

Now We Are Free

by Aylarah

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Chapter 1 of 1

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A.N: Damn you, Becci, I can't get this out of my head.

A.N.2: This took far too long to write. Still not entirely happy with it it deviated slightly from what I originally had in mind, but things do that when you take months and months of break between sections of writing something.

He doesn't know what brings on occasions like these. He's never asked and Severus has never volunteered a reason. All he knows is that every few years, Severus invites him to dine at Maison d'Âmes. They start their evening with an excellent bottle of 1999 Marcassin Sonoma Marcassin Vineyard Chardonnay, and share a platter of the finest seafood the restaurant has to offer. It was through these occasions that Lucius truly learned to savour oysters. Of course he had eaten them on many occasions in the past, but watching Severus try one for the first time made the experience so much more sublime. Persuading the other man to try a second ("It's an acquired taste Severus, but extremely worth it.") had made him think carefully about the experience, and he has savoured them, rather than just eaten them, ever since.

After the seafood starter, Lucius likes to order beef tartar. He likes how something so raw can be so exquisite, and on nights like this he likes to realise that to its fullest. Severus, on the other hand, goes for l'escargot drizzled with garlic butter. He enjoys seeing something so disgusting made into something so delicious. They both consume plenty of warm, fresh baguette. Conversation over the meal is light, easy. Lucius talks about business, his family, the current state of the ministry and the travesty of them raising taxes to help fund education for Muggle-born orphans. Severus in turn responds with news of Hogwarts, the latest Potions article he's read, or the price of the new range of gloves in Gladrags'. There is no hint of what is to come later.

When the waiter comes to clear away their main courses and offer the dessert menu, Severus always refuses. Lucius accepts that he will never persuade the man to try the magnificent crème brûlée the restaurant has to offer, or the mouth-watering fruit salad composed of only the plumpest, most succulent strawberries, juiciest cubes of melon and the most perfect grapes. For Lucius, the food is heavenly. He would quite happily give up his soul to dine in the place forever. But he knows that in this case, for Severus, enough is enough. So he orders whatever takes his fancy off the incomparable menu whilst Severus watches him, sipping at the rich black coffee he always ends with.

The arrival of the bill is where it starts. The waiter places the slip of paper on a fine silver plate in the middle of the table and steps back to allow the two men some privacy whilst they settle the age-old question of who should pay for what. This privacy is unnecessary, however, because between these two men, on these nights, there is nothing to decide. Lucius pulls the plate towards himself and doesn't react to the fact that Severus has lowered his eyes and focuses his gaze firmly not on the plate. He gives the bill a casual glance, not caring how much the bill has come to; he will pay. He always pays.

The two of them leave the restaurant in silence. Lucius stands up first, steps away from the table and exits through the door without a backwards glance at Severus, who follows behind, pace quickening to keep up. When Severus walks through the door, it is to see Lucius already standing in front of him, one arm outstretched for Severus to

lay a hand on. He does, and before he can say whether or not he is ready, they are standing in the grounds of Malfoy Manor. Again not looking at the other man, Lucius strides towards the house and makes his way towards one of the older dining rooms. It's the same every time, so it doesn't really matter if Severus falls behind. He doesn't though, even if he has to hasten his pace several times to keep following Lucius. Despite the beauty of the manor, he barely looks up from the ground.

When they reach the dining hall, Lucius nods at Severus as he enters before moving to cast locking, silencing and privacy charms on the large, dark, wooden doors. Whilst the preparation of the room is taking place, Severus moves to one side of the hall and starts to divest his clothing, folding each item neatly before taking off the next. When he has nothing left to remove, he turns around to find Lucius standing beside a chair that has been drawn back from the table. For a moment, Severus' eyes flicker up to meet Lucius', seeking something, before he lowers them and moves slowly but surely towards the chair. It's the same chair as always, prepared in exactly the same way. The front and a large portion of the middle of the seat have been removed, leaving a 'U'-shaped area that can only be sat on if one leg is placed on each of the thin strips of padded wood that are left. As he has done in the past, Severus seats himself, gripping onto the arms of the chair for a moment to help himself balance on the not-quite-there seat, which keeps his legs spread wide.

Lucius smiles softly and moves closer to Severus, running his wand along each of the dark-haired man's arms and legs in turn. As he does so, dark vine-like tendrils sprout from the wood and wrap around each appendage, binding Severus firmly to the chair. Severus tenses at first, but soon relaxes, allowing the bindings to support him and taking the weight off his muscles. He feels Lucius run a soothing hand across his neck and shoulders, then closes his eyes and takes a deep breath. He is ready.

Sensing a change in the man, Lucius knows it's time to begin. Leaving Severus in the chair, he walks towards a locked cabinet on one side of the room, observing as he does so that Severus keeps his eyes lowered, seems not to notice Lucius moving. Removing a small silver key from his pocket, Lucius opens the cabinet and gazes at the objects within before removing a supple black, leather flogger. He places the key on top of the cabinet, leaves the door open and returns to Severus, chosen instrument swinging loosely by his side as he walks.

He doesn't ask Severus if he's sure about this. Not out loud in any case. Rather, he walks to stand in front of the man and watches. It's not obvious what he's looking for. Maybe it's the way Severus' breaths stay deep and even. Maybe it's how his gaze is still resting on the floor in front of him, how he's calm and collected. If he saw anything that made him doubtful about Severus, he would release him instantly, and not a word would be said about it. But all is at peace, and Lucius raises the flogger before letting the strands rain softly down on Severus' chest. It's time to start.

The second blow isn't lashed harshly against the man's torso as one might be expecting. That would be too similar to what Severus has gone through in other situations, in other places. He needs something different. Lucius knows this. That's why he lowers the flogger gently to rest by his knees before flicking upwards. Severus hisses and grits his teeth as the leather connects with his most sensitive area. It's his tender balls which will be the subject of tonight's session, as indeed they are every time.

After five lashes, Severus' hands are curled tightly into fists, knuckles white, but he has yet to let out any sound other than a hiss. Lucius runs another hand over the man's neck, noting the tightness of the tendons, imaging the heat that must be starting to radiate from the other man. His balls are already starting to turn a most delicious shade of red. He doesn't give Severus any time to relax though, and lets another five hits rain down in quick succession.

By fifteen, the hisses have turned to gasps, which quickly turn to moans. On the twentieth, Severus lets out a harsh cry. "Stop," he rasps. "That's enough." It's not enough though. Lucius knows this. He knows exactly when the time to stop is, and they've not reached it yet. They're nowhere near reaching it. Severus' calls to stop grow louder, more distressed, until he unleashes a litany of curses that gives Lucius half a mind to wash his mouth out with soap, all the whilst adding to his own vocabulary. Sometimes he wonders where Severus manages to pick so many colourful phrases up, but the thought leaves his mind just as quickly as it arrives, as he is brought back to other, more important matters.

On the thirty-sixth hit, Lucius hears it. It's quiet, it's always quiet, but he never fails to notice. A sob, swiftly followed by another. They're small, but they're definitely there. Lucius instantly places the flogger down and releases the bonds as Severus slowly but surely starts to cry. He turns to take the flogger back to the cabinet, allowing the man a small amount of privacy as he lets out everything that has built up since the last time Lucius was invited to dine at Maison d'Ames. They say tears are the balm of the soul, and never is that more true than on nights such as these. It's painful, but it's such a relief Severus feels as he is finally able to let go, finally able to get rid of all the pain and guilt that has been festering inside him over the last however many years it's been. He cannot afford to let himself cry that often, cannot afford the luxury of letting himself go on a regular basis.

So he saves it all up, and as Lucius rejoins him, bringing with him a soft woolen blanket and placing it around Severus' shoulders, he relaxes. Lucius can look after him for the moment. For this short span of time, he feels nothing but peace. He imagines this is what it is like to be free.

No.

That's not quite right.

For this short span of time, these few precious moments that occur only once every few years, Severus knows.

He *is* free.