

Body, Adrift

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Chapter 1 of 1

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The warm summer nights proved most painful. Narcissa detested Cooling Charms; they always felt artificial and stifling to her as they pushed the natural air from her skin. Most nights she lay in her elegant, four poster bed, watching the curtains wave against her perfectly matched wallpaper as a faint sheen of a sweat formed on her forehead.

Even on these warm nights he would hold her close. Perfectly poised and calculatingly cold by day, her husband cradled her gently by night. He would form his body to hers as they lay on the bed, gazing at these curtains. The breath on her neck would eventually take on a slow and steady rhythm, but Narcissa would lie awake, savoring her moments. Over twenty years now and those moments were still her most cherished.

That summer she lay alone. The first time she had known since taking her vows. Her mind pushed down the thought that his world was worse. Lucius slept on cold stone in ragged clothes while she continued to savor her satin nightgowns and Egyptian cotton sheets. The pain he bore was harsher, but in those moments, hers was more imminent, more tangible.

July brought a marked decline in her health. Sleepless at night, wakefulness was never truly hers by day. Haunting the corridors was unsafe with the people who gathered under her roof now. Vigilance. She needed this as she needed air. And for this she needed rest. As August closed in, she grasped for hope, for anything that would allow her to guard her home and family. It was then, in the moon's eerie glow, that he came.

Many years ago, before she ever imagined her engagement to Lucius, there had been one other, gentle, kind, and affectionate in ways exceeding the man who had warmed her bed since. Narcissa had never loved her first, but she cherished the way he had held her. He came one warm summer, the one where she first abandoned Cooling Charms. Quietly he wove his way into her life as his brother courted her sister.

Laying in bed, she conjured him, summoning him to haunt her. Narcissa could not bear to dream of Lucius, but she could summon Rabastan. Holding her against his chest, gazing at her affectionately, he would caress her almost wholesomely. She needed this, the feel of his breath and his touch, and she would sleep.

Some mornings she woke and could nearly smell him, or at least what had been his scent so many years ago: wind and evergreen, with the smell of her mother's exotic lilies to soften the edges. Some part of Narcissa told her it would be different now. They were all so changed from the years in Azkaban. Outgoing and charming Rodolphus was now guarded and withdrawn. Bellatrix, once blazing with carefully wielded power, now nearly burst with her power impulsively unleashed.

Rabastan now haunted her halls, his eyes averted where once they had shone gladly to those he met. She wondered at him, wondered if he knew how he was her salvation, that the ghost of who he had been kept her sane from day to day. Some days she thought to seek him out, but her mind knew better to spoil what she had, the gentle caress with no chance. The risk of bringing him to her bed, even with innocuous intentions, made her tremble. The Rabastan she knew would have lain for hours,

content to hold her. There could be no additional risks for her, not now, not with the Dark Lord infecting the house. Even if enough of her Rabastan was left to bring her comforting nights to reality, there would be no understanding should one of their compatriots discover them betraying an incarcerated brother.

Even though it was the phantom of him that gave her strength, Narcissa still gave Rabastan special thought. Secretly she held onto him, watching him move through the quiet halls. When she woke at night, having lost her dream of him, sometimes she walked to the window. There she caught his form wandering through the gardens at night. Where she found sleep in his presence, he seemed to only find torment in his own skin. Constantly moving at a gradual pace, he walked towards something she could not guess at.

Slowly they pained her again, the summer nights. The soft hands she felt caressing her hair, cradling her trembling form as she thought of her life, became an unjust fantasy. Narcissa could not take comfort in Rabastan when there was none for him. So she again embraced her own sleeplessness.

The danger crept in again, now with added stakes as her eyes continued to linger on his form. In her stolen moments, she reassured herself with the thought that she could provide no comfort to Lucius in his prison. Instead she sought to free the prisoner at hand. In the mornings, when he was silently cloistered away in some corner of the manor, she sent a house-elf to find him. Hearty bread, sharp cheddar, pear and Irish breakfast tea, black. Of all the foolish things to remember, she remembered his favorite breakfast.

Narcissa wondered if he knew who sent the creature, or if he remembered that he had once savored these things. Gently she caressed him with hints of his humanity. Hidden within the occupation of her home, Narcissa learned to subvert the terror. In it she found her wakefulness, as she hoped Rabastan would find his.

A/N: This story was written as a birthday gift for janus, who enjoys dear Rabastan.

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