

Like a Devil's Sick of Sin

by Gelsey

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Chapter 1 of 1

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He wakes up slowly, feeling thick and unreal, like he's been packaged in fog and Fuzzy Thistles. He tries to turn his head but finds he can't – between sudden pain and something holding him in place, he can't move.

A grunt, mixed parts of fear, frustration, and almost-pain, escapes him, and a face appears above him.

"You're awake?" She sounds shocked, looks shocked.

She is shocked, Vincent tells himself with a mental smack. *Stop being an idiot.*

He squints, trying to bring her into focus, but before he can, she's gone, yelling for a Healer. Bright green robes come, waving wands and gadgets and unidentifiable things at him before giving him a brief explanation and a sleeping draught.

As if he hadn't already had enough sleep with the coma he'd apparently been in.

~o0o~

He found out from one of the intern-Healers who she is – Mandy Brocklehurst. Her brother Alfred is two doors down from his in long-term recovery, a war hero who is healing and learning to walk again.

He doesn't see her again until a week later. She creeps in quietly, and he feigns sleep until she opens her book. "Why you here?" he asks roughly, voice permanently damaged from fiendishly hot air and smoke.

She jumps and clutches her book to her chest. "It's quiet here," she says softly. "It's always loud in my brother's room. I can't think."

He blinks, surprised at the depth of her answer.

"I'm sorry, I thought you were asleep and wouldn't know. I'll just go."

She's halfway to the door when he manages to croak "No, wait." It is too quiet in here, giving him too much time to think, an occupation he'd never much liked or wanted to do.

A little company would be nice. Even if she is a half-blood.

~o0o~

The visits have become something they both look forward to, or so Vincent hopes. She reads to him, or they talk. She never rushes him or seems to mind that he doesn't sound terribly bright. He is very conscious of it – she's smart, a Ravenclaw.

"Why?" he asks her one day, interrupting the sound of her soft voice. "Why do you keep coming back?"

She shrugs, leaning against the bed, careful not to touch his bandages or disturb the Pain Portrayer, a clear stone that glowed with different colors depending on his pain levels. "I like spending time with you. You listen to me, and you don't rant about the war."

He looks at her with a puzzled scowl that is still hidden by gauze. "I was on the bad side of the war." He doesn't know how to address the 'likes spending time' portion of her explanation.

"Regardless of what some may say, Vince," she says, and her eyes flick in the direction of her brother's room, "there are no sides any more. I think you've suffered enough."

He cannot understand her no matter how hard he tries. So Vincent does what he's always done when he doesn't understand things – he keeps on going and hopes it will come to him someday.

~o0o~

She's the one who insists that she stay when the bandages come off. "I don't care what you look like, silly," she tells him. At least she didn't call him stupid like most would.

Again, he doesn't understand, but he accepts it and lets her stay. And when he sees his reflection, the twists of skin that might someday be minimized but not banished completely, he's horrified. She holds onto his hands tightly, though, and touches the tender flesh.

"I'm a monster," he whispers, unable to look in the mirror again.

"No, you're not. Not any more."

He looks at her in surprise, remembering past conversations that delicately discussed the war and even his atrophied conscience that she made grow as if it were Devil's Snare, and she was fertilizer.

He sighs and leans against her, feeling soothed by her presence and the soft stroking of his coarse, brittle hair. "Thank you," he murmurs into her shoulder, and a gentle touch on his chin and soft kiss on the lips is her reply.

~o0o~

Two years later, they have a quiet wedding – he has no family left, and half of hers doesn't understand. Luna stands at her side as maid-of-honor, though, and surprisingly Draco Malfoy appears as his best man.

Vincent doesn't care that no one really understands them – he just goes on with his life with her and hopes they might understand someday. For her sake, not his.

Author's Notes: The title comes from the poem, *Dulce Et Decorum Est*, by Wilfred Owen. This was a last moment fic, I hope it turned out all right.

This was written for the recent challenge on Romancing the Wizard on LJ.