

Covenant

by diabolica

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Severus stood in the hall, moving his cloak from one arm to the other, and looked up to find not Lucius but his wife standing on the stairs.

'Severus,' she said. Her tone was surprised, as if she wasn't expecting him.

Severus cleared his throat. 'Narcissa. How do you do?'

Narcissa nodded in acknowledgement and said, 'Well, thank you.' But she stopped there, regarding him expectantly.

A moment later, Severus asked, 'Is Lucius home?'

'No,' said Narcissa. 'I thought he was with you.'

'He asked me to meet him here at half seven this evening. We've an ... appointment.'

She gave him a knowing look as she descended the remaining steps, one hand on the bannister, the other on her belly. 'I'm sure you have,' she said. 'Lucius left this morning. Frankly, I was expecting him back by now.' A sharp line appeared between her eyebrows. 'No matter. He'll be home any moment probably. May I ... offer you a cup of tea?'

Without waiting for a response, she gestured towards the drawing room and summoned an elf to serve the tea.

In the years he'd known Lucius, Severus realised as he seated himself opposite Narcissa, he had never previously found himself alone with Lucius's wife. He was rather at a loss for what to say. Picking up his teacup and saucer, he settled on, 'How are you feeling these days?'

'Enormous,' she replied.

She looked down then. Was she blushing? Certainly, it was a candid thing to say. In Severus's opinion, the added weight looked well on her, softened her formerly sharp angles. It didn't seem the sort of thing he should tell her, though.

'I'm still a bit tired,' she continued, 'but all in all quite well, thank you. In fact, thanks to you, I've slept very well the last month.'

Severus looked down deferentially. 'It was no trouble,' he said. What he did not say was that, as any Death Eater knew, a favour for a Malfoy was well worth any trouble one might take in doing it.

'She can't sleep, you know. She worries.'

Of course, Severus would never have accepted payment for a potion that would help Lucius's wife sleep without harming the baby. Nevertheless, the words *'I'll see what I can do'* had hardly left his mouth before he found his brewing room stocked with anything and everything he might need for the endeavour, as well as six new cauldrons of varying size and utility. Severus's pride nearly made him tell Lucius to take it all back before he remembered that it meant Lucius was indebted to *him* and not the other way round.

Narcissa raised a teacup to her lips, then put it back down so fast that the cup clattered against the saucer.

Severus quickly set down his own cup. 'Are you all right?'

'Fine.' On her face, a wince tussled with a smile; the smile won. 'I think,' she said slowly, 'I've just been rather soundly kicked in the ribs. First time.'

'First ... ?'

'This is the first time he's kicked. Oh! There he goes again. Here.'

Unceremoniously, she caught his wrist and pulled his hand to her belly where, a long moment later, something that could have been a small foot or fist connected with his palm. It was startling, not least because Severus couldn't remember an occasion on which he'd touched Narcissa other than to shake her hand. It felt unbearably intimate.

Unaware of his distress, Narcissa laughed. 'Ow!' she exclaimed as another blow landed. 'He'll make quite a Beater one day, won't he?'

Delicately, Severus extracted his hand from her grasp and resumed his seat. 'You're sure it's a boy then?'

'Definitely.'

'How can you know?' There were no charms that could reliably tell the sex of a baby nor, he knew, any potions.

Narcissa shook her head. 'I just ... know. There's never been any doubt in my mind. I know him.' She now seemed more at ease, which made Severus feel more relaxed somehow. She said, 'Lucius really wants a boy, you know. He'd be just as happy with a little girl, I'm sure, though he'd spend half his life hexing any wizard who looked at her sideways.'

Severus didn't doubt the truth of that statement. He allowed himself a smirk.

'But this one's a boy,' Narcissa continued. 'A strong one, it seems.' She clucked her tongue against her teeth. 'Lucius will be so upset to have missed it! Have you any idea the amount of time he's spent talking to my midsection, trying to get a reaction?'

Severus found the idea faintly ridiculous but said nothing, merely shook his head.

'Then the little one goes and puts on a show when he's not around to feel it,' grumbled Narcissa.

The words rolled off his tongue before Severus knew what he was saying. 'Then don't tell him.'

'I beg your pardon?'

'Don't tell him about this. Then, next time the baby kicks, tell him it's the first time. It's a father's privilege. You can't deny him that.'

Narcissa laughed. 'I think you're right, Severus. It'll be our secret, then.'

Severus nodded, aware that he and Narcissa had come to a kind of agreement but uncertain what it actually entailed. Even with intentions as harmless as these, he found it disquieting, the thought of keeping another Malfoy's secrets. It was too much like being part of a family.

'We missed you at the McNairs' last week,' Narcissa said then, which gave them something else to discuss, but not for long. Lucius arrived home a few minutes later, and he and Severus left almost immediately so as to arrive on time for their appointment. As she bade them goodbye, a subtle twitch of Narcissa's eyebrows when Lucius's back was turned sealed their little conspiracy. Upon leaving the manor, Severus shoved his thoughts on the subject into a dark corner of his mind and turned his attention to the task at hand.