

A Season in Hell

By Cassandra Claire

*C'est le Diable qui tient les fils qui nous remuent!
Aux objets rpugnants nous trouvons des appas;
Chaque jour vers l'Enfer nous descendons d'un pas,
sans horreur, travers des tnbres qui puent.*
—Baudelaire *Les Fleurs de Mal*

one: de profundis

Harry is on his way to the library when he sees Snape and Lupin arguing with each other by the statue of the humpbacked witch. The passageway behind the statue gapes black and open and there is something lying on the floor between them. It is purple and lumpy and not particularly enchanting to look at. Harry is not surprised to see it; monsters have been crawling up into the school from the tunnels underneath almost every day since the siege started.

Harry slows down as he gets close enough to hear their argument. Snape seems to think the creature should be killed and eaten; Lupin wants to keep and study it.

“To what end, Remus?” Snape demands, prodding the lump with the toe of a boot. Reflexively, it twitches and extends a tentacle. All the monsters have tentacles. Voldemort appears to be obsessed with them. Most of the Dark Lord’s creatures are perverse crossbreeds — hippogriff werewolves, vampire satyrs, unicorn basilisks with spider legs — and they all have tentacles, sometimes several sets. Nobody knows why. “It is perfectly obvious to the layman’s eye what this creature is.”

Lupin crosses his arms over his chest. “Then you tell me.”

“It’s a... it’s... it’s a part-Graphorn, crossed with a Lobalug and a bit of sea serpent, maybe some trout.”

“You just pulled that out of your arse, Severus, and you know it.”

“So what if I did?” Snape seems to be losing his patience. “I hardly see what good studying it is going to do, Remus, and may I remind you that we are down to the last of our livestock. Hagrid informs me there are only six roosters left, and according to Sprout the greenhouse will soon be entirely denuded. I suppose you think we should

starve —”

He breaks off, seeing Harry.

Harry gives both professors a weak smile.

“Off to the library, Harry?” Lupin says, too brightly.

“Yes,” says Harry.

“Good lad,” says Lupin. “Good, good lad.”

Harry walks away, uncomfortably aware of their eyes on his back. Pleading, hopeful, frantic eyes. Not the eyes of adults looking at a child. The desperate eyes of desperate people, looking for a savior.

Harry knows they are looking in the wrong place.

The library is Harry’s. Someone had decided, weeks (months?) ago that it should be headquarters for the student resistance, and had put up boards in there to be written on; there are sheets of paper everywhere and quills with different colored inks and maps of the castle and the surrounding environs and the tunnel system under the castle and even boxes of toy wizard soldiers for battle strategizing.

Harry has no idea what to do with all these things, so he ignores them. Mostly he sits around drawing stick figures on sheets of blank parchment. Himself and stick figure Ron and Hermione at the Burrow, represented by a squat little box with smoke pouring out of the chimney. A stick figure of himself stepping on stick figure Malfoy. Although it is hard to draw Malfoy as a stick figure. He is already all angles and planes and bits that stick out and are sharp and pointy and a round stick figure head just doesn’t look like him.

Harry is not exactly sure how he had been elected the de facto leader of the population of the besieged school, but there it is. He is, after all, the Boy Who Lived and he was supposed to defeat Voldemort. He’d done it before and his current inability to do it again seems incomprehensible to everyone but himself. They can only imagine that he is planning something really incredible, something amazing and Really Big that will bring the castle down on top of Voldemort’s head.

Of course Harry has no idea what that might be and has said as much, multiple

times, but everyone ignores this. “You keep on planning, Harry,” they say. “You’ll strike when the time is right, and we all know it.” Harry often points out that their situation is entirely hopeless — they are a hundred strong at the most, students and teachers, Dumbledore is gone, and they are almost totally unarmed. Meanwhile, the castle is boxed in by Death Eaters, a hundred men deep on each side. Voldemort’s forces appeared that first morning of the siege; they have never left, and sheets of green fire burst from their wands at regular intervals as they shoot down any owl that tries to get a message in or out.

Sometimes they hold peculiar-looking rallies on the Quidditch pitch. That really depresses the hell out of Harry. That was his Quidditch pitch. He should be running on that pitch, kicking off from his broom, soaring up into the infinite air. It should not be overrun by a bunch of creepy looking men in masks whose bony white legs protrude from the hems of their black robes as they dance in circles, waving flaming torches and making rude gestures towards the castle.

Harry sits in the window ledge and watches them sometimes, and wonders idly what would happen if he wandered down there and tried to kick them off the pitch. If he still had his wand he might try it — he’d probably manage to get at least one or two of them before Voldemort showed up and put a Killing Curse through his head — but all the wands had vanished on the first day of the siege, every wand in the castle. Nobody knew where they had gone. Quite a few people surmised that the house-elves had run off with them, as the castle’s servants had all vanished that day as well, like rats deserting a sinking ship.

After that, Hermione had burned her SPEW buttons in the common room fireplace.

Harry also wonders sometimes what would happen if he went down to the Great Hall and simply announced that he was done. That he had absolutely no idea what to do and no desire to lead the inhabitants of the castle on some kind of suicide mission had he even been able to think of a mission to lead them on. He is only sixteen and he has never been a military genius. In fact, he privately suspects that he isn’t actually even all that bright. His skills are luck and being good at Quidditch and not dying and none of them are coming in at all handy at the moment. Especially the not dying part. Sometimes he suspects he already has died, and this, this endless twilight stasis, this half-empty castle with its closed windows and dead stale air and dying torches and dying people all expecting something from him — this is Hell.

The door of the library shuts behind him and Harry takes a deep breath, readying himself for another day of drawing stick figures on bits of parchment and trying to

not go insane. He takes a few steps into the room and realizes as his eyes adjust to the lesser light that he is not alone in here.

Draco Malfoy is standing at the far end of the room, at an open window, waving down at the Death Eaters below.

Harry stands for a moment and just stares at him. Nobody ever comes in while Harry is in the library. They are afraid of interrupting him in the middle of a brilliant thought.

Harry knows that there is no chance of this happening. This, however, does not excuse Draco's intrusion into his private space. On top of which, it is strictly against the rules to open any of the windows.

Harry strides across the room towards Draco. Draco is leaning out the window embrasure, waving cheerfully, as if he were the Queen greeting her subjects. "Hello down there, darling," he is calling. "You look lovely today, Nott, and you too, Avery. That shade of black really suits you and the nail-studded cudgel thing is absolutely dashing. Say hello to my father for me, will you? Tell him I'm not dead yet and I still fancy —"

Harry slams the window shut. "What the fuck are you doing, Malfoy? You know the rules about open windows."

Draco narrows his eyes to slits. "Just saying hi to some old friends," he says.

"Perhaps you should bugger off and join them," says Harry. This, actually, is something he has long wondered about. Draco is the only Slytherin left in the castle; the others all walked out and joined up with the Death Eaters a long time ago. Harry knows only a very little — something about an estrangement between Draco and his father, Draco having been disowned and cut off — but he does not know how, or why.

"Why don't you join them," says Draco evenly, "and save the rest of our lives?"

Harry blinks at him. "What?"

Draco chuckles, low in his throat, and leans back against the wall. He is wearing, rather defiantly, Muggle clothing: a long-sleeved black cotton shirt that molds itself to his slim torso, a pair of jeans that ride low on his narrow hips. "It's you they want," he says. "It's you they're here for. Go and give yourself up and the siege ends. We all walk free."

Draco's right, of course. Harry bites his lip, and winces — biting his lip has become a nervous habit lately, he's practically chewed a ragged hole into the soft tissue, and he's been consciously trying to stop. "Why are you still here, Malfoy?" he demands. "In the castle, I mean."

Draco runs a hand through his short silvery-blond hair and shrugs. "My father disowned me," he says. "Everyone knows that."

"Yeah, but why?"

"I ate all the strawberry creams out of his Christmas chocolates," says Draco. "It made him bitter." He curls his lip at Harry, jams his hands into the pockets of his trousers. He looks fragile, hollow-boned like a baby bird, Harry can see the shadows under his cheekbones, gathering in the suprasternal notch at the top of his collarbone.

"What is it with you and Muggle blue jeans?" says Harry. "Is this some way of spitting at your father? Sartorial revenge on the Death Eaters for leaving you here?"

"I'm touched you've been noticing my trousers," Draco says.

"I have no opinion on them," Harry says quickly.

"I didn't ask you if you did." Draco leans against the wall next to the window, back against the stones, thrusting his hips forward. His lazy eyes take in the room, raking the untouched blackboards, the undisturbed stacks of paper. "It's wonderful that you've been getting so much done in here, Potter," he said. "Especially with everyone's hopes pinned on you and all."

Harry fidgets. "I'm working on stuff."

Draco laughs derisively. "You're probably just sitting around drawing stick figures."

Harry feels himself flush.

Draco grins. "You are, aren't you? I knew it."

Harry chews his lip, again, winces and tastes blood. Damn it.

"Just admit it, Potter," Draco says. "You don't know what to do."

“And I suppose you do?”

Draco laughs softly. “Nobody’s expecting anything from me,” he says. “I don’t have to save the world. I just have to suffer because you can’t.”

“Well,” says Harry, but his voice is a thin thread, “at least you’re suffering.”

“Not as much as you are,” says Draco. “But then you seem to be making yourself suffer on purpose. Otherwise you’d be out there fucking up a storm with everyone else.”

Harry blinks. But he knows perfectly well what Draco is talking about. The threat of death hanging over the castle has destroyed, to some extent, the inhibitions of its inhabitants. People clinging together in the ashes would be the poetic way to put it — mostly everyone just seems to be having sad, desperate, end-of-the-world sex. In the dorms, on the common room couches, in broom closets, in the no-longer-used classrooms. Harry has walked in on his fair share of carnal events. He has learned little from this except that such events seem to be interesting only to the participants.

“I don’t think that’s really much of a solution,” says Harry, and immediately hates the way he sounds. He sounds like an enormous dork, the kind of person who would spend days drawing stick figure pictures while everyone else around him was putting the Pop-Up Wizard’s Kama Sutra to shame.

Draco lifts his shoulders in a shrug. The action separates his shirt from the waistband of his jeans, showing a strip of hard pale torso. A faint shiver runs across the back of Harry’s neck. Harry blinks in shock — it has been so long since he’s felt anything, anything at all, that this tiny shudder, this tightening in the pit of his gut, is like Vesuvius erupting all over his head. He gasps, looks up at Draco, wide-eyed. “Do that again,” he says.

Now it’s Draco’s turn to look confused. “Do what?”

“This,” says Harry, and shrugs.

Looking at Harry as if he suspects he might be insane, Draco shrugs again.

Harry kisses him.

Draco makes a sputtering noise and draws away, but only for a moment, and only, it seems, to pull Harry around into a better position. Then he lunges for him, mouth

fierce and seeking, and their teeth clack together with a sound reminiscent to Harry of one chess piece clicking against another. Harry's hardly ever kissed anyone before but he's fairly sure this isn't exactly the way to do it right. Surely it should all be a bit more neat and orderly than this: Draco's mouth open over his own, little hitching gasps coming from his throat, Harry's mouth full of warm wet tongue and the taste of cigarettes and cold coffee. Draco's fingers knotted in his hair, jerking his head forward half-painfully, their lower lips rubbing together, a damp syncopated symphony of lips and teeth and tongue. Warmth gutters up from the pit of Harry's stomach and spreads through his chest and he feels the beginning of a tightening in his veins and a hot, burning ache that makes him dizzy.

He pushes Draco away. "Wait."

"Wait?" Draco looks incredulous. "For what?"

"We shouldn't do this here," says Harry.

"Gee," said Draco. "You think the Death Eaters will let us outside so we can get a hotel room?"

"Fuck you, Malfoy," says Harry with a dull, strengthless annoyance.

Draco leans his head back against the wall and looks at Harry through the dark silver blades of his lashes. "If you say it," he says, "then mean it."

"I mean everything I say," says Harry.

"Right," says Draco. "So let me ask you. Do you want to fuck me?"

"Well," says Harry. "Yes, obviously."

Draco looks shocked.

Harry expels a sigh. "You were right about what you said. Everyone else is fucking up a storm, and I guess it keeps them sane. And I'm too tired to hate you anymore. What's the point, anyway? There's no more Quidditch or Houses and Pureblood vs. Mudblood doesn't matter much when soon enough we'll be drinking each other's blood to stay alive, does it?"

"Drinking blood won't keep you from starving," Draco points out helpfully. "Now, come has some nutritive value. Blood, not so much."

"I assume you speak from experience," says Harry, slightly breathlessly. Draco's hands are back on him now, sliding along the narrow hipbones, inching up the bottom of his t-shirt. His fingers are soft against the taut skin of Harry's stomach and the dry rhythmless scratching of Draco's fingernails against his ribs is oddly pleasant.

"You're so thin," Draco observes.

"We're all thin," Harry says. "The amazing Siege of Hogwarts Weight-Loss Programme."

"Don't try to be funny," says Draco. His hands are finding out marvelously interesting things about Harry's skin, the pulses under it, the sensitive spaces between his ribs. He rubs his thumbs against Harry's nipples, and Harry shudders. "Being funny is my job."

"You know, I never thought you were all that funny," Harry says absently. "Mostly you're just mean."

In response, Draco puts his mouth against Harry's neck. Harry tenses for a moment, not sure what to expect, anticipating some kind of vampiric biting, especially after that talk about drinking blood. But Draco just gently slides his cool lips against Harry's throat, his hands stroking up and down Harry's torso as if he were steadying a colt. His fingers find the waistband of Harry's trousers and hesitate there, light as butterflies.

Harry grins, his smile hidden against Draco's hair. He raises his own hands and puts them on Draco, his fingers finding the other boy out through the short distance compressed between them. Draco feels the way Harry thought he would feel. He has looked at Draco Malfoy enough times and over enough years and perhaps this was always in the back of his head somewhere, this contact that seems to shape the other boy's body under his hands. Silky-feathery hair, soft skin, angular shoulders, smooth musculature layered over a hard torso, jutting hip bones, and Draco makes an incredulous gurgling noise in his throat as Harry finds the buckle on his belt, undoes it, and goes for the zipper on his jeans. No button-flies for Malfoy. Harry slides his hand inside slowly, there's not a lot of room to work with, his arm is trapped between their two bodies and Draco doesn't seem interested in giving him any extra room. He's making funny little noises under his breath as Harry's fingers waltz their way into his underwear. Harry finds Draco's cock and wraps his hand around it, waiting, and Draco sucks his own lower lip into his mouth, a line appearing between his eyes, and he's tensed up and not moving as if he's terrified that if he does move, Harry will stop.

Harry is not interested in stopping. He hasn't felt nearly this alive in ages, the burned-paper, dead-air smell of the castle replaced by Draco's scent of sweat and soap and cigarette smoke. Draco's cock in his hand feels nothing like his own, it's something entirely different, hard and alive under his exploring fingers. Draco makes an incoherent sound, a whimper, and Harry moves his hand down and then up, one slow steady stroke. Draco buckles forward into him, hands splayed on Harry's shoulders, and Harry kisses him hard, their mouths wet and hot together and underneath Draco's bitter taste of coffee and smoke is an underlying sweetness, a sugary candy taste, and Harry recollects how young Draco is, how young they both are, and his hand is still in the other boy's pants, about to start stroking up and down the taut length of Draco's cock, and then Draco goes rigid and gasping against him, fingers digging into Harry's shoulders as he comes all over Harry's hand.

Harry pulls back. "Okay," he says. "I guess you haven't actually been fucking anyone, either."

Draco stares at him, his hands still on Harry's shoulder, and then he goes even paler — Draco's version of blushing, Harry supposes, a bloodless rush of blood to the face. "You're just mad because you fucking enjoyed that," he hisses.

"No," says Harry. "I'm mad because you came all over my hand." He raises the hand in question, and wipes it off on Draco's shirt. "And I was expecting a little more stamina out of you, Malfoy," he drawls, "I'm disappointed."

Draco pushes him away, hard, and starts yanking his trousers and underwear back up, his fingers shaking on the buckle. "I was going to suck your cock," he says. "But now I guess I won't bother."

"I was going to not let you," says Harry. "Now I guess I don't have bother doing that, either."

"Rot in hell," Draco says, with which pronouncement he stalks over to the door, and slams his way out of the library.

Harry wonders if anyone will ask Draco about the mess all over his shirt. He hopes Draco has enough sense to tell people he was attacked by a slime-secreting monster that has crawled up out of the tunnels. At least it will give everyone something to talk about over dinner.

Dinner turns out to be the purple tentacled creature Harry saw Lupin and Snape arguing over by the statue of the humpbacked witch. Cooked, it is even more purple and gelatinous than before. It seems to be pulsing slightly as Harry pokes at it with his fork.

“Don’t eat it, Harry,” says Hermione. “I think it might be toxic.”

Harry looks over at her. She is reading another fat, useless book. She is as thin as the rest of them, her face gone all to luminous transparency and huge dark eyes, her hair knotted into thick braids over her shoulders. He wonders idly if he should ask her if she is, as Draco maintained, fucking up a storm along with everyone else. Perhaps that’s what she and Ron do while he’s in the library. That would be interesting. Although Ron is not there at dinner again. He is always off exploring the tunnels, looking for a way out, although they’ve all told him hundreds of times that there is no way out that has not already been mapped out or blocked off or is guarded at the other end by Death Eaters.

Some students had tried to get out through the Hogsmeade tunnel, during the first few days. They had never come back.

“Is there really any nutritive content in semen?” Harry asks Hermione now.

She is unflappable, does not miss a beat. “Not much. About five calories a tablespoon. Why?”

Harry looks across the empty Great Hall at Draco, who still, stubbornly, sits at the Slytherin table, although there is nobody else there. Draco raises his white-fair head, and stares at Harry with burning eyes. His lips shape words. Harry is not entirely sure what he is trying to say as lip-reading is a lot harder than Draco seems to think it is. He might be saying Later, or he might be saying Tonight, actually it looks like he’s saying Tomato, although Harry thinks this isn’t very likely.

“No reason,” says Harry absently.

“Well, you know there’s no point, er, consuming your own, Harry, I mean, you lose more calories making it than you’d get back.” Hermione pats his hand. “We’re all hungry. But you’ll find a way for us to win, Harry. I know you will.”

The gelatinous lump on Harry’s plate puts forth a mini-tentacle. Harry stabs it viciously with his fork.

“That’s the spirit,” says Hermione encouragingly.

Harry winces. He is sure that everyone in the room except Hermione is looking at him with deep hatred and loathing, wishing he'd step on up and throw himself to the Death Eaters so that they can go home and eat normal food and take normal showers and not be held hostage by the whims of eugenics-obsessed madmen with tentacle fixations.

Ron suddenly appears out of nowhere and hurls himself down at the table next to Harry. He is festooned with weeds and smells like something that has been dredged up from the bottom of a well. "All right," he says enthusiastically, spearing a tentacled purple mass with his fork. "Calamari!"

Across the Hall, Draco throws his napkin down on his plate, and stalks out of the room.

The Marauder's Map is still useful for some things. After dinner, it tells Harry that Draco is in the Slytherin common room. Harry goes downstairs and throws things against the dungeon door until Draco, blinking and irritable, finally makes an appearance. "Go the fuck away —" Draco pauses and blinks. "Potter? What the hell are you doing here?"

"I want to know why you mouthed the word tomato at me across the Great Hall at dinner," Harry says.

Draco looks disgusted. "I did not mouth the word tomato at you across the Great Hall at dinner, you gigantic freak."

"Well, what did you mouth, then? It was something."

Draco shrugs. His shoulders lift elegantly, beautifully, under the thin material of his worn t-shirt. An arrow-thrust of something goes through Harry; he knows what Draco's body feels like under his hands, now, knows how the muscles tense and contract and give themselves up willingly to his caresses. He can make that thin body buckle to its knees for him. It is power, of a sort, something he has very little of these days. "Well," Draco says. "It won't sound the same if I say it now, will it? It's all about context, Potter."

"I bet you said 'Later'," Harry says. "You're so predictable, Malfoy."

Draco bites his lip. "I did not."

“You know you want me,” says Harry cheerfully, dancing on the balls of his feet.

“Well, I did want you,” Draco says crossly. “But now you’re being really annoying.”

“Ha!” says Harry.

Draco crosses his arms across his chest. “Are you going to tell me what this is about?”

“Yes,” says Harry, and stops dancing. “I’ve decided to give myself up to the Death Eaters like you said.”

Harry is not prepared for Draco’s reaction. The other boy goes so pale he is almost transparent. Harry imagines he can see right through the pellucid skin to the delicate veins inside, the pale bones like a framework of crystal rods connected by vitreous joints. Draco is so delicate, he really wasn’t meant for this, even less than the rest of them were; Harry feels a flash of pity for him, this little white ferret caught in a trap set for much larger game.

“You can’t do that,” Draco says.

“You told me to do it.”

“Of all the times to decide to listen to me,” Draco says fiercely. He has stepped out into the corridor, and the dungeon door slides closed behind him. He closes the space between himself and Harry, put his hand on Harry’s face as if he means to pull Harry’s head around so that Harry is looking at him. But Harry is already looking at him. “They’ll kill you,” he says.

“They might not,” Harry says. “You don’t know for sure.”

“I do know for sure,” Draco snaps. “Why are you telling me this?”

“I don’t know. I thought you should know.” He takes a step back. “And now you know.”

But he isn’t going anywhere, because Draco has grabbed hold of him and flipped him hard up against the wall. He twists around to glare but Draco has him pinned now, the grip on his arms is amazingly tight, his feet inches off the floor, and he

remembers that even though Draco looks like a doll made out of glass and wax he is actually quite strong, lean and wiry with thin whipcord muscles. “No,” Draco says, “No, no no, you aren’t going anywhere, Potter, and you certainly aren’t going outside.”

“Okay, now you’re being all weird about me going,” says Harry. The wall is hard against his back and grit is scraping his elbows. Draco is pressed up hard against him and Harry is cold everywhere except where they touch up and down the lengths of each other’s bodies, where he is hot and shivery. “You know, you always used to tell me I’d be first up against the wall when the Dark Lord came, but I didn’t realize you meant it like this, Malfoy.”

Draco chuckles, low in his throat, and the vibrating purr sends a shock down through Harry’s bones. “I also thought I’d be the one who killed you,” he said. “I always thought I’d be the one who stuck my wand in your throat and watched you crumple to your knees and that I’d do the dance of effortless fucking superiority on your fucking grave, Potter, that’s what I always thought.”

“How interestingly morbid of you,” says Harry. “And now?”

“And now I hate them more than I hate you,” Draco says. “My fucking father who disowned me, the rest of my House that turned its back on me. Not that I don’t still hate you. Because I do.”

“I’d love to give that the attention it deserves, but the fact that your erection is pressing into my leg is strangely distracting,” says Harry. “Now I understand why Parvati was always refusing to slow-dance with me at the Yule Ball.”

“Ah, yes,” says Draco bitterly. “Thank you for that reminder that you like girls.”

“I’ve been reconsidering,” Harry says brightly. “You know, I’m losing all sensation in my arms, Malfoy.”

“You want me to let you go?” Draco asks. “You might fall if I do.”

“I want to fall,” says Harry, and Draco lets him go. Harry slides about an inch down the wall, and then Draco catches him around the waist and their mouths meet, banging clumsily together, slamming Harry’s teeth against the inside of his lip and now it’s bleeding again, but he doesn’t, he finds, really care about that at the moment. He cares about kissing Draco who, Harry still privately thinks, is kind of a rotten kisser, or at least anyone else would think so. He has his hands in Harry’s hair and is kissing him so fiercely that it is as if he cannot breathe normally and is

sucking oxygen through the medium of Harry's mouth. Harry discovers that he does not mind this. He finds with his own explorations the hidden sweetness inside Draco's mouth, that candy taste, as sugar-sweet as hope and childhood and innocence. It seems to be a part of Draco, unrelated to anything he's eaten or drunk lately.

Harry moves his hands down but Draco bats them away, finding his own path through Harry's clothes, past the simple fastening on his trousers, and when Draco's hands slide inside his pants and stroke his cock, Harry gives a little gasp, feeling as if he has been swimming in deep water and has suddenly brushed up against something organic, something huge and alive in a place where he had thought he was entirely alone. He closes his eyes and waits for Draco to do something, to move his hand, something — hell, anything — but Draco doesn't, he has frozen, unmoving, and finally, the ache in his cock grown painful and unrelenting, Harry opens his eyes a crack and looks at the other boy.

Draco is flushed, his mouth partly open, his skin dark red along the cheekbones and pale everywhere else. His hair is in his eyes. He looks quite fuckable, which isn't a word Harry has ever applied to Draco Malfoy before, mentally or any other way. "Is this... okay?" he asks, voice gone suddenly small and defenseless.

"Oh, for fuck's sake," says Harry despairingly. "Get on with it, would you?"

Draco looks startled. Harry kisses him to forestall any other pointless questions, but Draco pushes him away soon enough and Harry hopes Draco isn't going to ask if this is okay again, because if he does, Harry is going to punch him in the eye and damn the consequences. He doesn't, though, he just drops to his knees and reaches up to tug down Harry's trousers, swiftly and inexpertly so they bunch up around Harry's knees. Harry realizes he must look very silly, wearing just a T-shirt and a sizeable erection with a pile of trousers and underwear wadded around his kneecaps, but Draco leans forward at that moment and sucks the length of him into his mouth and any thoughts about how stupid he might look vanish away entirely and Harry is suddenly worried about how he must sound, as a guttural half-sobbing gasp rips its way out of his throat.

He'd never known anything could feel like that. It isn't just that it feels good, it does, it's the intensity. Galvanic shocks are tearing through his nerves. His hands scabble for purchase on the wall behind him and his hips are bucking forward, insistent and urgent and Draco's mouth on him is hot and wet, sucking him in long slow strokes, and it's a good thing he is going so slow because Harry is afraid that if Draco went any faster he would explode into a thousand pieces. Already he can feel the gathering inside himself, the tightening, and he knows what comes next from his

own solitary experimentation: the excruciating peak, the fall, the drowning aftermath. He grips Draco's shoulders with his fingers and Draco takes this as a cue that Harry wants it faster and harder and he gives it to him, fast and hard and hot and slick and wet, and that is the end of that: Harry flings his head back, bright light exploding behind his eyes as he comes with a convulsive sobbing cry, although the light might just be because he's hit his head against the wall.

Draco pulls back, swallowing, starting to smile. Harry, gone boneless with the shock of orgasm, slides to the floor in a welter of his own discarded clothes. His rapid heartbeat is gradually slowing from jackhammer swiftness to a pace he can breathe around. Draco is looking at him, his eyes like silver cat eyes in the darkness. "You all right there, Potter?" he asks.

Harry nods weakly.

"You still going to kill yourself?" Draco asks.

"Well," says Harry, "maybe not tonight."

Now Draco really does grin, a crooked grin that suits him. "This would be the first time I ever saved anyone's life with a blow job," he says.

"Shut up, Malfoy." Harry lets himself fall backward so that he is lying on the floor, which is cold and unpleasant against his bare skin. He throws an arm over his face, blocking the light. After a few moments he feels a faint pressure against his shoulder and realizes it is Draco, leaning against him.

He lets him.

Ron and Hermione are both in the common room when Harry gets back to Gryffindor Tower. Hermione is reading in a chair and Ron, filthy and streaked with mud, is sprawled on the rug in front of the fireplace.

"Terry Boot went out and gave himself up to the Dark Side today," says Hermione. "Where have you been?"

"I let Malfoy give me a blow job in the dungeon," says Harry.

"Ah," says Hermione. "This explains the sperm conversation."

“You let him give you a blow job?” Ron asks, his tone tinged with disbelief. “He’s what, just giving them out?”

“Yes, he has a stand and a little sign and everything,” says Harry. “He was going to sell lemonade, but you know. Food shortages.”

“Ha ha,” says Ron weakly. “I wasn’t interested anyway.”

“I think you should be careful of Malfoy,” says Hermione, looking up from her book suddenly. “He’s not to be trusted, Harry. His father is a Death Eater after all. Maybe they just left him here to spy.”

Harry rolls his eyes. “Spy on what?” he demands. “We have no plans. We have no secrets. Having secrets would presuppose that we had some kind of scheme at work, and we don’t. What’s he going to say? Dear Dad, we had tentacle for lunch again today. Everyone still starving. Love, Draco.” Harry shrugs. “Let him.”

“We don’t have a scheme?” Ron looks properly alarmed now. “I thought we did!”

“Well, if the plan is to starve to death slowly, then we have a plan,” says Harry.

“Harry, don’t,” says Hermione in a hissing whisper. “You’ll upset everyone!”

“Like me,” says Ron. “I’m upset.”

“Just keep on tunneling, Ron,” says Harry, and goes upstairs to his room.

When Harry gets to the library the next day, Draco is already there. He’s sitting on one of the tables, looking at Harry’s collection of stick figure drawings. He jumps when Harry comes in and half-slides off the table. “I was —”

“Looking at my drawings, I saw,” says Harry. “Exciting, aren’t they?”

Draco comes around the table to Harry. His eyes are huge in his white face, he looks shaken and unsettled and vaguely hurt as if someone has been slapping him around. “I keep thinking about you,” he says. “All the time — I can’t stop.”

“That could be because you’re always following me around,” Harry points out. “Maybe you should find something else to do.”

“This is nothing else to do,” Draco says.

Harry thinks for a moment. “Good point,” he admits. “Still, I don’t see how you can be thinking about me all the time. I just saw you, when was it...”

“Yesterday,” says Draco. “It was yesterday. If I recollect correctly, I gave you a blow job, and then you left after I fell asleep on the floor.”

“Yeah, I remember thinking that couldn’t have been very comfortable.”

The side of Draco’s mouth twitches. Not a smile, but a little nervous tic. “How observant of you.”

“I left you a note,” points out Harry, a slight tinge of defensiveness in his voice.

“It was a stick-figure drawing,” says Draco.

“Ah, yes,” says Harry, realizing he has no memory of this. “I figured you’d know what it meant.”

“Next time, perhaps, be a bit more specific,” says Draco tensely. “Look, Potter, do you want me to leave you alone?”

Harry thinks for a moment. He says, “No.”

Draco relaxes almost imperceptibly. “Are you still planning on killing yourself?” he asks, leaning back against the table.

“I was never planning on killing myself.”

“Giving yourself up to the Death Eaters, then,” says Draco impatiently. “You know what I mean.”

Harry makes a face at Draco. “Yes, I am... eventually.”

The beginning of an actual smile curls the corner of Draco’s mouth. “Just not right now?”

Harry shakes his head. “Not right now.”

Draco reaches out and pulls Harry back against him, so that they are fitted snugly against each other like two pieces in a puzzle box, Draco’s hard torso pressed

against Harry's spine, his softer mouth against the back of Harry's neck. It is almost like cuddling, which makes Harry slightly edgy, but then Draco reaches around him and starts unbuttoning the front of his trousers, and Harry relaxes. Sex is fine, sex is okay. Sex is the wonder drug, the marvelous anti-psychotic that will keep him from careening over the edge. "You never know," Draco says into Harry's hair, "Maybe Weasley will actually succeed in tunneling us all out of here and we won't have to worry about it."

"*We* don't have to worry about anything," says Harry, meaning, there is no *we*, but Draco's fingers are skidding over the ridge of his hipbones, they are sliding down into his pants, and he decides to debate this perhaps minor point some time when Draco's hands aren't suddenly stroking his cock, wringing blissful sparks out of his every nerve ending. After all, bliss is in somewhat short supply these days. Harry closes his eyes.

two: sed non satiata

Days go by.

Desire is a timeless country, or perhaps it might be more accurate to say that it keeps its own schedule. Harry can no longer remember what day it is, what time it is, where he is supposed to be. There is no urgency left and no time to be measured, only the attenuating spasm, the endless fall, the blindness afterward.

He spends every second he is awake with Draco, and most of the time he is asleep as well. They fuck on the floor, and on the tables in the library, and on the couches in the deserted Slytherin common room. Every day Harry finds himself turning more towards Draco, a slow organic sort of turning like a flower looking for sunlight, only what he feels about Draco really doesn't deserve pretty flower imagery. It seems more to him like a necessity, like the necessity of getting up in the morning and going to bed and eating and sleeping and breathing. He does it because he has to. Because there is nothing else left for him to do.

He shows up at the dungeon with a sharp pair of scissors one day and Draco blinks at him — it's noon, and Draco is still in pajama bottoms, no shirt — as if he expects Harry to lunge at him and stab him through the heart. Instead Harry explains his hair has gotten too long and will Draco cut it for him, Draco always has such neatly cut hair.

This appeal to Draco's vanity is successful as Harry has suspected it would be. In fact it is slightly too successful and after a bit of snipping Harry finds that he and Draco now have the exact same haircut.

Draco seems pleased. "Look at you," he says.

Harry looks at himself in the mirror, and Draco over his shoulder. He sees two thin boys with scarecrow eyes, skin burned to pallor by too many shadows, the same round mouths and boyish chins. Harry takes his glasses off, and puts them on Draco. Very close up, he can see the other boy without too much blurring of his vision. Draco blinks at him, gray eyes enlarged behind the owlsh lenses, and Harry wonders not for the first time what Draco sees in him, because in his opinion that is one stupid-looking pair of glasses.

He steps back. "Look at you," he says.

Draco bites his lip. "I can't see you with these on."

“And I can’t see you without them,” says Harry. “I kind of like it.”

He’s telling the truth, from this distance he can’t see. He doesn’t see what happens to Draco’s expression when he says this, or the crumpling rage behind his eyes. He just knows Draco takes the glasses and flings them back at him and then pushes him against the wall and kisses him, hands sliding up under Harry’s shirt, fumbling at the waistband of his jeans. Harry returns the kisses with reciprocal appetite, holding his arm out stiffly away from his body so the glasses don’t get crushed between them.

When Harry is done and they are sprawled on the floor as always, skin sticky, glued together by sweat and saliva (and sometimes, when Draco is rough and bites, blood), Draco leans on Harry’s chest and says, “You cover your face when you come, did you know that?”

Harry is staring up at the ceiling of the Slytherin common room. It is polished stone, with the constellations picked out across it in slivers of glass that shimmer when light hits them. “I what?”

“You cover your face with your hands,” says Draco. “Is it because you don’t want me to see you come or because you don’t want to look at me?”

Harry sighs and transfers his gaze to the other boy’s face. “Don’t make this into something it isn’t, Malfoy,” Harry says.

Draco’s skin looks drawn, his mouth a bloodless etiolated line. “Don’t make it into what?”

“Don’t make it into something,” says Harry crossly.

“So it’s nothing, then,” says Draco, biting off each word as if he were biting chips off an icicle. “I’m nothing to you.”

“Not just me,” says Harry equably. “I could name at least ten other people who don’t care about you at all.”

Draco rolls off him. Harry continues to stare at the ceiling. A few seconds later Draco is back and there is something cold pressed against Harry’s throat. After a few moments adrift Harry realizes that what he feels is the open blade of the scissors against his jugular vein.

“You cannot actually be planning on scissoring my head off,” Harry says. “Do you know how long that would take?”

“I have nothing but time,” says Draco. “Tell me again how you don’t care about me.”

Harry slowly turns his eyes towards Draco, who is naked from the waist down, wearing only a cotton t-shirt. The neck of the shirt is loose around his collarbone, which Harry has always thought was one of the most beautiful parts of him, delicately curved like the thin shadow of a bird in flight. His cheeks are damp, flushed and feverish; his hair gone dark with sweat has taken on the sheen of old pewter.

“If you kill me,” Harry says, “maybe your father will take you back. Can you un-disown someone?”

“He disowned me because of you,” says Draco. “So that would be kind of ironic. Wouldn’t it?”

Harry does not ask about this. He does not want to know. Actually, he already does know, has guessed, and simply wishes to avoid the awkwardness of being officially told, because then he would have to have a reaction, and he hasn’t got one.

“I’m sorry,” Harry says, less because he doesn’t want his throat cut than because he doesn’t want to have a discussion with Draco about their relationship. “I just like making you angry; you know that.”

Draco snorts in response. “You apologized and you looked directly at me,” he says, “this is indeed a red-letter day.”

“Oh, but I like looking at you,” says Harry. “You’re beautiful.”

Draco perks up. “That’s certainly true.”

“Can I have my throat back now?” says Harry.

Draco’s tone is begrudging. “All right.”

Draco lets the scissors go. He leans in and kisses Harry on the cheek and the scissors fall to the side. Harry catches at Draco and rolls him over onto his back. Draco lets him, only snarling a little into Harry’s bare shoulder, relaxing with a gasp of gratified surprise as Harry moves down his body. Harry would be the first to admit that their relationship is not evenly reciprocal in this manner; Draco attends to Harry’s needs far more often than the reverse occurs. Which is odd, because this is how he likes Draco best: writhing mutely under him, fisting his hands in the material of his shirt,

raking holes into the carpet with the scoring pressure of his nails. Draco tries so goddamn hard to be quiet, Harry considers it a challenge to force noises out of him. He'll hover over him, mouth centimeters away from where Draco wants it to be, and wait, just breathing, not moving. Draco will buck his hips up, and twist, and snarl down at Harry, and make breathy gasping noises in the back of his throat, which Harry will ignore. And then, finally, he'll say "Please," and that's the magic word, what Harry has been waiting for, and Harry will slide Draco's cock into his mouth, take as much of it as he can all at once without choking, and that's when Draco really breaks, his back arching up and he'll say Harry's name, "Harry, Harry, Harry."

It's the only time he ever calls Harry anything but "Potter."

Dormitory life, Harry supposes, teaches boys to be silent when they come. All that quiet masturbation in the dark, trying not to wake up the boy in the bed next to yours. But Draco is unusually quiet even considering all that. He gasps and whimpers and bites on his own hands as if he were undergoing a surgical procedure and keeping up a courageous front is imperative. Harry has to surprise him even to force those few cries out of him, those repetitive shrieks of Harry's own name, and that's all he ever says, he never curses or importunes any deities or babbles the names of lovers past or imaginary.

It's very weird considering that usually Harry spends his time wishing that Draco would shut up.

This time, when Draco comes, he cries. Tears leak out of his eyes and into his hair and he palms them away, messy, embarrassed. "I'm not crying," he says.

"I know," says Harry.

When Harry returns to Gryffindor Tower it is the first time he has been there in days. He finds Hermione curled on the sofa, weeping tiredly. She tells him Ron has disappeared, whether he's been killed or defected or is lost somewhere in the tunnels is unclear.

"For how long?" Harry says.

"Five days," says Hermione. Her eyes are red.

"What do you want me to do?" Harry says.

"I guess I want you to care," says Hermione and sits up, pulling her legs under her. "But I know you can't do that."

"I'm sorry," says Harry. And he is sorry. This is one more failure, one other particular in which he is inadequate. He wants to miss Ron for her, and probably somewhere he does miss Ron, and wishes he could tell her that. He had loved her so much once.

"Are you in love with Malfoy?" she asks.

"Erm," says Harry. "Not exactly."

"I didn't even know you were gay," says Hermione a bit wistfully, and plucks at the tasseled cushion she's sitting on with fretful fingers.

"I'm not entirely sure I am," says Harry.

"I wouldn't care if you were, Harry," she says. "You could tell me."

"I know," he says. "And you'd start a Gay Wizards Alliance and make eight million buttons. I suppose it would give you something to do."

"Maybe it's just what they say about wartime," says Hermione. "There are no straight men in the trenches."

"That's atheists, Hermione," says Harry. "There are no atheists in the trenches."

"Malfoy's in love with you, you know," Hermione says suddenly.

"Yeah," says Harry. "I know."

"What are you going to do about it?"

"Probably nothing," Harry admits. "I guess it's good to have someone around who doesn't want me throwing myself to the Death Eaters."

"I don't want you to throw yourself to the Death Eaters," says Hermione. "Nobody does."

"Ron might disagree with you there," says Harry.

"So you're going to go? You're really going to do it?"

Harry nods. "I think it's time."

Hermione's lip trembles. "If I have sex with you will you stay?" she says.

"I couldn't do that," says Harry, "I don't hate you."

Hermione blinks at him. "You are one seriously fucked-up boy, Harry Potter," she says.

"Yeah," says Harry again. "I know."

Harry goes up to the Owlery as it provides the best view down over the countryside and he figures he might as well know what he's dealing with before he heads outside. Draco is already up there when he arrives, sitting on a low crossbeam. There are no owls here any more; of course, they have all been set free or killed trying to deliver messages. The Owlery is spotlessly clean and vacant, all bare tracts of shining polished wood. Up close you can see the grooves in the wood where generations of claws have gripped and raked and scratched. It looks like some secret language.

Harry goes to the window and looks out. He can see the plains all around the castle, stretching away to the Forbidden Forest. They are black with robed figures, moving to and fro with the directionless determination of ants. Everywhere there are little brushfires like tiny burning match tips. The clear blue autumn air is stained with smoke.

"Potter."

Harry turns around and looks at Draco, sitting silently on the crossbeam. He seems very small, as if he has shrunk somehow inside his oversized jumper, the sleeves dangling down over his thin hands with their bloodied, bitten nails. He gets up, and pulls the jumper off, and now he's standing in front of Harry in just his jeans and shivering pale skin.

"Don't go," he says. "You can do anything you want to me. Anything... I'll let you."

"I already do anything I want to you," says Harry dryly.

Draco shivers again. His lips are cracked, bruised where he — or Harry — has bitten

them. "You can hurt me if you want," he says.

"I already hurt you when I want," says Harry, and realizes that this is true. Perhaps he himself can feel nothing, but Draco, always so fiercely angry or wanting or desperate, whether choking on his own vinegary bitterness or drawing hungrily on Harry's no longer accessible sweetness, Draco is still alive, perhaps the most alive out of all of them. Draco is the only wound Harry can give himself. Harry holds his hand out. "Come here," he says.

Draco comes over to him, slowly, and Harry pulls him in close and kisses him. Not hard but with an intent and seeking pressure. Draco catches at Harry, holds him, but there is a nervous restraint about him, a shrinking tension and Harry pulls back and Draco says, "They can see us."

Harry realizes he means the Death Eaters. He doubts they can be seen very well from such a distance, the window is small, but then Draco's father is probably somewhere out there, isn't he? Harry bites on his painful lip and says, "I thought you said I could do anything I wanted."

Draco squeezes his eyes shut. He is so thin that Harry can see the beat of his heart through the moonlight-pale skin, the blue mapping of veins across the insides of his forearms and the lids of his eyes. "Fuck you, Potter," he says. "This isn't fair."

No, Harry thinks silently, *it's really not*. He hooks his fingers into the belt loops on Draco's jeans and pulls him closer, and Draco lets him, but his face is shut like a flower at night. Harry undoes the snap on the jeans, then the zipper, pushes them down, Draco's not wearing anything under them. Draco grips the window ledge with his hands as Harry slides down him, Harry's blunt nails raking his torso, the sides of his hips, hands cupping his ass, and Draco is dead silent and almost completely still as if he's undergoing some painful torture. But his cock is hard and ready when Harry takes it into his mouth and then Draco does make a sound, a fierce whimpering curse, and throws his head back.

Harry watches Draco while he sucks him off, because this is a good angle to watch him from. Draco has that quality of very beautiful people of never being quite entirely naked because their own beauty armors them, there are no bad angles to catch him from, but Harry likes to watch the changes in him as they progress, as he shuts his eyes and bites his lips and his lips part and his mouth opens. He hangs his head forward so his hair hides his face and he's breathing quickly and shallowly. One of his hands finds Harry's head and tangles itself in his hair, gripping tightly and nearly painfully. Harry can tell he's still trying not to move because the muscles in his thighs are jumping like the plucked strings of a violin. Harry pulls back for a

moment, waiting, and Draco's eyes fly open in disbelief and he looks down and Harry knows what he's thinking — that he won't say please, he won't. Not this time.

So just watch me, Harry thinks, and keeps his eyes fastened on Draco's as he takes him back into his mouth and sucks hard — messily, greedily, not bothering with technique or pacing or lightness of touch. And it is the first time that they have done anything like this while actually looking at each other and the effect is startling: Draco's eyes open impossibly wide and his hips buck forward and he comes instantly, a swift silent spasm and release, as if Harry's found some magic button on the back of his head that just needed to be pressed once.

He buckles, of course, forward, almost pitching into Harry's lap. Harry catches him and rolls him over onto his back and leans over him. "My turn," he says.

Draco looks up at him, eyes still dizzy from shock and release, and his lip twists into a weak snarl like a kitten in a trap. "Go ahead," he says, and gestures, "... in my pocket," he says, and reaches for his jeans, drags them over, pulls the flat near-empty tube out of the back pocket and shoves it at Harry. Harry takes it; he is already unbuttoning his own clothes, pushing his trousers down, kicking them off, and he leans forward, an elbow on either side of Draco, who is lying flat on his back. They are so close that the tips of their noses are touching.

"This isn't going to stop me," he says.

"I could go with you," Draco says. "When you go."

"No," says Harry patiently. "The whole point of me saving your life is that you live through it."

Draco says nothing, only his eyes flick away and he looks at the wall. He doesn't look up at Harry when Harry slides into him, only his hands come up and circle Harry and pull him down, and he buries his head in the curve of Harry's shoulder, the juncture where it meets his neck, and makes little whispering noises there. They are not whimpers and they are not cries, it is a litany of some sort, and as Harry rocks into and against him the words spill out of him faster, a frantic subvocal prayer. His hands slide down Harry's back, slipping and counting over the knobs of his spine, and as the deafening roaring pressure builds behind Harry's eyes and ears, he imagines himself clinging to a ledge that is crumbling away, the whole mountainside sliding down, and he lets go his grip and falls and shatters and breaks onto Draco, washed up on the shores of him, his bones all gone to sand. And Draco holds him through the shattering breaking fall and as the roaring fades away Harry realizes that what Draco has been saying all this time into his neck is really the simplest

litany of all: his name, just his name.

They sleep. When they wake up it is late afternoon. Draco is curled on a pile of his own clothes, the only light thing in the darkness, his hair rayed out over the dark stone floor like streaks of solar fire.

Harry starts to get to his feet and go for his own clothes, but something is clamped around his ankle. It's Draco's hand. Draco jerks on his leg, hard, and Harry goes tumbling back down and lands on top of him. Draco is dragging him down like clinging seaweed — if seaweed moved in violent jerks and had the tensile strength of steel. It takes Harry a moment to get his bearings and struggle and by then Draco has found a double purchase on Harry's body, fingers digging in hard and Harry has a feeling that if Draco could jam his fingers through the spaces between Harry's ribs and hold on that way he would.

Harry jabs at Draco with his elbow, and now it's a fight rather than just Draco clinging on, and they roll over, fiercely tearing at each other. Harry is astonished that Draco can make such a violent act out of simply holding on, but there it is: when Harry goes to pry his fingers away, Draco bites his hands, savagely, crushing the skin between his sharp teeth, and Harry yells out loud because it hurts. He brings his leg up and knees Draco in the solar plexus and Draco gags and clouts him with his free hand, hard, across the side of his mouth. Harry's mouth is full of blood and he decides despairingly that this signals the end of his abused lower lip, it will simply never heal up, and he shoves hard at Draco, trying to wedge an arm between their bodies, and then the door of the Owlery opens and Hermione comes racing in, shouting something.

Both boys freeze and stare at her, aware of their positions — they are naked, tangled together, blood from Harry's cut lip dripping down onto Draco's face.

"You know, Hermione," says Harry, "knocking is always an option."

Hermione gives him a scornful look. "Like I've never seen naked people before," she says. "Aren't you listening to anything I'm saying, Harry?" she demands. "The Death Eaters are gone. The siege is over."

The two boys spring apart. Draco is staring. "But it can't be over," he says. "They wouldn't just go away."

"Well, they have," says Hermione. "Everyone's running around outside. Ministry

owls are here dropping food and emergency wands. You should get out there. Although you might want to put clothes on first," she adds with a discreet sniff.

Harry and Draco fumble for their clothes, sheepishly, not looking at each other. Not embarrassed about the sex, Harry suspects, but about the fight that followed it. Draco cannot find one of his shoes and eventually pads downstairs barefoot. Neither of them are smiling and when they pass through the Great Hall and one of the students comes up to Harry and congratulates him, as if the end of the siege was somehow of his doing, Harry fights down an insane urge to run away, back upstairs.

But then they are outside. Blinking in the sunlight. And it is a cool hot bright shady day, the air smelling faintly of smoke. The sky overhead so insanely high and blue and deep. Students are running this way and that on the grass, all mushroom-pale windmilling arms and legs, and Hermione detaches herself to race over and prevent Seamus Finnigan from eating the clover out of sheer glee.

The teachers are standing over by the steps to the school in a knot, gesturing at each other. None of them seem to notice Harry much, although Lupin claps him on the back as he goes by. "Nasty cut on your lip there, Harry," he says, "You should get Poppy to see to it."

There are owls overhead, dropping packages. Mostly they seem to have food in them. A black owl swoops low over Harry's head and drops something into his hands. It is a letter. Harry stares at it blankly. It is addressed to him.

Draco speaks for the first time since they have come outside. "Who's that from?"

"I don't know," says Harry, and opens it.

He recognizes the looping, impatient script immediately.

Harry —

Hey, it's me. Did you get any of my other letters? I tried writing six different times. I even sent a message back with one of the merpeople. I found a way out through the lake. Just swim down to the bottom and the well in the merpeople's village is a tunnel. It comes out in a lake in France. I'm in Amsterdam right now, waiting for you, having a beer, watching the shows. This witch just did this totally bizarre thing with an enchanted banana. You should meet me.

— Ron.

There is a photograph of Ron stuck into the letter; he looks tanned, healthy, happy, sitting on a wooden bench with a beer in his hand and the tip of a wand sticking out of his pocket. He is winking at the camera.

“Potter?”

Harry looks up from the parchment in his white-knuckled hand. Draco is staring at him. Harry stares back at Draco and sees him, as if for the first time: sees the skin he had thought of as moonlight-colored, which is really just pallid from so many days inside with no sunlight, and the lank silvery hair, falling over the hollow eyes in tangles, and the half-moons of grime under the bitten fingernails, and the starved look in his eyes.

Draco says, “What’s in the letter?”

Harry folds up the parchment and sticks it in his pocket. “Nothing important.”

Draco looks back towards the castle. The lawns are full of students, although really not as many as there should be, really there are heartbreakingly few. They are blinking in the raw sunlight, they are hugging each other, they are staring up at the sky as if they have forgotten such a thing existed as infinite space.

“We should go,” Draco says. “If the Death Eaters all left it’s probably because something worse is coming.”

Harry zips his jacket up and pulls his hands inside the sleeves. “I’m sure you can handle it,” he says. “Good luck and all that, Malfoy. I’ll see you around.”

Draco stares at him in utter shock. “Are you kidding me?”

“No,” says Harry.

Draco’s eyes have gone elliptical with astonishment. *Hurt me*, he had said, and Harry has. It is all Harry knows how to do with him. They had played a game with their own shadows cast against a wall. But this is reality, bright sun and clear air, and there are no more shadows. There is not even a wall to cast them on.

“You can’t just leave,” Draco said. “You can’t leave me.”

“You said I could do anything I want,” Harry said.

“Well, I didn’t mean this,” says Draco.

“Next time, perhaps,” says Harry, “be a bit more specific.”

He hears Draco suck in a startled, whistling breath, and then he is walking away, quick strides opening up the space between him and Draco like a seam unraveling. The pale sun beats down on him sharply and his shadow falls away behind him and the air tastes of clean things, cold and fresh and newly cut open. The parchment crackles in his pocket as he walks away from the castle and down the path towards the lake.

Note: The Latin—

De profundis: Out of the depths

Sed Non Satiata: And yet not satisfied