

# Tell-Tale Task

by *Stefdarlin*

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*Chapter 1 of 1*

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"Men stumble over the truth from time to time,  
but most pick themselves up and hurry off as if nothing happened."

~ Winston Churchill

The night moved in slow motion as Lucius' boots tossed leaves up behind him, and the wind tousled his hair in the orange light of a wayward pumpkin. Glancing sideways, he frowned as the pumpkin smiled jovially at him, causing his fingers to twitch momentarily. He longed to reduce it to ash.

Up ahead, the Dark Lord led his minions along the pavement, his robes billowing in the chilly fall breeze. Pausing at the white gate blocking the path, he turned around slowly as his Death Eaters rallied around him.

"Ah, tonight is the night we deal with those who oppose us. Tonight, my friends, is a night of reckoning." His voice drifted over the gathering with a high, rasping quality. Gesturing with his hands, he commanded, "You four! Go to the Longbottoms. You six! Pay a visit to the Prewetts. And you." Lucius stepped forward. "For you, my friend, I have a very special task." Voldemort grasped Lucius' shoulder and turned back toward the white picket gate as pops of Apparition resounded around them.

Striding to the end of the leaf-blown pavement, Voldemort paused and held out a parchment. Glancing at it, Lucius frowned and then looked up at his master. "My Lord?"

"This will help you find your charge. I believe you too have noticed the absence of one of our number. I believe he has turned traitor... and you know what to do about deserters," the Dark Lord breathed hollowly.

Nodding, Lucius took the parchment and disappeared. An instant later, a fierce wind assaulted him, causing his hair and robes to thrash about wildly. A salty mist stung his eyes and clung to his face, and it took a moment to gather his bearings. Swallowing, he raised his wand and whispered, "*Lumos*."

Gasping, he teetered a bit. The wind whipped past him, threatening to push him from the ledge he found himself upon. His eyes could barely discern the white crests of waves as they crashed against the solid wall of rock soaring up from the dark waters below. Leaning back, he almost dropped his wand as he clutched for something firm to hold onto, and in his fear, he dropped the article, his link to the traitor.

*Breathe. Just breathe.* Closing his eyes, Lucius calmed. Slowly, he breathed. In. Out. He noticed the howl of the wind was different to his left. Raising his wand once more and casting *Lumos*, he saw a cave off to the left and bent forward to step inside.

The acrid smell of seawater filled his nose, and steady dripping echoed around the cavern. Up ahead, he caught a glimpse of movement and smiled maliciously, quickly extinguishing his wand. Moving forward with measured steps, Lucius halted when bright penetrating light flashed, revealing a monstrous black lake ahead. The radiance

was thrown back from the surface like the reflection of a disco ball: dazzling, dizzying and fracturing.

Lifting his hand to shade his eyes, Lucius could see his prey on a small island in the center of the murky lagoon. His brows rose in surprise to see an old, bowed house-elf with him. The little elf appeared distraught as his master prepared to drink from the basin resting there. He wrung his hands around a shimmering chain strung to a locket and bounced back and forth on his feet.

"Master, please..."

Holding up his hand, Regulus stopped Kreachers entreaty. "It is the only way. What the Dark Lord has done is beyond contemplation by any wizard, pure-blood or not." Kneeling down, Regulus looked at Kreachers. "I have realized he is using us, his followers, as a means to an end. He will not stop. He will never stop until he has reached total domination, my friend. And if I do not do this, his reign...his tyranny...will never end. You do understand why I must do this?"

Swallowing audibly, Kreachers looked at the ground a moment, then looked back up at his master and nodded, still wringing his hands around the glistening object.

Turning back to the basin, Regulus studied it again for a moment, conjured a clear crystal goblet, then dipped it inside. Slowly he lifted the chalice, which was filled to the brim with a glowing green liquid, to his mouth and drank.

From the edge of the black lake, Lucius observed his quarry. Suddenly, Regulus dropped to the ground and hugged his knees to his body, the goblet rolling from his hand. Snatching up the cup, the aged house-elf dipped it in the basin once more and fed it to his master.

"Please, no more," Regulus pleaded weakly.

"But, Master, you must. The next cup will bring you relief, you will see," Kreachers told him, reaching to refill the chalice and lifting it to his master's lips at his limp nod of acquiescence. Once the glowing liquid was gone, the house-elf moved to the basin, leaving his master in a shaking heap on the ground begging for water.

Squinting, Lucius tried to focus on the small elf but was unable to discern what he was doing. Using their distraction to his advantage, Lucius Apparated to the small atoll in the middle of the lagoon. Immediately, Kreachers turned when he heard the familiar 'pop' behind him and found Lucius standing over his master, wand raised to strike.

Raising his hand in defense, Regulus moaned, "Lucius, no, you mustn't..."

"No!" Kreachers cried at once, but it was too late.

Abruptly, the water surrounding them gurgled and swirled violently, and pale, grotesque bodies began to emerge from its depths. "Inferi," Lucius whispered, repulsed, backing away.

With stiff movements, the Inferi clawed their way up the rock toward him as Lucius backed away, slipping in his rush to escape their grasping hands and falling into the fleshless arms of one from behind. Deftly, they dragged him across the small island while he struggled to fire off a spell to regain his footing.

"*Incendio!*" he yelled, causing the gruesome zombies in front of him to fall back, but the arms holding him from behind dragged him beneath the water. Under its surface, he found himself enveloped by a sea of dead bodies, grabbing for him, plucking his clothes, clutching his arms and legs, pulling him deeper and deeper. Vainly, he struggled against them, his lungs beginning to burn from lack of air.

Above him, a bubble descended. It knocked the Inferi away and exploded beneath him, thrusting him to the surface and casting him back onto the rock. Spluttering, Lucius stood and looked around. They were surrounded by a ring of fire, but the house-elf was gone.

"Lucius, you must leave. I cannot hold them off for long," Regulus rasped.

Aiming his wand at Regulus, Lucius countered, "I gather you know why I am here."

Nodding, Regulus coughed. "And I gather you have no idea why I am here," he answered raggedly.

"What makes you think I don't know why you are here?"

"Because I am certain the Dark Lord would not have sent you if he knew I was here. He would have come himself." Regulus laughed roughly, beginning to cough again and struggling to stand up.

Looking around again, Lucius raised his wand higher when Regulus stood. "What is this place?"

"A place where the Dark Lord has hidden a piece of himself."

"What do you mean by that?" Lucius asked, frowning, sweat beginning to rise on his brow.

Regulus barked out a short laugh. "Don't tell me you don't understand my meaning. Of anyone, you, with your extensive library of dark books, should know what I mean. I just hope there are no more. If there are, you must destroy them. Surely you know that."

Swallowing audibly, Lucius continued his stance. "And how can you be so sure you are right?"

"Look around you, for Merlin's sake, Lucius! Why would he surround this place with such things if I am wrong?" Regulus rasped, motioning toward the water with his hands.

Pulling in a deep breath, Lucius countered, "Even if you are right, I don't see how this affects my loyalties, nor why it affected yours."

Laughing, the younger man held his middle, then began to cough horribly. "You are such a fool, Lucius! For all his spouting of pure-blood mania, the Dark Lord does not care for anyone. And while I thought he was someone I could easily follow, I have realized that my family means more to me than his sick sense of domination of the entire world. You know it will happen, if you don't destroy them. He won't hesitate to destroy whoever gets in his way.

"Where is he tonight? Gone to kill an innocent child? You have a son the same age, don't you?" His voice grew weaker, and he leaned against the basin. The flames surrounding them began to wane. "What makes you think he wouldn't kill *your* son if the prophecy indicated it?"

Opening his mouth to retort, Lucius paused and lowered his wand slightly as the words sunk in. Closing his eyes for a moment, he swallowed. Opening them again, Lucius raised his wand once more. "Be that as it may, you aren't leaving here alive."

"I never planned to, so your secret is safe, because you won't be the one to kill me. Once the flames die, his Inferi will pull me under, but the Horcrux will be destroyed, and I will be the reason the Dark Lord cannot carry out his plan. Now there is another who knows the secret, and if you do not destroy any others you learn of, the fate of the entire world will be on your shoulders. Do you want that for your little family?"

Lucius said nothing.

"That is what I thought. You have to go..." Regulus sank to the ground, clasping his middle. The flames withdrew further.

Stepping forward, Lucius knelt in front of the younger wizard and attempted to haul him up. But Regulus struggled against him.

"No! There is no hope for me now, other than the knowledge that you will, eventually, do the right thing," he chuckled, then started to cough again. "Go, now!" he

commanded weakly, and the flames died altogether, plunging them into complete darkness.

Panting, Lucius heard the smacks of flesh against the island and Regulus' last staggered breath. Quickly closing his eyes, he pictured the area where he had Apparated from before. With a loud 'crack', he found himself up against the wall on the other side of the lake when he lifted up his lighted wand, but now the path was blocked by a solid wall of rock.

Clawing the rock in front of him, he searched frantically for a way out. In his scramble, he sliced his wrist on a sharp edge. Behind him, he heard movement in the water and turned, lifting his wand. He couldn't see the island, but he knew Regulus was no longer there. In front of him, the water bubbled, and the grotesquely white bodies were making their way towards him.

Stifling a yell, he spun around and desperately explored the niches in the rock. His arm stung from his wound, and he could feel the blood dripping from his hand. Suddenly, the wall disappeared and he darted through, almost falling off the cliff in his flight from certain death.

Clasping the cave wall, he held up his wand once more and Apparated back to the leaf-blown sidewalk where his task had begun. Opening his eyes, his gaze fell on the house with its cockeyed door and ripped screen. The cries of a child drifted to him on the wind.

Striding down the path, Lucius paused in the doorway and looked inside. The room was in shambles. Pictures hung crooked on the wall, glass was scattered over the floor, and sofa stuffing tumbled in the breeze which rolled in through the broken windows and doors. A dark-haired child sat in the middle of the chaos, fat tears streaming down his face, and a fresh, bright red, lightning-bolt shaped scar on his forehead. Harry Potter.

But the Dark Lord was not to be found. He was gone, without a trace.

*The Dark Lord is gone?* Lucius thought, looking around. *Regulus was wrong, there are no more Horcruxes.* Sucking in his breath deeply, Lucius released it as he turned away from the bedlam.

Squaring his shoulders, he stalked back down the path, his robes billowing in the chilly fall breeze. *I should get home just in time to help Narcissa put Draco to bed. Thank Merlin, Regulus was wrong.*

Reaching the white picket gate, he disappeared from sight.

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**Prompt:** Lucius, a pumpkin, Inferi, and a disco ball from Teshara last year.

**A/N:** My sincere thanks go out to ladyinthecloak and MMADfan for their beta abilities and suggestions. You gals rock my socks!