

Harry Potter

Waves Crashing

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Fandom: Harry Potter.

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Characters: Harry Potter.

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Summary: The war is over, but Harry doesn't feel it yet. Post Deathly Hallows, before the Epilogue.

When Harry awoke the shadows in the room were long and warmed the room with an almost orange light. He let his eyes adjust to the brightness after sliding his glasses on, watching the dust swirl in the rays.

He finally pulled his focus from the small bits and glanced around the room. It was deserted, despite the mish-mash of belongings that had been tossed all over the other beds and on the floor.

The bed that Ron had slept in for six years, directly next to Harry's, had the covers pulled back and the sheets were disturbed, as if someone had slept there recently. The same could be said for the other beds that occupied the room.

Although his friends must have come in at some point, Harry hadn't heard a thing during his sleep. He hadn't even been disturbed by Ron's and Neville's snoring or the shuffling of various others who had come and gone.

He allowed his eyes to close and rubbed them underneath his glasses. Even with the soft, warm bed beneath him, his sleep had been less than refreshing. Exhaustion had claimed him before his head had even hit the pillow. In fact, he didn't remember much more than collapsing against the soft bedding. Ron, or someone, must have removed his trainers and pulled the blankets up and over him at some point.

The nightmares that he wished he could simply claim as imagination revisited him now and he pressed his fingers hard against his eyes to block out the images, allowing the sparkling blackness to take over until the discomfort became too much to bear and he was forced to take his fingers away.

He sighed and slowly pushed the covers back to reveal his filthy clothing from the day before. Unfortunately, Hermione carried everything Harry could hope to have right now in her small beaded bag. And she wasn't here right now.

Well, he'd have to do the best he could with what he had. He'd become rather proficient at cleaning charms over the last year. Although he wasn't sure the thread-bare rags he was wearing now would hold up under a vigorous cleaning.

He sat on the edge of the bed and tried to take stock. Next to the bed, on a small table that usually held his glasses and a framed photograph of his parents, lay a plate of sandwiches. No doubt, Kreacher had placed an ever-fresh charm on them. He'd vaguely spoken to the house-elf before making his way blindly up to the dormitory.

His stomach growled loudly and Harry quickly consumed two sandwiches before slowly taking another and contemplating as he picked at the bread and cheese that hung out one side.

Yesterday, (had it really only been a day... it may have been a week that he'd been sleeping) he'd finally achieved freedom. Harry held no illusions that the world was a wonderful place now. Just because Voldemort was gone didn't mean that everyone would embrace their differences and there wouldn't be those in the Wizarding world who looked down on others as less than themselves. He wasn't stupid. There would still be problems.

But they wouldn't be nearly as suffocating for Harry as having to deal with a Dark Lord out for his blood.

Then why did he still feel so... trapped. That wasn't the word, he knew. He just couldn't seem to find the right one for what he was feeling. The pressure on his body... the numbing heaviness that weighed down his mind... those seemed to be the only things he could feel right now.

He blew out a long, slow breath and stood on still-shaky legs, tossing the partially eaten food back onto the plate. Maybe a good, hot shower would help him to clear the fog in his brain and feel a bit better. While the food had certainly helped, his stomach no longer rumbled, it hadn't satisfied him.

The water hitting his shoulders gave him some small comfort and he scrubbed his body hard, washing away months of living on the run in a small tent in the middle of nowhere. He hadn't had a good shower for too long. Once he'd cleaned his hair twice, he stretched his back against the hot stream of water and contemplated how he felt.

The weight was still there and Harry was vaguely annoyed, knowing that he was missing something... just not sure what it might be.

He closed his eyes and leaned forward in the water, letting it cascade over his face.

Suddenly, he knew how to describe the feeling. He jolted out of the water, sputtering it out of his mouth and nose. He'd felt it before, although the circumstances were so extreme that he hadn't recognized it right away.

Fourth year. The second Task of the Triwizard Tournament. When he'd been in the middle of the Black Lake, the Gillyweed he'd eaten had begun to wear off and the pressing of the water on his body, filling his lungs with a burning sensation and threatening to pull him under.

And then again, the night Dumbledore had died and Harry had been forced to swim through the salty sea, waves crashing over his head and filling his mouth and throat with pungent water.

It was the feeling of drowning.

The realization hit Harry hard and his knees buckled, sending him careening toward the tile floor. The water continued to pour down on him as he pressed his cheek to the cold wall, gasping for breath. Panic threatened to consume him as he struggled to understand.

Why would he be drowning now? Why would this hit just when he was finally free?

The water began to run cold as Harry still sat on the floor of the shower. Finally, taking a large breath, Harry turned it off and slowly stood, reaching for a clean towel.

He felt fidgety and out of sorts as he cleaned his clothing and dressed himself. Once finished, Harry wasn't sure if he was prepared to leave the silence of the room or not. He was sure the many people who had been at the castle would still be there and knew he wasn't ready to face all of them just yet.

Maybe if he found Ron and Hermione they could slip away and he could banish these pressing

feelings by simply being in their presence. He was sure Hermione would have a name for this sinking, drowning feeling if he would ever speak to her about it. But he never would. He knew himself well enough to recognize that, at least.

Harry's senses immediately assailed him once he stepped outside of the portrait hole. It seemed that everyone in the Wizarding World who had not participated in the Final Battle was now at the castle.

The noise level was almost unbearable; the press of bodies around him almost made him turn around and seek the solitude of Gryffindor Tower. His breathing became harsh, his heart hammering inside his ribs, threatening to break out.

Acquaintances and friends alike greeted him enthusiastically, shaking his hand and clapping him on the back. But Harry couldn't bring himself to do more than nod in their direction and attempt a weak smile.

The main entrance hall to the castle was a torrent of life. People greeted each other with enthusiastic hugs full of gratitude for life while others still clung to each other in grief. Harry was once again reminded of the ocean he'd traveled with Dumbledore. Wave upon wave, of people this time, washed over him, their voices sounding hollow and muted as if speaking underwater, their touch slow and uncomfortable; like brushing against some slimy creature in the depths of the lake.

Panic began to take hold again and Harry's head swiveled back and forth, searching for something that he couldn't define. Somehow, he just knew he needed... something.

Someone grabbed his arm and Harry spun slowly to find Cho Chang smiling up at him. He couldn't make out what she said for the echoing voices around them and the pounding of his own heart. She narrowed her eyes at him and her head tilted to the side. Harry could only look at her blankly before she glanced over toward the doors of the Great Hall. Slowly, she took hold of his elbow and began to pull him through the crowd.

He didn't know where she was taking him... did it even matter? He followed meekly, jostling left and right when people would pass and getting more and more irritated. The feeling that he couldn't breathe was becoming overwhelming and his head spun.

Cho stopped abruptly, speaking to someone. Harry knew the voice, but his head wouldn't make sense of it. The pounding in his ears had been joined by a rushing sound. His eyes darted over the scene in front of him, seeing everything but comprehending nothing.

Distantly, he heard his name and turned toward Cho and... Hermione. His friend moved forward quickly, placing her hand on his forehead-which, normally, Harry would have dodged.

He wanted so much to plead with her to help him. He was sinking and he couldn't seem to find the strength to do more than gulp for little bits of air. His throat was so tight he knew he could never speak.

Her dark eyes looked deep into his and softened a bit before she laid a hand along his cheek and turned his head to the side.

Obediently, his eyes followed, slowly panning the myriads of people seated at the house tables, eating. A flash of vibrant red caught his gaze and he forced himself to focus in that direction.

His chest compressed even tighter and Harry blinked hard as Ginny rose from where she was seated next to her parents. Slowly, she made her way to him, weaving in and out of the tables. When she reached a clear spot, her pace quickened until she was almost running and she launched herself at him.

His arms wrapped, of their own will, tightly around her waist, his face buried in her neck and pieces of her hair stuck to his mouth... Harry took his first breath.

He would be alright. *They* would be alright.

He could now walk on that water that he'd been drowning in. And Ginny would be there to catch him if he fell.

His heartbeat was replaced by theirs. Beating together.