Breath Of life

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Summary

Pirate!Potter! Merman!Malfoy! AU. Lowly sea-dog Harry is pitched off his ship at sea, only to be rescued by a mysterious creature with beautiful silver eyes.

Drairy. No smut, just feels.

Notes

This is a birthday present for so many people! Shaz, Jenny, Jessa, Amina, Sabrina, Emma and CL, I AM SO SORRY THIS IS LATE! :-(( I was literally out of the country and unable to get access to a computer, so I hope you forgive me xxx

See the end of the work for more notes

Breath Of Life

Life at sea was not for the faint at heart. Not all possessed the weathered skin or hardened soul necessary for surviving the salt-laced air or relentless struggle in the clutch of the ocean’s towering
waves, even on the calmest of days. On a night such as this, when blackened sky met iron grey waters in the howling, fury-whipped tempest of the Atlantic, Harry Potter feared he was not made of such stuff, and that he was doomed to a watery grave before he was to see his twenty first year.

Once more, the depths rose up to try and claim the motley crew as they scrambled across the ship like insects fleeing a disturbed nest. Harry’s boots slid across the slimy deck as the boat rocked violently, salty rain biting into his skin through his clothes. The cries of his fellows rang through the air, cutting between the wail of the storm and the splatter of the deluge hitting the wood of the boat; water from above mixing with water from below, indiscriminate as to which would snatch up the men’s lives first.

They needed unity if they were to pull the vessel back on course and steer her true, but these were a troop of blaggards and thieves, of murderers and rapists, given leave to run amok under the banners of the skull and cross bone. These were not men of honour. These were not Harry’s men.

“Soze the rigging!” the captain bellowed as he clutched desperately to the railings, his peg leg having even less purchase on the slickened wood than the crews’ worn leather shoes. Harry could not say he had much sympathy though as he began to scale the knotted ropes; Captain Dursley was a miserly, bitter old dog, whose greed was evident by his bloated belly as much as his bulging coffers. Not that greed was a frowned attribute amongst fellows with a profession such as their own, but when Harry had spent much of his voyage so far fighting hunger pangs strong enough to fend off sleep as often as he had hiding from the cat-o-nine-tails, his interests now lay more with self-preservation than any sort of loyalty to his captain.

Or any of the crew for that matter. A pirate’s life had not exactly lived up to all he had hoped it would be. For sure, he felt he must argue anything was better than the merciless toil of the workhouse he had spent his early, orphaned, years in, but perhaps he had not chosen wisely when signing his life over to the unquestionable rule of Captain Vernon Dursley.

“Scurvy rats!” the old man bellowed over the raging storm, waving about his cutlass. “Useless swine! If any of you toothless knaves lag, you’ll pay the pretty price; under my keelhaul!”

Harry gritted his teeth and assured himself if The Fair Petunia sank, he’d find himself in old Davey Jones’ locker as much as the next man. However comradery failed him as one of his fellows, a dastardly scoundrel by the name of Flint, thrust him aside, claiming the pulley Harry had marked as his target to heave against the sail whipping back and forth in the gale.

“Out of the way Potter!” he snarled, earning several cackles from those nearest them, despite their urgent predicament. “Leave the work to the real men!”

“Aye!” called the lumbering Goyle, a man so sluggish and vast Harry felt he had to at least give him some praise for making it this high up the rigging without hanging himself. “Little girls like you should be swabbing the decks.”

“Or warming my bed!” crowed Baddock, and Harry shuddered, not needing to be reminded of the other challenge that hindered any restful nights’ sleep. He’d yet to be dragged from his own bunk, but he suspected it was only a matter of time before he lost that fight, and he dreaded to think of what would happen when he did.

Perhaps it was this particularly disturbing line of thought that caused his grip to slip, but the gargantuan wave that came crashing over the ship would almost certainly have taken him in any instance, as it did numerous other men judging from the screams that assailed Harry’s ears. The water hit, cold, hard and merciless, stripping Harry of his senses, rocking the Petunia with unwavering ruthlessness. He fell several feet before fate took pity on him, and he found his hand
snatching hold of the ropes once more, saving him from plunging into the ocean, allowing him a scant moment to catch his breath.

“Potter!” came a scream from bellow, and he looked to see Marcus Flint tangled by his foot and hanging upside-down from the rigging. “Help me!” he begged.

Flint was not a kind man, nor a generous one. In fact, there were few Harry feared more from on this boat. But the terror in his eyes as he tried to right his flailing body so as to have a chance at defending himself from the sea’s next onslaught had Harry scrambling down the numerous rows between them, trying to pull Flint’s boot from where it was snared in the fraying ropes.

“Hold fast!” he commanded, forcing his raw, burning fingers to attack the jumble of limb and rigging, but already the next wave was gearing up, rocking the boat at a gut-wrenching angle, and Harry gasped as he clung to the netting, but to no avail.

The waters reared like a wild animal before diving down in their attack, striking icy cold and slamming the air from Harry’s lungs as he was yanked free from the ship’s bosom, spiralling through the air before he found himself submerged by the roaring waters. He tumbled over and over, losing all sense of which way was up or down as gravity took hold and dragged him into the freezing depths of the ocean below.

Once he plunged under the waves though, an odd sense of calm wrapped around him. He did not flail or struggle to try and push back up through the churning surf, and although his lungs burned he did not choke or cough in a vain attempt to find air. Being at sea lead a man to fantasise morbidly about what drowning must surely feel like, and even in his disoriented state, Harry knew this was not what he had imagined.

He drifted down, his eyes closed against the water, nothing to see but the blackness of the salty waters under the night’s sky in any instance. His life had been short and mostly miserable, squirming for freedom from under one thumb or another. Was it such a shock that his release should be so peaceful?

That peace was shattered as hands suddenly seized his shoulders. His eyes flew open despite the sting of the sea, in time to make out a blurry form as lips were pressed to his own, forcing air down his throat, filling his lungs like sunlight spilling out from curtains yanked aside in summer.

Harry inhaled, gasping, not understanding as he still felt and tasted the water in his mouth and through his nose, but yet at the same time air coursed through his chest and the burning was soothed immediately. He coughed and spluttered, blinking as his eyes too changed through some unknown force, and he found the sea was not so dark as he had before assumed. In fact, he wondered if he had ever seen so well in his life; his eyes had always been weak and in need of spectacles, but of course such luxuries were a mere dream for lowly street urchins.

Before him swam a creature of such beauty Harry momentarily forgot his plight, or his body’s miraculous new skills. He had heard of the sirens, women of extreme beauty who would lure men to their deaths with ethereal song. Women who were of human flesh but amphibious in nature, half person, half sea-creature. This, however, was no woman at all.

“Breathe,” urged the young man, hands still on Harry’s shoulders as he steered them to take shelter in a fissure nestled in an outcrop of sharp looking rocks jutting from the seabed blew. “Let the spell take its hold.”

He spoke the words from his mouth, but Harry more felt them resonating through his skull, as if they were his own thoughts. “Spell?” he asked in return, finding he too could speak in this strange
manner. The man smiled, and Harry felt, even through all these unnatural events, his heart tug.

His rescuer was as a man should be through his chest and arms and face. His body was mostly exposed, showing pale skin and lean muscles draped in strips of hessian, bolted together with shell and coral. Such garb must have been more for show than warmth – and it was at this thought Harry realised he too was no longer suffering from the iciness of the waters either. Logic suggested maybe his impending doom had caused a fit of madness as he drew his last few breaths, however Harry decided he would rather believe in this dream world instead.

For it surely must have been a dream, with this talk of magic and spells from a man who, below the waist, bore a magnificent tail of silver that matched his wide, concerned eyes. The scales blended into the human skin with a dappling effect, and as he turned at an angle to steady them in the rocks, a ridge of fins could be seen that ran along the back of the tail, a larger one where the fish met the man, then smaller again up his spine until they dwindled at the nape of his neck. Upon a closer look, the silver had a green sheen to it, reflecting in the light whose source Harry couldn’t be certain of.

To finish off the portrait were locks of fine, white blond hair that slipped through the water as they came to a final halt in the alcove of the rocks, and an angled face with enthralling features that displayed nothing but concern for Harry’s well being.

“I’m alive?” he said to the creature, and was rewarded with a dazzling and bashful smile.

“Yes,” he admitted. “It would appear so.”

He still held Harry in a firm embrace at the shoulder, anchoring him so the ocean’s current would not spirit him away. “But how?” Harry asked. “How is such a thing possible?”

The young man (for he was more man than fish Harry felt) caught his lower lip between his teeth and worried it for a moment. “It is forbidden to speak of it to Uplanders,” he said, as if confessing. “But I sensed your kind heart long before you were claimed by the waves, a bright light making mere shadows of the scoundrels you were ensconced with. I wanted to give you a chance, to let you return to the Air Above rather than watch that light go out.”

Harry blinked, a strange sensation indeed against the water. “I am…a bright light?” he repeated like a dim-witted child, but he cared little upon seeing the blush that coloured the merman’s cheek.

Harry had been taught to feel stirrings for another man was the Devil’s work, and to feel such a way for a creature not even fully man was surely worse, but he had never felt so alive, so drawn to another as he did in that moment. The warm smile that met him led him to hope he was not alone in his longing.

“You are,” assured the man. “I can see it as plain as my own hand before my eyes. I will accept any punishment if I can know you have not drowned like your kin.”

“They are not my kin,” said Harry quickly, then realised the implications of his words. “But I am sorry if they have drawn their last. I would not wish death upon anyone.”

The merman squeezed Harry’s arms. “And this is why you were saved. Such goodness should not be squandered.”

Harry regarded his saviour, utterly convinced he was unworthy of such praise, but allowing himself a moment, just a moment to bask in it. “How?” he asked again, changing the subject. “How did you see my brightness, and how am I now still alive?”

“Simply put?” the man replied. “Magic. Certain of my people are gifted, and I have been well
Harry’s head swam. A beautiful, magical being had deemed his life worthy of saving. Occurrences like that just didn’t happen to street waifs such as he. “Magic,” he mused, feeling the smile creep upon his face. “Aye, I have heard tales, but I never really believed…” Suddenly the world didn’t seem like such a dismal place to him. All his heartache and sorrows appeared to pale in this newfound knowledge. Magic was real, he had seen it with his own two eyes.

“You have a true gift indeed,” Harry told the young man. “What shall I call you my new friend?”

He looked sad all of a sudden, and Harry was fearful as to why. “My name is Draco,” he began, but Harry could not stop himself from interrupting.

“Like the stars!” he cried happily. He had never met anyone named for a constellation before, despite knowing almost all the formations there were to be known. For Harry, the stars let him dream of freedom, true freedom, no longer at the mercy of another’s cruel whim. He had drifted through the stars long before he had ever drifted on the sea.

Draco’s melancholy turned to joy. “You know of my namesake?” he asked, incredulous. “You have seen it in the Air Above?”

Harry nodded, bursting with pride to have impressed his rescuer even just a little. “A great dragon spanning it’s wings across the night.”

Draco’s silver eyes danced, just like the fire in Harry’s belly. He had never felt this way with anyone in his short life, he pondered he could live his whole life basking in the warmth of Draco’s smile.

“And you?” asked the merman Draco eagerly. “How shall I know you by?”

Harry deflated as he confessed his mundane name. “It is far less wonderful than yours.”

But Draco shook his head. “There are no Harry’s amongst my kind. I declare you to be exotic and rare, dear Harry.”

Harry felt he could already count the number of compliments Draco had bestowed on him in the past few minutes as more than he had received in his entire life from his fellow humans. He summoned his boldness and rose his hand to touch Draco’s arm, mirroring the grip he still had on Harry.

“Will the spell last?” he asked, wanting to determine the length of time they had. But to his dismay, the sadness returned to Draco’s face.

“The Breath of Life will only remain a little longer, giving you chance to rise once more to the Air Above,” he explained. “And…I will have to take your memories of our meeting, otherwise I am certain the elders will take sterner measures, unmaking the good deed I have done today.”

Harry couldn’t help the horror that swelled in him. He did not want to die, but he did not want to lose this joyous moment either. “Is there no other way?” he pleaded.

Draco shook his head. “Not if you wish to remain human.”

Harry stilled. “And if I cared little for my human life?” he asked.

The surprise was slow and cautious on Draco’s face. He studied Harry, still cradled in his
embrace. “You have no loved ones to return to?” Harry shook his head.

“I took to the sea yearning for a new life, but it was just as wretched as my last. Can your magic help me try a third time?”

Disbelief remained on Draco’s face. “You would wish to become like me, to join the merfolk?”

Harry swallowed, not daring to hope too hard. “If it is possible?”

“There is no reversing it,” Draco warned. “And our lives can hold just as much struggle and toil as the Uplanders.”

Harry took a deep breath, feeling the water swirl in his lungs. It was funny, after that first, unnatural inhale, it now felt as if he had been surviving his whole life under the water. Like he could survive the rest of his life that way too. “Would you be there to guide me?” he asked.

He reasoned he had nothing to lose. If Draco could not, or would not promise that, even if just at the start, he would return to The Fair Petunia and take his chances. But the gloom of his features was once more replaced by delight, and he flicked his tail, swimming closer to Harry. “I would be honoured,” he said, happiness clear in the voice resonating through Harry’s head. “Are you ready? The Breath is soon spent.”

Harry nodded, eager and excited beyond anything he had every experienced before, even when escaping from the poorhouse and signing up to Dursley’s crew. He had known in his heart that life at sea was truly where he belonged, it had obviously just taken him a little time to discover it was below the sea, not above it where he would eventually call home.

Harry had always thought magic came from the hands, in great bursts of colourful light, like Merlin and the Lady Morgana from the legends of King Arthur. But instead, Draco wrapped his tail and his arms around Harry’s form, drawing him near again, pressing their mouth together once more to cast his spell.

Except this time it was no chaste brush, but a hot, intense embrace of strong lips and tongues. Harry had dallied with barmaids before, allowed a few sloppy kisses, but this, this felt like it was giving him his very life, renewed from the flesh and blood of his darling mother.

But lo – it was giving him life! The hotness spread through him like fire catching on oil, spurring across his skin, making him twist in shock. Draco released him from the kiss, but held him as if protecting an infant from the elements, soothing Harry as he gnashed and wailed, the transformation burning away his legs, reforming his lungs, even stripping away his clothes. He was not sure how long he writhed, bordering between agony and ecstasy, but never once did Draco relinquish his hold, whispering in a tongue Harry did not quite comprehend, but finding himself holding onto a peacefulness all the same.

And then, as soon as it had begun, it was done. Harry gasped, his lungs and eyes even more improved than when the first spell had taken effect. The waters were bright as if sunshine was spilling down from above, the taste now sweet in his mouth. And his ears! He could hear the thrum of life the ocean had to offer, the way Draco’s heart and soul ebbed from his chest. Now he understood, he saw how Draco had found him, how his own body had called out through the tides.

“You,” said Draco, pulling away just a little and looking Harry up and down. “You have such beauty.”

Harry pulled his hair forward with his hands, enough to see it was still black and coarse, but then
he realised that was not what Draco had meant.

Looking down, his clothes had been stripped down to rags, revealing a body far stronger than he had ever been as a human. There were soft spines he could feel drifting all the way up the centre of his back, longer and more slender than Draco’s fins, pleasurably sensitive to his touch. And then there was his new, glorious, tale. Scales, shimmering a golden copper, petered off at his navel where his skin began. The tail was longer than his legs ever were, and as he gave an experimental swoosh through the water, he could feel it also had power he could never had hoped for on land.

He raised his eyes and grinned like a buffoon. “It worked,” he breathed, lifting a little into the waters, discovering his new freedom from gravity’s pull.

“My magic always works,” chided Draco playfully. His fingertips were skirting tentatively up and down Harry’s arms, drifting along his collarbones, evidently admiring his work. Admiring Harry.

“Young magic,” Harry began as Draco very carefully brushed his fingers along the first of Harry’s new spines on his back, sending sinful shivers all along his skin. “Must it always be administrated by kiss?”

Draco bit his lip again, though this time the smile was coy and Harry found himself reflecting a matching one back. “Any skin to skin will actually suffice,” he admitted, looking up through long, pale eyelashes. “I thought I would never have another chance, that you would return to the Air Above.”

“And the second spell?” Harry challenged, giddy and brave with happiness.

The blush returned to Draco’s cheek. “You were none the wiser,” he said, peeking up in embarrassment. “Do you mind?”

Now it was Harry’s turn to draw the other near, to wrap him in his new, spectacular tail and skim his fingers across the silvery green fins along Draco’s spine. He too shuddered, and Harry knew he must feel the same as he himself had.

“On the contrary,” he said leaning in closer together. “Teach me your magic,” he uttered, before sealing the gap, and pouring his life into Draco, just as Draco had poured his life into him.

The End

End Notes

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