

Fever Dreams

by h_vic

Severus makes his choice.

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Author's Note: Written for the prompt 'He Didn't Look Back' for my Severus/Narcissa table for the rarepair_shorts community on LJ. This little vignette is probably the oddest thing I've ever written, I have to confess, but I had a lot of fun with the imagery.

Searing darkness.

Falling.

Echoing pain.

He felt icy marble against his cheek as his shattered senses coalesced into something resembling a coherent sense of stability. The world no longer spun and bucked beneath his protesting body, and the cool stone felt good against the fire that burnt along his left arm from his sprawled palm to the shoulder twisted beneath him.

He opened his eyes to the dark and bewildering shape of a pew looming above him. Memories seemed to elude him. He pushed himself to his knees, and the weight on his damaged arm made him retch vainly, his chest heaving in protest.

It was a high church in which he had lain, it seemed, marble and gold marking its glory. He knelt before the altar now; two candles burnt before his eyes – one golden and one red. Crimson wax cascaded to the floor as the red candle guttered and died, but what pooled before the altar was not wax, but blood. Small, blackened droplets formed a trail that led past him along the aisle, marring the stones.

He struggled to his feet, his injured arm hanging useless at his side. Somehow, he dared not look at it, although he did not understand why. He only knew it filled him with a nameless dread. It was that same dread that led him staggering away from the bleeding candle like a condemned man towards the open doors. The air felt heavy with the sweet scent of decay; thick and fetid, it seemed to fight to keep him tamed to its narrow will.

Bursting out into the misty light, he found a doe waiting for him in the graveyard, or so it seemed, for as soon as he emerged, the doe turned tail and began to walk away from him slowly enough for an injured man to keep pace. The mist hung thickly; beyond the creature, he could see nothing. He found himself seized with an unbearable longing to possess the doe, so blindly he stumbled forwards, shambling awkwardly after her graceful progress.

As he passed beyond the gateposts, from which hung no gate, he felt an icy chill shiver through him, and the church bells pealed a single mournful note as a raven swept from the sky. The doe bolted, and he could not restrain his childish yell of frustration as he lost her in the mist that swept closed behind her like a curtain. The raven paid no heed to his distress, landing in a swirl of midnight feathers in the doe's place.

In landing, the raven became a woman cloaked in darkness, and as she swirled away from him, his breath caught at the bird-like lightness of her movement. The woman began to walk, and he was compelled to follow, but unlike the doe, there was no desire to possess this shadowy sorceress, from whom the mist itself seemed to shy away.

Instead, she seemed to possess him completely. He was her puppet, swept along in the poise of her footsteps.

Her movement was so smooth as to be imperceptible, and yet try as he might, he could not close the distance that separated them as she led him inexorably onwards.

Long, cruel fingers stretched out of the mist to draw back her heavy, black hood as she passed and bare a shimmering fall of blonde hair. As he drew nearer, he saw the fingers were the branches of a tree, leaves and fruit bound unnaturally to its form by jagged sheets of ice. A single, frosted, red apple fell at his feet, and he reached down for it, the cold eating into his protesting bones. He took a bite, and the fruit was bitter, and his left arm burned angrier than before in response.

Suddenly, he realised his guide had stopped ahead of him. She stood beyond the arched gateway of a castle and he over a putrid moat. He half turned; behind him on the banks of moat stood the doe once more, and he hesitated. The blonde woman turned to face him, and power burnt in her cold eyes. The doe's eyes were blank and innocent as she lowered her head to drink the water; he wanted to scream out to her to stop, but it was too late. The doe staggered and fell to her knees. The blonde woman laughed and stretched out a hand towards him. With the doe fallen, there was nothing to keep him; he stepped towards his temptress and took her proffered hand. A portcullis fell with a clatter behind him sealing the entrance. But he did not turn. He did not see.

"Welcome home, Severus," the woman said in a voice like poisoned honey.

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*Severus woke to see Narcissa sitting over him. From the pressure on his right hand, he could only assume she was holding it; from the agony of his left forearm, he could only assume at least some of it still remained.*

*"Thank you, Severus," she breathed as she leaned down to kiss the freshly burnt brand on his arm. "Thank you for doing this for me ... for making this choice ... for us.*