

Dance Me

by Orpheus Samhain

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Chapter 1 of 1

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A/N: Written for leianora for riddle_gifts 2008 anonymous exchange. Betas: arbor_vitae, teacuppa, and sweetflag. Special thanks to sweetflag, who made this story better.

"You are dismissed."

The gathered Death Eaters bowed and, amidst the shuffling of feet and rustling of cloaks, moved to exit.

"Lucius! A word with you."

"My Lord." Lucius turned back to the throne-like chair placed on a dais and bowed again. Only when the pale wizard sitting there beckoned him over did he dare to approach.

"There is something you will safekeep for me." Lucius opened his mouth to utter another sentence of servility, but was cut off with one sharp hand gesture. "It appears to be very inconspicuous, but I'm quite attached to it." His master's cold smile promised torture should something happen to the object in question. "Treat it as your most valuable possession, and keep it out of the reach of *any* hands."

From inside his voluminous robes, Voldemort produced a small, ordinary, well-worn book with a black cover. "This has its past and future, I daresay." He smiled, watching the surprised expression on Lucius' face. White hands offered the book, and Lucius...still dazed...hastily took it with as much reverence as he could muster under the circumstances. "Do not divulge the information of where it's hidden to anyone."

"Of course, my Lord. Anything you say, my Lord." Each sentence was accentuated with a bow.

"You may go."

Still bowing, Lucius took a few steps backwards before he dared to turn his back on his master and walk out. Outside the door, he inspected the book carefully. With disbelief, he took in the faded cover and blank pages of mediocre quality Muggle paper.

Extraordinary treasure, he thought dryly, and in that moment, he felt a slight tingle in his hands. Lucius had encountered enough inconspicuous magical objects before to know what he held. His Lord's words came back to him, *out of reach of any hands*, and he dropped the book into his pocket.

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"Cissy, where did you put the key to the secret chamber?" Lucius' voice boomed through the door between their bedroom and his study. The shuffling of parchments and sound of drawers being violently opened and closed carried from the study.

"Nowhere." Narcissa tried to charm the strand of hair into obedience in an attempt to learn the newest sophisticated coiffure.

"Where?" Lucius stuck his head into the bedroom.

Exasperated, Narcissa put her hands down, and the stubborn lock fell over her face. She looked at her husband, who had madness in his eyes, and sighed.

"I didn't touch it, Lucius. I don't know where it is. Why don't you..."

"I have no time, darling. The Dark Lord will kill me if I'm late, and he'll kill me if I arrive on time only to inform him that I failed to hide his precious *empty* diary," Lucius spat, disgust thickening his voice, before retreating back into his study and shoving the books off the shelves.

Narcissa rose from her stool at the vanity and walked into the adjacent room, the long back of her nightgown trailing behind her.

"I meant, why don't you call Dobby?" Her husband was beyond reason, though, frantically moving from one bookshelf to another. The rain of books was pouring steadily on the floor. "Dobby!" Narcissa called out in an entirely different voice.

With a crack, a cowering house-elf appeared at her feet.

"Mistress called?"

"Do you know where the key to our secret chamber is?"

"Yes, Dobby knows." The elf's eyes bulged out more than usual.

"So, where is it?" Narcissa didn't have the patience to put up with elf's normal way of divulging information.

"In the kitchen." Dobby picked at his pillow case.

Lucius must have heard something through the thick wool of his panic. In three long strides, he was at the house-elf's side, shouting, "What is the key doing in the kitchen?"

"Master said Dobby is to have an eye on that key, and Dobby is in the kitchen almost all day..."

Narcissa put a restraining hand on her husband's arm and barked out to Dobby, "Bring it!"

Dobby bowed and Disapparated, and a second later, he was back, handing the key to Lucius.

"Give it here, you stupid, worthless creature!" Lucius tore it from the elf's trembling fingers and rushed to the tapestry depicting an ancient scene of a three-headed dog under an apple tree. "Get out!"

Dobby didn't wait to be told twice and vanished immediately.

"It'll be a full ten minutes before I can open it, get down there, find a place for it, and then, get back here to close it," Lucius chanted madly, fumbling with the heavy tapestry.

"Lucius, go! I'll do it. The diary is as good as safe now; you can tell the Dark Lord such. Go, now." She pushed him gently on the arm, extricating the key from his clenched fingers with her other hand.

"You're an angel." Lucius kissed her on the forehead. He took the cloak from the sofa's backrest, removed the book from the pocket, handed it to Narcissa, and ran out through the door.

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Narcissa listened to his pounding steps on the stairs, and when the entrance door closed with a thud, she sighed and turned the book over in her hands...nothing special. She would have thrown it into the hearth, not hidden it in the chamber amongst the precious and rare artefacts secreted there. But the Dark Lord's will was the law, and she would never dare to put Lucius in danger.

She drew back the tapestry, unwarded and opened the chamber, and descended the spiral staircase. With a wave of her wand, the torches flared into life, flooding the vast chamber with unsteady orange light which reflected off the myriad golden and silver objects adorned with precious stones. It was here where this common book was meant to rest.

Narcissa thumbed through the pages. They were all blank! By Salazar! What a new eccentricity was it supposed to be? To keep a worthless rag in one's treasury!

The pages moved as if ruffled by a gust of air, and she instinctively looked up towards the entrance, the book slipping out of her hands. Narcissa stomped her foot in annoyance.

"That's enough! I've wasted enough time on you! *Accio book!*" The book opened and arched upward, as if struggling against the spell. Narcissa gasped and whipped her wand forcibly. "*ACCIO BOOK!*" Her voice quivered, but this time, the book floated into her hand, albeit much more slowly than it should have.

Narcissa cast it aside onto the pile of sapphire jewellery and rushed upstairs. It took her three attempts until she thought she heard the satisfying 'click' of the lock. Next time, Lucius Malfoy would have to deal with his master's orders alone!

She put the key into the small drawer in his desk, went back to the bedroom, and sank onto the puff before the vanity, sighing exhaustedly.

So, this was another evening she would spend alone, she mused bitterly. Good thing that she had to prepare for the night's gathering at Nott Manor. She wasn't ready yet...her hair was being stubborn, and she couldn't choose which jewellery to wear. The only thing she had decided on was her robes: silvery, shimmering, moon-touched.

Narcissa decided to do it properly and quickly changed into her dress robes. She preened herself before the tall standing mirror...right profile, left profile, en face. The robes hugged her body closely, flaring from her knees. In the gathering darkness, her hair merged with the fabric of her dress. Holding up her hair with one hand, she stood on her tiptoes to judge the result.

"There's still something missing there," came a soft voice from behind her, along with belated, drawn out and exaggerated knocking.

Narcissa spun on the spot, and her right hand slid from her hair to her décolleté, trying to prevent her racing heart from leaping out of her chest.

In the doorway stood a tall, dark-haired boy in Slytherin school robes. Narcissa thought about her wand on the vanity, but it was too far away from where she stood, and the young man had his right hand in his pocket, no doubt ready to strike should she do something unexpected. He must have been observing her for a while.

"Who are you?" Narcissa's voice trembled a little, and she lifted her chin to cover her weakness.

"Oh, I'm sorry. I ought to have introduced myself first." The boy inclined his head in a way that may or may not have been considered a bow and pushed away from the door jamb, removing his reassuringly empty hand from his pocket. "I'm Tom Marvolo Riddle." He fixed his eyes upon her.

Narcissa frowned. She had a feeling that she had heard the name before, but couldn't place it. It wasn't the most pressing issue, though.

"What are you doing here? Who let you in?"

"I'm your... guest. Your husband brought me here personally."

Their home was open to many Slytherin students and graduates, but Lucius had always, *always*, forewarned her and introduced the new guests to her, if she didn't know them already.

"I don't remember you from Hogwarts."

"There is a considerable age difference between us," he said with amusement in his eyes.

Narcissa snorted angrily. The cheek!

"I may have graduated before you, but it doesn't mean that there is a 'considerable age difference' to speak of!"

He inclined his head and regarded her for a moment before answering with a wry smile.

"It doesn't matter, really. People judge by appearance; they don't know what they deal with until it's much too late."

"Have a care, boy! My husband may have invited you here, but I can have you thrown out in no time!"

"I'm here on Lord Voldemort's orders."

"Oh, are you? So you think you're that important?" She almost laughed.

"I *know* I'm important." He took a few steps into the room with such a certainty and seriousness written across his face that Narcissa believed him.

"And what are you supposed to do?" She tried to lace her words with strained derision, but with little effect.

"Wait."

"For wha...? Oh, never mind!" Narcissa knew from experience that Death Eaters didn't talk about their affairs. "Now, let me tell you that you're in my bedroom. Get out of here before I ask the Dark Lord if that was his specific order."

They both knew it was a bluff. Nobody went about enquiring Lord Voldemort about his orders.

Tom sat lazily...*impudently*, Narcissa's mind supplied...on the arm of the chair and smiled charmingly.

"I've got nothing to do here, and as I see, you could use some help..." he said, indicating with his chin in her direction and spreading his arms. "I have many talents."

"Please, don't tell me you know about the latest fashions." Narcissa had heard many a stupid catching line, but this one was ridiculous.

"No, I won't claim I know anything about the *latest* fashion, but I do know if I find a woman attractive."

His eyes roamed her body briefly, and Narcissa straightened her back unconsciously. Yes, the admiration in men's eyes has always been the best guide.

"Perhaps... Perhaps you could advise me on something, since I can't choose," she conceded. "Of course, I won't follow your advice blindly."

"Of course," he agreed smoothly.

Narcissa's eyes stayed on him for a while, searching his face, still not quite sure about what she was going to do. His black eyes stared right back at her, wide and attentive: an image of good intentions.

Narcissa went back to her vanity.

"I can't choose the jewellery to go with this dress. I want something impressive, magnificent, and yet, I don't want the necklace to be the first thing to catch attention. I don't want it to clash with my robes. I don't want it to outshine them." She glided her hand over several gemstones laid on the top of her vanity.

She hadn't heard him move, but when she looked up into the mirror again, she noticed his reflection over her mirror-self's shoulder. His eyes roamed the display.

"Is this all we've got to choose from?" he murmured into her ear as he bent over her shoulder, never taking his eyes from the jewels.

"Of course not!" Narcissa was revolted. She gestured towards the jewellery box with its door ajar that stood beside her vanity. "These are for important occasions. Don't touch those on the inside of the door!" she warned hastily.

The young man's hand hovered over the contents of the impressive box; his attention drawn to the forbidden items. He studied them for awhile.

On the plush-covered inside of the door, there were three necklaces. Each one of them equally finely made: every one completely different from the others...a choker set with angry-red rubies, a beautiful sapphire one, and ornamental garland with poisonously green emeralds for leaves.

When Tom's fingers grazed the choker with rubies like drops of blood, his face changed; the jaw tightened, and those dark eyes narrowed. The pale, slender fingers gripped the necklace tightly before relaxing slowly with visible effort. His eyes flicked to Narcissa. When he found her busy sweeping her cheekbones with a wide brush, he went back to examining the necklaces.

"Where did you get those?" he asked, lightly touching the stones.

"Those?" Pride shone through Narcissa's voice. "They were my paternal grandmother's. She told me to keep them safe. Well, I never got around to putting them away. I was the one who received the whole set. My eldest sister inherited Dark artefacts, and the other one got nothing." She wrinkled her nose with disgust.

"Do you know why she asked to put away such a beautiful treasure?" Tom firmly stuck to the subject.

"Well, they were supposed to have some power, although, no one remembers what exactly. I suppose the spells have worn with time. Nothing happens when I try them on."

"Nothing?" Tom smiled slightly.

"No." Narcissa snatched up the choker and spoke with sudden, unaccountable vehemence. "Although I have to admit *loathe* the ruby one. I can't imagine why anyone in

their right mind would want this *garish*, Gryffindor ornament!"

Tom took it from her hand, and as the cold metal slid into his palm, his smile tightened until he let go of the choker, putting it back in the box. Narcissa relaxed as well, even if she still scowled in the general direction of the box.

"Nothing at all." His smile had mocking edge to it, and in the mirror, his hooded eyes watched the changing emotions on her face. "Which one do you like the best?"

Narcissa's hand darted to the box, then hesitated, hovering left, right, left and right again, from emeralds to sapphires, from sapphires to emeralds... deceptively soothing blue to poisonous green. Tom watched her confusion for a while before making her choice for her.

He plucked a heavy necklace from its velvetene niche: sapphires and diamonds set in white gold. As he straightened, his gaze stole towards his reflection. He appeared transfixed by what he saw, as if the reflection was in some way different from the one just a minute before. Breaking eye-contact with his mirror image seemed difficult to him, but he finally managed to turn his attention back to Narcissa.

"This one. What would you say to this one?"

She reached out to take the necklace, only to pause an inch from it, the longing in her eyes a counterpoint to her apparent reluctance.

"Lucius doesn't allow me to wear any of the three," she whispered with regret.

"Doesn't he? Maybe, he's just never seen you in them?" Tom's voice was tempting. He avoided her outstretched hands and gently placed the chain around her neck. "Look! How could he possibly resist this sight?"

Narcissa looked up at her reflection, and her pupils dilated. She reached out to the mirror's surface and traced the contours of her face. "He couldn't."

"No one could." Tom leant over her shoulder, pressing his ear to hers and looking at her expression. "No one!"

He traced the necklace from the nape of her neck to the largest tear-shaped gemstone hanging like a dewdrop from the setting and almost reaching her cleavage.

Narcissa didn't seem concerned with him...a stranger...touching her this way as she turned her head one way, then the other, as if trying all angles, all possible lights on her face.

"Magnificent, isn't it? Now," Tom straightened up, "we shall see how it looks in all its glory." Gently grasping her upper arms, he guided her to stand. The image in the mirror was so enthralling to her that Narcissa was reluctant to tear her eyes away, but at his insistence, she allowed him to lead her to the standing mirror...and her astounded reflection gazed back at her again.

"I know how to make a witch look attractive, do I not?" asked Tom, delicately squeezing her shoulders.

"Yes," she whispered, standing on her tiptoes and swirling slowly before the mirror. "Shoes," she whimpered suddenly, discovering what was missing from that perfect image.

"We're not leaving."

"I can't let anyone see me if I'm not properly dressed." The tone of her voice bordered on panic.

"There's nobody here: just you and me." The words rolled slowly and deliberately. He ran his hands down from her shoulders to her elbows, cupped them from behind, and started to draw small circles on the inner side with his thumbs. Then, he stepped aside and measured her with his eyes.

"The most beautiful woman, appropriately dressed and bejewelled, needs an appropriate man at her side."

For the first time since he had put the necklace on her, Narcissa looked away from her reflection and studied his. She seemed to be satisfied by what she saw, and Tom smirked behind her back.

He extended his arm to her, clearly considering himself worthy of that title. Narcissa didn't object to this assumption and obediently accepted his arm. He led her, misty-eyed and impressed, to the centre of the room and spun her around. With the extinguishing of the torches, her robes caught the moonlight pouring in through the open window...intensifying it and going alive with it.

When Narcissa finally fell into Riddle's arms...hands placed impeccably just below her shoulder blade and on the small of her back...she had to stand on her tiptoes to be able to waltz gracefully.

"My shoes..." she whispered again, trying feebly to extricate herself from his embrace, but Tom strengthened his hold on her.

Bowing his head until his mouth touched her ear, he murmured, "Have you ever heard of a nymph in shoes, Narcissa? We have all that the tradition requires: graceful being..." he squeezed her minutely, "pleasant evening, moonlight and a mirror's surface. Why spoil it with shoes?"

Tom twirled her expertly, and her left hand instinctively reached for the fold of her robe. Now, spinning to the inaudible music, she really looked like an unearthly creature with her robes flying and the diamonds in her necklace catching and diffracting the moonlight, giving the impression that she herself was the source of it. Strangely, only the red seemed to reflect in Tom's eyes.

The dance seemed to have no end, and Narcissa was already tired, unaccountably so she spent vast amounts of her time dancing on numerous occasions. The sweat pearly on her temples; she parted her lips, but no words came out.

"Shh..." whispered Tom. The voice was soothing, but his expression changed from his previous attentiveness to a barely concealed excitement. "Soon."

Their reflection flickered in and out of the mirrors as they glided across the room. But every time it returned, Narcissa's silhouette seemed more slumped and tired while Tom's became more radiant and vigorous. His pale cheeks became tinged with a healthy red; his moves became brisk and sharp as he dragged the limp body in his wake.

Suddenly, the door opened with a bang, and two men burst into the room, both equally pale, but only one of them concerned. Upon their violent entrance, Tom released Narcissa and stepped away from the newly arrived men. His face contorted into an ugly grimace of hatred.

Narcissa, devoid of support, swayed on her feet, her fingers clutching at her necklace. Lucius ran to his wife, catching her before she fell and ripping the necklace off her, and ineffectively tried to get any response from her.

"I'm afraid the plans have changed slightly. It isn't your time, yet." The taller wizard spoke in an indulgent and amused tone, as if talking to a naughty child. Tom's wild eyes flickered to the swooning woman and then back to Voldemort. "And this isn't our target."

Then, Voldemort reached out his hand and called out, "*Accio book!*" Something smashed into a solid barrier, and the well-worn book floated into the room, landing in the waiting palm. Voldemort muttered a short, commanding incantation, made a grasping move with his hand, but seized nothing more than thin air. After this, however, the pages of the book rustled as though in an invisible wind, and Tom, fists clenched with helplessness, slowly lost his healthy appearance. Little by little, he became pale, then transparent, and then, he vanished entirely. The cover shut closed, and the book, awash with moonlight, lay balanced on Voldemort's outstretched hand.

"And it's over for now." Voldemort turned to his spectators. With a silent *Lumos*, the torches came back to life.

Lucius sat his wife on the verge of their bed, stroking her hand. She seemed to be extremely tired, but aware of her surroundings. Voldemort came up to them and lifted Narcissa's chin with his bony finger.

"Did he scare you, my dear? You have to forgive him. Usually, he's on his best behaviour."

Then, he turned to Lucius. "Take this," he pointed to the sapphires sparkling on the bedcovers, "and these." He gestured vaguely with his head towards the vanity table, but somehow, Lucius didn't have any trouble comprehending the order. He grabbed all three necklaces; the conflicted light of angry rubies, deceptively calm sapphires and venomous emeralds corresponded to the emotions that flickered across his face. "Lead the way."

Lucius strode into his study and pulled open the secret door that stood ajar.

"Is this how you guard my property, on my special orders?" Voldemort's voice was mocking, and there was a hidden threat lurking beneath.

"My Lord, I'll take better care of your possession."

"It'll take care of itself. The only thing you have to do is to keep it away from any hands, exactly as I had instructed you before. I believe that what you saw is punishment enough for your negligence; I wouldn't count on my magnanimousness again." Voldemort took in Lucius' face contorting with conflicting emotions, from hatred to adoration to bitterness, and smirked. He stepped down into the chamber and gestured to Lucius, who had descended after him, to drop his burden.

Lucius' clenched fist didn't open at once. With his teeth bared in effort, he had to pry open his hand finger by finger, and when the three necklaces fell into the opened chest, there was regret in his eyes.

Voldemort closed the lid.

"Now, to the important matters. Lucius, bring me a new chest."

At Lucius' wave, a wooden inlaid box landed with crash on the nearby table and opened its lid obligingly. Voldemort extended his hand with the diary to deposit it within its new home, but on release, the book stubbornly floated in mid-air, refusing to descend. Voldemort touched it with his fingertips. It seemed to struggle for a minute then, resignedly, dropped into the velvet-padded inside of the chest. Voldemort's chalk-white hands caressed the cover.

"Your day might come sooner than we think. For now rest." He closed the lid and turned to Lucius. "I believe this will do as long as nobody will be curious enough to open it. I hope you are able to ward the door to this chamber enough to bar entrance without your knowledge."

Lucius swallowed the words that rose unbidden and nodded. "Of course, my Lord."

"Excellent." Voldemort climbed the stairs and went back to the bedroom, not waiting for Lucius to close and ward the door.

"Narcissa, my dear!" The slumped figure on the bed raised her head and watched her master approach. "I am still expecting to see you *both* at the ball."

"But, my Lord..."

"Not a word, Narcissa." He put his fingers to her lips, silencing her protest. "I would be very disappointed. You wouldn't like to disappoint me, would you?"

"Of course not, my Lord," she whispered dejectedly against his fingers, not daring to move her head away. "But I'm not..."

"Oh, but you are, my dear. You are. Come here." He dropped his fingers from her lips and took her hand. Narcissa stood up and followed him to the mirror. When he manoeuvred her to stand directly before the smooth surface, she closed her eyes. "We will have none of that. Open your eyes!"

Reluctantly, Narcissa obeyed and looked at the reflection: a pale, distressed witch in luxuriant robes and a tall, changed-beyond-recognition wizard behind her.

"You are almost ready," he whispered to her, brushing his cold lips against the shell of her ear. "The only thing you need are some jewels to complement your beauty and your outfit."

"No, my Lord; no jewels... please." She half turned, raising her panicked eyes to him.

"Don't let that unpleasant incident deter you." His cold fingers closed around her neck, too tightly for her comfort. "Although, I have to admit that those sapphires accentuated your eyes perfectly. I wouldn't have chosen better myself." One side of his mouth turned upward for a split second, and then, he said, "A choker, I think, would be appropriate. Diamonds. I'm sure you have something of the sort. Lucius," he called to the man standing by the door, "if you please."

"Yes, my Lord." Lucius went to the vanity, and from one of many boxes within, he procured a wide band of white gold inset with row upon row of clear, flawless gemstones.

"Perfect," muttered Voldemort, and with his free hand took the necklace. Gradually replacing his cold fingers with the equally cold band, he put the jewels around her neck. "Is it fitting closely?"

"Yes, my Lord." She raised her hand to adjust the choker, but was stopped by a bony hand.

"I want to see you like this in fifteen minutes." He moved to the door. "And you, Lucius, as well," he added over his shoulder.

2008, May-July

E/N: The full title should read *Dance Me (To The End Of Life)* and is a paraphrase of Leonard Cohen's song's title *Dance Me To The End Of Love*. I thought it was telling, though.