

Weakness

by dorrie6

Fandom: Harry Potter

Pairing: Harry/Draco

Rating: PG

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Summary: Draco finds out what he is worth.

Note: This story was first posted on December 25th, 2003 as a sequel to [Contingency](#).

Draco continued, "It's true, isn't it? We all have a choice, but Potter. You and I can fight in the war or--or travel the world or sit home and play exploding snap all day if we want to, but Harry--" He felt his throat catch, swallowed and took a deep breath. "Potter has to march off to his doom because some bloody prophecy says so, isn't that right, Professor?" His head was throbbing now, and his hands shaking. Draco wondered if perhaps this was what it felt like to go mad.

Dumbledore looked as though he'd been struck. Draco fell back into the depths of his chair, wishing he could just go to bed and wake up to find this all a dream.

"It was for Harry." Dumbledore spoke softly, as though only to himself. Then he looked up at Draco. "You did this to help Harry."

Draco stared for a moment and then nodded. "I did this to help Harry."

"ATTENTION! INCOMING WOUNDED! ALL AVAILABLE HEALING STAFF TO THE GREAT HALL!"

Draco's head flew up from its pillow, his heart pounding. After all these months, he still had not become accustomed to the untimeliness of war. He fell too easily into the comfort of sleep and was never prepared for its inevitable interruption. As he climbed from bed and pulled on his too-recently discarded robes, he thought about how little he was prepared for any of it; the lack of sleep, the stench of the wounded, the constant fear that the next mangled body would belong to, well, to someone he might care about.

"I don't know why I'm here," he spoke out loud to the empty dungeon.

Harry, his dream replied to him, still in Dumbledore's voice. You did this to help Harry.

"Harry."

He tried to push back thoughts of their last conversation, but they flooded him as always. It was the day he'd found out that he was to stay at Hogwarts while Harry went to war. Harry had come to say goodbye.

"You're to stay and brew healing potions with Snape," Harry had informed him, as though it was nothing at all.

Draco had reacted badly. "WHAT?"

"There's going to be a great need for it." Harry was not looking at him. "You're the best choice, Draco. Nobody else is at all qualified."

Draco crossed his arms in front of his chest. "What about Granger?"

"She's needed elsewhere."

Draco snorted. "For what, to transfigure sheep?"

"Very funny."

"They don't trust me," Draco said, his voice quiet.

Finally Harry met his gaze. "I trust you."

"That's not what I said."

Dropping his eyes again, Harry began to pace the room. "Draco, this is war. We all have to be where we're needed."

"And I'm needed where I can't do any harm. Secure under Professor Snape's watchful eye, right?" Draco could feel himself losing control, letting his anger carry him into comfortable territory.

"Draco--"

"Or maybe we're to watch each other. Nobody trusts him either. If you're lucky, maybe we'll kill each other."

Harry was angry now. "THAT'S NOT WHAT I SAID."

"No of course not!" Draco whirled on him. "None of it is you anyway, right? You had no choice, You're just doing as you're told."

Harry got quiet. "No," he said. "This was me."

Draco was stunned. "What?"

"This," he said. "I chose this." Harry nervously ran his fingers through his hair, and then forced himself to look at Draco. "It was my idea. I told them they should keep you here with Snape."

"You said you trust me!" The words felt like dust in Draco's mouth.

"I DO! I don't trust--" Harry broke off suddenly. "Never mind. Listen, I have to go." He tried to take Draco's hand.

Draco moved his hand away, turning his cold eyes on Harry. "Is Longbottom needed?"

"What?" Harry's eyebrows furrowed.

"Longbottom," Draco repeated. "Is he needed to fight?"

Harry blinked. "You're a bloody idiot."

"Well, I guess that's perfectly clear," Draco answered, turning away.

"Draco--"

Draco's voice was tight. "Get out."

"Draco." Draco felt a hand on his shoulder.

"Get. Out." The hand moved, but he knew Harry was still there. He let his all his hurt and bitterness fill his next word. "Harry."

Harry's retreating footsteps were his only reply.

"Excuse me?"

Draco stared blankly into the face of a confused mediwitch. "Sorry, what?"

She sighed, annoyed. "Did you say something?"

Draco took in the buzzing Great Hall around him. He hadn't realized he'd got that far. "No," he said. "Nothing. I'm sorry."

The mediwitch melded into the chaos of the Hall. Draco surveyed the now-familiar layout of Hogwarts' makeshift hospital, far more crude than St. Mungo's certainly, but populated with some of the best healers in the wizarding world. Draco was little more than a lackey, he knew; chopping, stirring, fetching ingredients from Professor Snape's personal storage when needed. It had been six months since Harry and his team of heroes had gone off to war, and Draco was still performing tasks unworthy of a third year. The war was going badly, that much was clear from the nightly onslaught of injured witches and wizards. Perhaps even more telling was the complete lack of news from the front. Dumbledore had been absent for a month now, and Harry... Draco closed his eyes and took a breath to steady himself. He both feared and hoped for the day he might find Harry amongst the rows of broken wizards around him. Visions of the many hopeless cases he'd seen, men and women who would remain as shells for the rest of their lives, were terrifying. On the other hand, if Harry made it here at least he was not dead. It was the silence that tortured him most. With Dumbledore gone, all briefings had been suspended, and he didn't even know who to go to for news. He barely knew anyone left at Hogwarts, and the few familiar faces avoided him vigilantly.

The one exception was Professor Snape, whom he assisted daily, and if Snape knew anything, he'd been keeping it to himself. Draco headed towards their small potions laboratory at the far corner of the Hall, where Professor Snape's dark figure was already in place.

"You're late, Mister Malfoy," Snape said as Draco approached, no sharpness in his tone.

"Yes." Draco picked up an empty vial and began bottling the already completed potion from their first cauldron. "I'd been asleep."

Snape nodded.

When Draco had filled a dozen vials, he set an alert charm over the tray of them. Its glowing light lasted only moments before a mediwizard's assistant picked them up. As he began filling another dozen, he summoned the nerve to ask what he most feared the answer to.

"Any news from the front, Professor?"

Snape looked at him with mild surprise. "A sudden interest, Mister Malfoy?" He lifted his left eyebrow, which reminded Draco of Harry.

Draco frowned. "The quiet is... unnerving."

"Agreed," Snape responded, still studying Draco. "Unfortunately I have no more knowledge than you do. With Dumbledore gone, my connections are... limited."

"Really?" Draco struggled to find words that would not offend. "I thought you were, well, with the Order."

Snape sneered. "The Order has little use for a spy with no cover."

"Oh." Draco decided to press his luck. "So, is that why you're not in the fight? Why--" He choked a little. "Why we're not?"

Professor Snape stopped working and turned to face him, his eyes serious and probing. "That's some of it. Not all."

Draco's lifted his eyes to meet Snape's. "What else?" Snape looked back to his work.

"They consider us too much of a target."

"Isn't H-- Potter a bigger target than anyone?" Draco's volume was rising. "They sent him out there as bloody head of a team!"

"Quiet!" Snape snapped, and then continued, "Potter is feared, ludicrous though that may be. His team is stupidly loyal and would sacrifice their own lives without question to keep him from being captured. The Death Eaters would not dare keep him alive if he were. You and I are... reviled. We are traitors. The Dark Lord would--" He chuckled darkly. "Well, let's just say it would be slower and more painful than anything these do-gooders can imagine."

Draco smirked. "So we're being kept here for our own good, then."

"That's the official story." Snape's tone was bitter.

Draco's head turned sharply. He studied Professor Snape's face as his own heart sank. "You think they don't trust us."

Snape returned his gaze. "They don't trust me. Some of them don't." He hesitated a moment before continuing, "You, on the other hand, have a guardian angel." He did not attempt to hide the disgust in his words.

Draco nodded. "Potter." Seeing the question in Snape's look, he explained, "He told me."

"Did he?" Snape laughed, dryly. "He's even more of an idiot than I had imagined. " He gestured toward Draco's right hand. "Chop that calamus root."

Draco waited for elaboration, but it was not forthcoming. For a while they worked in silence, broken only by brief instructions and the sound of pestle against mortar. Just as they set the last cauldron to boil, Professor Snape spoke again.

"Something I haven't asked--" He paused, as though unsure how to proceed. Draco wondered if the end of the world was near. Snape continued, "There are many reasons for my presence here on... *this* side of things. Some of which I'm sure you're aware, and

others perhaps not. Having served the Dark Lord in earnest for any period of time is reason enough for my defection. You, on the other hand--" Snape paused again, and then turned to face him. "Draco, why are you here?"

Harry. I did it... His thoughts trailed off. Draco glanced over the Great Hall. "I don't know," he said, and realized it was true.

The early morning hours passed quickly into the afternoon. Draco no longer had any sense of time. The bright lights in the Great Hall made the outside seem perpetually dark. When he finally was given a break from potion-making, he was surprised to step outside into soft daylight. The sky was slightly overcast, which gave an ethereal glow to the new snow on the ground. Draco let out a deep breath, watching the mist fade into nothing. He walked to the edge of the lake, which was not yet frozen over. He wondered what would happen if he jumped in. Death by squid or hypothermia seemed, at the moment, preferable to returning to the endless grim of the hospital.

The other thoughts in his head were less pleasant--things he'd been avoiding for months.

Why am I here?

He'd betrayed his father, lost his friends. He had no real passion for the cause, either way, only for-- Draco let out another breath, letting the mist carry away the thought he wanted to lose.

He was alone. Really, truly alone. It was something he'd longed for at occasional moments in his life, and now that he had it, he realized just how gravely he'd been mistaken. He supposed it should be liberating--the knowledge that he could disappear from the world on a whim, but instead he was consumed by a cold, empty ache. The lump in his stomach that had grown every day for six months had now taken over his whole body. He'd always been good at running away, but where did you run to when you needed to get away from yourself? He supposed he'd figure it out. Malfoys always saved themselves.

"So much for bravery." His words followed his breath into the ether.

Suddenly there was warmth against his neck and a hand in his. "Why would you say that?"

Draco's heart rose to this throat. "Harry." He closed his eyes. "You're not real." Harry answered by drawing him into a very real kiss, his hands weaving over Draco's shoulders and into his hair. For a few heart-stopping moments Draco forgot everything and let himself be carried away by want and relief. When his reason returned, it hurt to pull away. He did anyway, arms held stiff at his sides, lest they attempt to betray him. He tried to speak.

"I don't--"

"I know."

"No. Wait." Draco took a deep breath. The cold air caught in his throat. "I have to talk."

Harry stood still. "Okay."

"This isn't..." He made a vague gesture towards Hogwarts. "It's not okay. I'm not okay."

"Ok--" Harry flushed. "I'm sorry."

"Stop. I have to--" Draco took another breath and let it out, slowly. "I don't think that I can stay. Here. Doing this and not--" He could feel foolish emotions rising that he had no intention of indulging. He closed his eyes, took another breath and then opened them again. "I'm going crazy here. I have... no purpose. And then with you gone--" He felt his face burning. "I can't stand this. I sound like a fifth year girl."

"Draco--"

"I need to finish."

Harry nodded. "Yes."

"I know that we aren't... that we aren't anything. That it's stupid to pretend... with the war and all this madness. I keep asking myself why I'm here, and the only reason..." Draco swallowed. "I don't have a reason."

Harry was quite pale. "Oh."

"As for this insufferable method of protecting me--"

Harry broke in. "I'm not."

"What?"

"I'm not protecting you."

Draco's breath left him. "Well. I'm still a bloody idiot, aren't I?" He began to walk away. "No matter--"

Harry grabbed his arm. "No, will you just stop it?" He pulled Draco back. "I'm not protecting you, I'm protecting ME, don't you get it, you git?"

Draco glared. Harry softened.

"I have to win this war, Draco. I have to. The prophecy says it has to be me. I can't have a weakness. If I have one, he'll use it." Harry's voice dropped along with his eyes. "He always does." He looked up at Draco. "I can't have a weakness."

"I don't understand."

Harry stared.

"Oh."

"Yeah." Harry shuffled his feet.

"Well, I'm--" Draco smiled. "I'm glad you're not dead."

"Thanks." Harry laughed nervously.

Draco flushed. "What about all that rubbish in the beginning, 'No big declarations... there's no point' and so on?"

"Well, I've always been an idiot." Harry smiled. "Has Snape taught you nothing?"

Draco laughed. "He has mentioned it once or twice."

They stood in silence, shy and awkward. Then Harry spoke.

"Listen, can we start this over? I--" He reached into the pocket of his robes. "Look, I brought you something." He held out a small package, wrapped in muggle newspaper and a crinkled ribbon.

Draco smiled, taking the package. "What for?"

Harry lifted his eyebrow. "Draco, it's Christmas."

Draco stared at the package in his hand. "I'd forgotten."

"Well open it, would you?" Harry asked anxiously.

Draco pulled open the ribbon and gently unwrapped the paper. Inside was a tiny wooden box. He glanced at Harry who nodded, and then lifted the lid to reveal a very small key.

"Don't touch that part," Harry said.

Draco looked at him, questioning.

"It's a bit like a portkey, only backwards. It's keyed to me. If you touch it, instead of bringing you to a place, it will bring me to you." He smiled. "It will only work once, so you should save it for... something important. I just. I thought you should have it."

Draco was unable to speak, but he felt his eyes shining.

Harry bit his lip. "You do want it, don't you?"

Draco nodded, smiling. Then his eyes widened. "I don't have anything to give you."

"Yes you do," Harry said.

"I do?" Draco asked.

Harry nodded, pulling him close. He brushed his lips against Draco's ear and whispered, "Weakness."

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Thank you for reading *Weakness*!

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