no doubt be alerting all and sundry to his apparent resurrection, making it likely that the press would, before long, be on his tail.

Looking around to ensure that he was alone, he quickly walked over to a copse of trees and lit his wand. Dropping his backpack to the ground, he cast several quick Glamour Spells to disguise his face and hair, eventually settling on leaving his hair in its current state of unruliness, but changing its colour to a sandy shade of blond, and adding a similar coloured, short beard and brown eyes. He had long ago given up his signature round glasses for a more stylish pair, and when he conjured a mirror and gazed into it, he was fairly satisfied that no one could mistake him for the famous Harry Potter.

Stowing the mirror in his backpack for future checking, he hoisted the bag onto his shoulder once again and Apparated to London, landing quietly in the shadows of an old brick building on Charing Cross Road, just across from the Leaky Cauldron. Moving quickly, he crossed the road and nervously entered the bar.

As he closed the door behind him, he was greeted by a throng of Saturday evening revellers, hidden in part by a haze of smoke that wafted across the air and settled like a cloud over the heads of those seated at the crammed tables. Several people turned to look at Harry as he moved through the tables towards the bar, but each time they turned away in apparent disinterest, satisfying him that his Glamour was indeed effective. Taking a stool at the bar, he ordered a pint from Tom, the barman.

“I’ll need a room for the night too, if you have one,” he added, as Tom placed his pint on the bar. Tom grunted his response and pulled a book out from under the counter.

“That’ll be five Galleons,” he muttered distractedly as he fumbled with a huge ring full of oddly-shaped keys. Harry reached into his backpack and located the bag of Galleons, then counted out the requisite number onto the bar in front of him.

After setting a key on the counter scant moments later, Tom disappeared out the back without so much as a backward glance. Harry furrowed his brows for a moment. It was odd that Tom would dismiss a

stranger so easily; it was more like the wizened barman to thoroughly question any strangers who wondered into the bar. In fact, he had known Tom to be the cause of more than one row when customers took offence at his badgering curiosity. Surely Tom hadn't recognised him. No, it was impossible—he looked nothing like the famous Harry Potter. Shrugging to himself, he sipped his pint and returned his thoughts to Draco's whereabouts.

He had just finished the last of his drink and decided that he would start asking around in the morning, when a flash of blonde caught his eye. He turned to find the red-lipped, bespeckled Rita Skeeter settling into the stool next to him. His stomach clenched as he remembered the scandalous stories she had written about him while he was at Hogwarts, and quickly set his glass on the bar and picked up his key, planning a quick exit.

"Going so soon, Mr. Potter?" Harry turned abruptly at the mention of his name to find the damned woman leaning back against the bar, idly fingering her wand beneath the long, draping folds of her sleeve.

"Excuse me?" he bluffed. "Were you talking to me? I think you must be mistaken." He turned away and took a step towards the stairwell before stopping dead in his tracks.

"I don't think so, Mr. Potter. That Glamour may disguise your hair and face, but it doesn't hide your scar… or your voice." His right hand went instinctively to his forehead as he turned slowly to see Rita smirking in amusement. "A little rusty on the magic, are we?" Harry's eyes narrowed for a moment before moving downwards to stare at the tagged key in his hand. Out of the corner of his eye, he could see the snarky reporter moving slowly in his direction. He fingered his wand, letting it slide down his sleeve and into his cupped hand. Rita was moving closer now and he knew he had just moments to act before all would be revealed to the occupants of this crowded room. As soon as she moved her wand hand, he turned on the spot and Apparated to what he hoped was his room upstairs—all he had to go by was the tag on his key. He wasn't quick enough, however; even as he flicked his wrist and concentrated on his destination, she was uttering, "Finite Incantatum," dissolving his spelled disguise and revealing the dark hair and green eyes of the erstwhile saviour of the wizarding world.

Harry landed in a heap at the foot of his bed, and cursed as his ankle crumpled beneath him. Picking himself up, he gingerly made his way to the bathroom and gasped when he saw his reflection in the mirror over the sink. He wondered how many people had noticed him—well, it was bloody hard to miss him, given his mid-bar Apparition in the wake of the flamboyant Skeeter's shrill laughter. He groaned loudly and cast several strong Locking Spells on the door before collapsing on the bed and closing his

eyes. Merlin! What did he do now? He doubted he would be able to step foot outside the door without the entire wizarding world jumping on him in glee. He could just see the headlines in tomorrow's Prophet and wondered darkly whether anyone of Skeeter's minions had managed to capture him on film. He would have to think of a way to get out of the Leaky Cauldron without being noticed. Apparation was out of the question if he was going to Muggle London, of course. While there were some safe Apparation points, he had been away from the wizarding world long enough not to be up to date, and couldn't be at all sure to where he could safely Apparate.

He jumped when he heard a loud banging at the door.

"Mr Potter, you might as well come out. We know you're in there!" It was the Skeeter woman. Harry seethed as he imagined inflicting seven kinds of torture on the stupid woman. The door began to rattle precariously with the pounding and he quickly flicked several stronger Locking Spells in its direction, before looking frantically around for a means of escape. The window might work, since he was only on the first floor, but what if someone saw him and gave chase? He moved toward it as the pounding became heavier and more voices joined the shrilly annoying pleas for entrance. Looking down into the street, he gauged that he could easily jump the distance with a Cushioning Charm, but there were Muggles everywhere, it seemed. Just then, the door shuddered dangerously and he swiftly turned and drew his wand. Then suddenly there was quiet. After a few moments he could hear voices on the other side of the door, but they were muffled. Moving forward stealthily, he inched his way forward in an attempt to make out what they were saying.

… no need for all that. Got it righ' 'ere, 'aven't I?

Oh, for Merlin's sake, why didn't you say so? Hurry, the man isn't in his right mind! He needs help!

There was a furtive rustle and then the lock clicked and the door swung open. Startled into action, Harry instantly cast several Stupify's in that direction but soon found himself, to his great chagrin, completely bound and gagged and facing what seemed to be the entire population of the downstairs bar, all of whom were staring at him in varying states of wonder. "There. Tol' ya my key'd work. But you better be righ'. Privacy and all that, y'know…." Tom stepped forward, but was pushed aside as Rita Skeeter swept into the room.

She smirked as she moved towards Harry's struggling form. "I told you that you couldn't get away so

easily, Mr. Potter." She stopped in front of him and lifted a glossy, red-polished nail to caress his cheek. "Your fans want to see you. They want to know where you have been, Harry." She pouted then and brushed his hair back from his forehead. He winced and pulled back from the touch. "We've been worried about you… all these years. We've… missed you." Harry grimaced as much as he could through the gag. He could feel sweat starting to drip down his face. God, he wanted to punch the bint—how dare she? And the rest of them, standing there, gawking as if he were a prize exhibit in a museum. Fucking hell, nothing had changed! He struggled fruitlessly against the ropes that bound him, desperate to get out of there, away from all these people, away from the prying eyes and judgmental looks. He scanned the crowd in desperation, looking for a familiar face—one friendly ally to aid him in his hour of need. But they were all of a kind, gawking, curious… intent. He felt the panic begin to rise in him like an inexorable force, and struggled even more against the ropes that bound him.

He stooped in surprise, cringing and closing his eyes as a camera flashed in his face, and when he opened them, it was to the rolling cameras of WTN, the Wizarding Television Network. Skeeter was being prepped by several make-up artists and soon was standing before him with what he could only surmise was the wizard equivalent of a microphone. She nodded and the gag disappeared, replaced by the microphone, which she shoved in his face.

"Now tell me, Mr Potter, what brings you to the Leaky Cauldron after, what…? Ten years? The entire wizarding world thought you dead. Where exactly have you been?" She simpered in front of the cameras and Harry felt nauseous as he looked from her to the lights and then to the audience that had gathered. When he didn't answer, she continued. "Now, now, Harry, don't be shy, dear. We all love you. We're so glad to have you back…."

"Oh right, so happy to see me that you've tied me up!" He struggled against his binds again, sweat dripping from his brow, to no avail. Skeeter just tut-tutted and continued as if he hadn't said anything.

"The saviour of the wizarding world is alive!" She spoke to the cameras, flicking back her ruby red scarf as she did so. "And how glad we are to see him back! Though a little dazed, Harry Potter seems as happy to be back as we are to have him. Tell me, Mr. Potter," she said, turning once again to face him, "were you off vanquishing Dark Lords abroad?" She winked at the camera then. "So dashing and handsome!"

Harry felt himself trembling with anger and humiliation. This was so far from how he had pictured his re-entry into the wizarding world and he fought back the urge to Apparate back to Busselton right there. It was only the thought of Draco—of Draco getting married—that held him rooted to the spot. He could feel his magic building up around him, but he wasn't sure what it meant, it had been so long and he was

so unused to what magic felt like. He squirmed as he tried to suppress the growing anger inside, but his magic seemed to take on a life of its own and, before he knew it, the furniture in the room began to tremble and rock and Skeeter looked around nervously at the camera crew and audience. Harry closed his eyes and tried to calm himself. But it was too much—something was about to give. Merlin help me, his mind cried out to no one in particular, but there was no one there to help him. No one who understood. Just the crowding enclave of witches and wizards craning to get a look at him as if he were the eighth wonder of the world. Suddenly, his magic exploded, throwing Skeeter across the room, where she hit the far wall before falling into a heap on the floor. Not to be fazed, she quickly picked herself up as several of the crew ran over to assist. “Now, now, Mr. Potter,” she snarled as she moved back towards him. “Violence will not get you anywhere. Clearly you need some help.” She turned to Tom and nodded. "What did I tell you?”

Deciding that he had had about as much as he could take, Harry summoned all his magical energy in one final effort to free himself—but it was pre-empted by the sudden pull of a hand on his arm and a flash of blond hair. He squeezed his eyes shut as he felt himself spiralling as if on a roller-coaster, lurching and spinning in a never-ending space. When he opened his eyes, he was sprawled on a white coverlet in a large room with a huge chandelier hanging above his head. He closed his eyes in shock and fainted dead away.

Draco was bored stiff. Though they were dining at one of the most sought after restaurants in Muggle London, and the food and ambience were exquisite, he couldn’t help but stifle a yawn as he listened to his in-laws-to-be waffle on and on about inanities. Honestly, what did he care about the latest French fashion houses or the price of gold? It was all he could do not to nod off on the spot, so utterly dreary and mind-numbing was the conversation. Several times he had endeavoured to steer the discussion onto more stimulating topics, such as the groundbreaking potions research being done at St Mungo’s, but he had been shot down instantly. As he gazed around the table, noting with distaste the garishly overdone jewellery adorning Mme. Barrilleaux’s neck, wrist and fingers, he silently longed for the comfort of his couch, a bottle of lager, and a roaring fire. Sighing inwardly, he forced himself out of his reverie and attempted to pay attention to his intended, who was now waxing on about a new pair of designer shoes she had just bought. Merlin, BBC1 was more interesting than this bint, regardless of her beauty. From the short period of time he had known her, he had surmised that, although her features were classic and her hair silky soft, she had not an ounce of intelligence to speak of. How utterly prophetic, he sighed to himself, to be chained for life to the wizarding equivalent of Posh Spice. Urgh. At least her breasts looked real.

However, as luck would have it—and Draco was astute enough to recognise that his luck hadn't been exactly the luck of the Irish of late—M. Barrilleaux had an early morning appointment with his banker and his wife and daughter were booked into an early spa appointment, so the three of them excused themselves after dessert and Draco was finally free for the rest of the evening. He briefly contemplated going out to a local club for a drink, but was suddenly overcome with exhaustion. He hadn't really slept much since his nap at the pub in Busselton and the lack of sleep was finally catching up with him. So, after bidding his fiancé goodbye with a kiss to her cheek, he headed for the lifts and was soon ensconced in his private suite, his expensive suit thrown carelessly over a chair and his back propped against the headboard of his bed by a mound of pillows. Ah, yes, this was much better. Summoning a lager from the bar fridge, he settled back and picked up the remote to watch the ten o'clock news on WTN.

There was some further reporting on the St Mungo's potions experiments, which he found of great interest, but then the report was cut off by breaking news, and he sat up with some curiosity as the program cut to the Leaky Cauldron, where a crowd of witches and wizards were babbling excitedly and jostling to get a look at something.

"…this is a day to remember for all witches and wizards! A day of celebration!" Draco eased forward on the bed and squinted as he tried to make out the people on the screen. Rita Skeeter was evidently the source of the story, and he recognised more than a few of those in attendance, but he couldn't quite make out the person they were referring to, as he or she was currently being mobbed.

"…saviour of the wizarding world has returned! What a great day this is!" Draco dropped his lager and jumped off the bed to stand directly in front of the screen. Harry. NO! Oh, Merlin, what were they doing to him? He had almost disappeared beneath the throng of supposed well wishers and when the camera panned in, Draco caught sight of the look of sheer panic on his ex-lover's face. Without even stopping to contemplate what on earth Harry was doing back in the wizarding world after all these years, he quickly donned some jeans and a sweater and Apparated to the main bar of the Leaky Cauldron.

The bar was empty and, judging by the hubbub coming from overhead, he surmised that the reunion was taking place in one of the rooms upstairs. He ran up the stairs two at a time and managed to push through the crowded hall and through the doorway, angrily shoving people out of his way as he did so. He didn't hear their cries of protest as he pushed his way to where Skeeter was standing with a microphone shoved in Harry's face. Harry's mouth dropped open when Draco reached out to grab his arm, but Draco didn't have time to register his surprise; he simply pushed Skeeter out of the way with a deliberate shove, pulled Harry towards him and Apparated them back to his hotel room.

“What the fuck are you doing, going to the Leaky? Are you crazy?” He dropped the still bound Harry onto the bed and stood panting in front of him, his hands on his hips. “Surely you knew what a ruckus that would cause?” Harry didn’t answer, but merely lay there with his eyes closed. As his breathing slowed, Draco suddenly realised the emotional state the other man must be in, and quickly flicked his wand to remove the binds before dropping down next to him and gazing intently into his face. “Harry? Are you all right?”

Harry slowly opened his eyes and sighed deeply. “Draco….” He lifted his hand to tuck a stray lock of blond hair behind Draco’s ear and then closed his eyes again, his breath hitching in his chest.

“Harry? What happened? Are you okay? What can I do?” Draco was starting to get worried, and when Harry’s hand dropped back to the bed and tears began to slip from beneath his eyelids, he leaned forward and nuzzled the distraught man’s cheek. Moving his whole body towards him, Draco wrapped his strong arms around the other man and pulled him close. Harry sighed and buried his head in Draco’s neck and Draco could feel hot tears falling against his skin. “Shhh… it’s okay. You’re safe now, I promise.”

They lay like that for several long minutes before Draco pulled back slightly and brushed the hair away from Harry’s face. “Harry?”

Harry leaned back to gaze up at him and his eyes were full of pain. “I… I thought I’d… lost you. I’ve… been looking for you.” Green eyes searched grey ones as if asking for confirmation that he was actually there, actually in Draco’s arms, and Draco’s heart melted. All the pain and hurt in those eyes pierced like a dagger through his chest and he leaned forward to assuage the pain in the only way he knew how. He stopped just millimetres from Harry’s face, his eyes raking over the tear-stained cheeks and blood-filled lips, their breaths mingling, before closing the distance and gently touching his lips to Harry’s in a soft, breathless, entreaty. Harry responded immediately, reaching up to run his fingers through soft blond stands, his touch the most gentle caress. Draco closed his eyes, and was lost.

The kiss seemed to go on forever and neither of them were in a rush to end it, or to take it further. The feel of each other, of chest against chest, of mouth against mouth, was intoxicating enough, more than enough. It encapsulated all the depth of feeling, of love and hate, despair, loneliness, and longing, that had permeated both their lives for over a decade, hidden though it had been behind blind resignation, determination, and denial. It swallowed them whole, devoured them, and melded them into one, never to look back again.

After what seemed like forever, Draco pulled away and took a deep breath. “Let’s go to bed.” Harry nodded and Draco thought his heart would burst at the look of sheer adoration on the other man’s face. How could he have walked away so unthinkingly from this? Harry had left him and that had hurt, but now he understood just how difficult life must have been for his lover after the war. He remembered something his mother had said to him some months after Harry’s disappearance: A person’s worst behaviour is their best way of coping, Draco. If he’s still out there, he’ll come back when he’s ready. He hadn’t understood it at the time, but now, as he looked into his lover’s eyes, he knew it was true. That Harry had braved going back into a world that he had feared and hated was surely evidence enough that he was ready, that he wanted to be back with Draco for good.

Draco pulled Harry up from the bed and gently ran his hands over his chest before slipping off his jacket, letting it slide to the floor. His t-shirt was next, then his trousers, and Draco punctuated each removal with intermittent kisses to each newly exposed bit of skin. When all his clothes lay in a heap at their feet, Draco moved to the bed and pulled back the covers and Harry smiled as he slid between the crisp white sheets. Draco’s own clothing was gone in a matter of moments and, as he settled in next to the other man, he softly uttered a Nox to expel the lights. It wasn’t that he didn’t like to see his lover’s naked form, or that he was shy at all. The semi-darkness was like a gentle cover, adding to the loving ambience of their embraces and the tender sounds of appreciation that wafted from between the covers as they made love.

Harry’s skin tasted like salty tears and perspiration, but as Draco moved slowly down his torso, nipping and lapping first at his neck, then circling his tongue around a nipple, feeling it harden and wrinkle under his touch, he savoured the taste as if it were ambrosia. He blew across the cover of dark hairs that graced the broad chest and trailed down to Harry’s navel, dragging his tongue down the hard abdomen, stopping briefly to dip into his navel, before moving on to his hip, where he gently nipped the soft, pale skin there. Harry’s thickly aroused cock twitched against his shoulder and then his neck, and he nuzzled down into the soft curls at its base for long moments as Harry spread his legs so that Draco could nestle down between them, his breath ghosting across Harry’s sac and causing Harry’s breath to hitch in his chest. When he took the sac into his mouth, Harry moaned softly and shifted against the sheets, his cock rubbing gently against Draco’s nose and forehead.

“Draco….” he breathed.

“Mmmmm….” Draco tasted Harry some more, savouring the salty-sweet flavour, before moving up and resting his lips against the base of that throbbing erection. He stopped for a moment to inhale the

intoxicating scent of his Harry, before opening his mouth and flicking his tongue out to lick the thick vein that stretched from the underside of the base to its head. Harry groaned loudly and involuntarily bucked up against the sweet tension that began to build as Draco continued to minister to his burning need. Draco's own erection was stabbing heatedly into the bedsheets and as he took Harry wholly into his mouth, he rutted against the mattress, a raging fire pooling in his groin as the friction mounted. Again and again he took Harry deep into his mouth, alternately swirling his tongue over the sensitive head until he felt his lover's cock throb heatedly and knew he wouldn't last much longer. Harry threaded his fingers through Draco's hair, twisting and writhing beneath him as fiery sparks of lust jumped across his nerves and surged through his veins, spreading out around his groin and down his thighs until, finally, Draco sucked hard and Harry arched up and stilled for a moment, his orgasm ripping through him, crashing over him in wave after wave, until he collapsed back against the sweat-soaked pillows, completely spent. As Harry cried out in the throes of completion, Draco's own cock throbbed in response, his orgasm tearing through him and taking him completely by surprise. He rutted against the mattress until he had emptied himself, and then pulled his mouth away from Harry's spent cock and dropped down, panting, to lay his head against his lover's stomach.

Long moments later, when Draco began to feel the chill air against his rapidly cooling skin, he lifted himself and crawled up to place one last kiss against his lover's lips, before flopping onto the bed beside him. Harry turned onto his side and slid his arm across Draco's chest, settling in against him as if he had been there all his life. Draco reached down and pulled up the covers, resting his forearm against the other man's, whispering sweet words of love as he did so. After a few moments, however, Harry lifted his head and moved his lips to murmur into Draco's ear. "Love?"

"Mmmm….?"

"Can you scoot over a bit? You know how I hate to sleep in the wet spot."

Draco smiled into the dark and moved sideways, pulling Harry with him. "There, is that better?"

"Mmmm…. Much. Goodnight, Draco…."

"Goodnight… love…."

Fin

A/N: Epilogue still to come, folks.

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Chapter 9: The Long Walk Home

A/N: Well, this turned out to be a chapter rather than an Epilogue and is the official end to the story, but I might just have a Cracky Epilogue coming up. ☺

This was and still is for the lovely Welshman, sa1boy, and was beta'd by my partner in crime, Aandune.

The Long Walk Home

Chapter 9

Draco awoke to a tapping at the door. After a few moments, the door to his room opened and a waiter appeared pushing a breakfast tray. Draco rubbed his eyes and groggily lifted himself on to his elbows. "Is it that time already?"

"Sir, your breakfast is served. Please sign here." The waiter handed Draco a pen and clipboard and Draco quickly scribbled his name and handed it back before flopping back against the pillows. Harry stirred

when he felt the pillows move and rolled over to snuggle against Draco's chest just as the waiter exited the room, the door clicking softly behind him.

"Mmmm… morning."

Draco responded by kissing the top of his head and running his hands down under the covers to trace evocatively down his lover's back and chest, one coming to rest against the curve of his arse, the other idly stroking his morning erection.

"Oh… I could wake up this way every day."

Draco smiled into Harry's hair and then leaned down to nibble softly at his earlobe. He had slept better than he had in years, and now, waking here with Harry in his bed, he felt suddenly exhilarated, as if he had discovered the secret to unlocking the universe. Harry moaned softly and lifted his face to capture Draco's lips with his own, even as Draco's fingers began to stroke his shaft with fervour. "God. Draco…." But Draco quelled all further conversation by crushing his lover's lips with his own and pushing him back into the pillows, the arm that had caressed his arse moving up to cradle his neck as the rhythm of his fingers on Harry's cock set the latter to panting and groaning even more.

Draco's own morning wood was as rock hard as it ever was and, suddenly, moving it languidly against the other man's thigh wasn't nearly enough. Letting go of Harry's cock, Draco rolled him onto his back and pushed a knee between his legs to spread them wide. Harry whimpered at the loss of friction, but then groaned loudly when Draco reached down and moved his own cock to rest between his lover's balls. "Can I fuck you?" He gasped as he began to move against the soft flesh, the friction exquisite.

Harry reached up and threaded his hands through blond strands, pulling him even closer in response, their lips crushing and their tongues twining with acute desire, as if neither could get close enough to the other. They battled for long moments, tongue against tongue, lips against lips, until Harry pulled his knees up, moving his left arm under his left knee for added support. Draco pulled back long enough to leer at his lover, then grabbed his wand and whispered a spell.

"Fuck, Draco, how do you do that?" Harry arched back and moaned as he felt Draco's magic enter him and swirl inwards and around, pressing against his sensitive spot and stretching him magically from

within.

Draco smirked and raised his eyebrows. “Maybe I’ll teach you, if you’re very, very good.”

“Oh… Oh! I’ll… be… good….” Harry panted, before locking his lips on Draco’s yet again. Reaching down and under Harry’s right leg, Draco hooked his elbow around Harry’s knee to steady himself and then, without further warning, thrust into his lover’s entrance, stopping halfway to ensure that he was not hurting the other man. Harry’s groan reassured him that all was well and he pushed in further until he was flush against Harry’s arse. “Fuck. Oh, Fuck. Now, now… move!” Harry’s response was encouraging to say the least.

Draco instantly complied, slowly thrusting and pulling back until he had built up a steady rhythm, the intense heat and tightness enclosing him like a tight leather glove, squeezing until the tension mounted to an almost unbearable peak. Reaching down, he grasped Harry’s cock and began to stroke frenziedly as he slammed harder and deeper into his lover and they were both coming, their cries of ecstasy rending the thick air as their sweaty bodies slid slickly against each other.

“Draco, Mother asked me to tell you we’ll meet you in the Bistro for lu—” Draco turned his head abruptly in time to see the bright red face of his fiancé as she stared at the two of them, her eyes horror-struck. “Merde! What is going on here?”

Draco quickly pulled his softening cock out of Harry’s arse and rolled over, pulling the sheet up around them both for privacy. “Er, Harry, this is… er, that is, was my fiancé, Mlle. Barrilleaux.”

Harry propped himself up on his elbows and blinked several times in astonishment. “Um, nice to meet you?”

But Mlle. Barrilleaux was already throwing her delicate hands up into the air and cursing them both in fluent French. Harry flinched, but Draco just sighed and grabbed his robe from the end of the bed and threw it around himself before slipping out of bed and crossing his arms.

“Look, I know this comes as a shock.” He started.

“Shock? Shock!” Another round of cursing in French ensued and Draco rolled his eyes at Harry and patted his leg through the covers to reassure him.

When she finally ran out of steam, Draco raised his eyebrows disdainfully. “Finished, have we?”

“Yes, I have finished. I have finished with you—you… you gay poofter man! Wait until my father hears about this!” With that she turned and stormed out of the room, slamming the door behind her.

“Well, that went better than I expected.” Draco turned back to Harry, who had flopped back against the pillows with a groan. “Don’t worry about her. My father will sort her out. He’s used to it.”

Just then the fireplace sprang to life and Lucius’ face appeared in green flames. “Draco! I need to have a word with you, if you please.” The fireplace was across the room, and Draco was far enough away from it that his father wouldn’t be able to see him, so he quickly made his way to the far side of the bed and quietly motioned for Harry to follow him. They slipped into the ensuite and silently closed the door.

“Draco? I know you’re there, son.” They could still hear Lucius through the door. “I am prepared to wait until you come out. Draco? What were you doing on WTN with Harry Potter last night? Draco!”

Draco leaned back against the bathroom door and closed his eyes. “Holy Fuck. What do we do now?” Before Harry had time to respond, they heard the door to the suite bang open again and the shrill voice of Mme. Barrilleaux. “Master Draco! How dare you do this to my daughter. I demand an explanation!”

Luckily Draco had had the foresight to grab their wands from the night stand, and he quickly flicked his wrist, sending a Locking Spell at the ensuite door. Harry looked at him worriedly. “I don’t think that’ll hold them back for long.” He donned the bathrobe that Draco had lifted from the hook on the wall, but froze when a second voice joined the first.

“Ah, Madame Barrilleaux, how lovely to meet you.”

“Fuck. It’s Rita Skeeter! That damned bitch won’t leave me the fuck alone!” Harry sat down on the toilet and put his head in his hands. Draco moved to sit on the edge of the bath and patted his knee for several moments, pondering what to do. They were trapped in their bathrobes in one of the finest wizard suites at the Dorchester Hotel, with the press and several irate in-laws on their tail, not to mention one very pissed-off Lucius Malfoy hovering in the fireplace. It was only a matter of time before someone knocked down the door to their little hiding place and dragged them off to be vilified once again by the press and wizarding society in general. Draco rolled his eyes as he remembered how they had already gone through this years ago, when they had first got together. Not this time, he decided. This time, there would be no public humiliation, no frequent interruptions by the press, no damned crazed parents.

There was only one thing for it.

“Busselton,” he replied softly.

Harry looked up sharply. “What did you say?”

Draco looked back at him, then stood up and held out his hand. “Busselton. It’s our only chance to get away for good.” Harry looked uncertain. “Think about it, Harry. It’s the only place they’d never think to look. No one knows you live there. It’s perfect.”

Harry furrowed his brow and shook his head. “But… you’d never survive five minutes in a place like that. It’s just a small country town.”

“You have a house, I presume?”

“Well, yes, but…” Harry was still shaking his head, but Draco took his hand and pulled him to his feet, quieting his protests with a soft kiss.

“As long as I have you, Harry, I’ll be fine.” He pulled his lover into a warm embrace, then jumped back when there was a pounding on the bathroom door. “Come on. That place could do with someone like me to shake it up.” He smirked as he handed Harry his wand, before taking him in his arms once again and pulling him close. “Now, hurry up and Apparate us before they break down the bloody door.”

Harry squeezed him tight and kissed him. “With pleasure,” he whispered against Draco’s lips, and turning on the spot, they disappeared.

Fin

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