

No Rest for The Wicked

by Savva

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One

Chapter 1 of 1

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No Rest for The Wicked

When we die

We go into the arms of those

Who remember us (Bush/Out of This World)

Severus

He wakes up at six, as he has done for almost twenty years. He sees no sense in changing his lifelong habits now, though there are no more classes or students in his life. What matters is not the time he leaves his bed, but the fact that he has the strength to do so.

With a grunt, Severus pushes himself upright, jerks his sleeping trousers up to his bony hips, and shuffles to the loo, awkwardly dragging his left foot over the rough, unpainted wooden floor of his bedroom. His flesh protests against abrasion, and the thought of renovation crosses his mind again. He shoves it away...there's no time for that now.

He reaches the loo in six unsteady strides, throws the door open, mutters, "*Lumos*," and steps inside. Forty-five minutes later, he steps out, washed, shaved and annoyed with just how slow he has become. Somehow, this morning his joints are especially stiff, and it seems impossible for his numb fingers to fit those idiotically tiny buttons

through the equally tiny holes. Perhaps there *are* too many buttons in his wardrobe.

He curses and continues the process of fastening his starched white shirt. He refuses to use a wand for this simple task. It's a matter of principle...he isn't that crippled. Finally, his shirt and trousers are buttoned. He walks to his toilet table and reaches for his one pair of cufflinks. Ages of use are etched into them...the black onyxes are chipped at the edges, and the silver is worn and scratched...and yet, to him, they are still as perfect as they were almost twenty years ago. They twinkle at him, and the murky morning seems lighter. Reminiscences flood into his mind, and he grips the wooden surface of the table, allowing the memories drag him into the smoky whirlpool of the past.

Late autumn of 1981

"Why you insist on being so stubborn is beyond me. You know that I'm right. You need a new wardrobe," Lucius says for the umpteenth time. "You're going to be a professor, for Merlin's sake! You cannot teach in those rags." His face is shadowed with the distaste he always demonstrates at Spinner's End. Severus doesn't mind; the place repels him, too.

"My attire is the least of my concerns at the moment," Severus says wearily. He finds this bickering utterly useless, but he knows that Lucius won't leave him alone.

"Yes, yes, I know." Lucius waves his hand dismissively. "Here. I brought you a little something." He moves closer to the ratty armchair in which Severus is seated and sets a small rectangular box on his lap.

"What kind of mousetrap is this?" Severus says, eyeing it with suspicion.

Lucius rolls his eyes, brushes off imaginary lint from his coat and says, "Don't play the paranoiac. Just open it."

Severus pops the box open and stares at a pair of cufflinks on deep-green velvet. The subtle shimmer of onyx on silver captivates him, and he touches one with a fingertip.

"To commemorate your first job," says Lucius with a triumphant grin.

Severus clears his throat. He's not used to receiving gifts and uncertain how to respond. He takes the path of least resistance and scowls. "You do know that I don't have a proper shirt for them?" he says and touches the smooth stones again.

"That is exactly my point." Lucius chuckles.

Severus glances up at him, notices Lucius' smirk and says, "Oh, for Merlin's sake, don't look so annoyingly smug." His tone, though, lacks real bite.

"Yes, I love you too, dear." Lucius pats Severus' shoulder. "Now hurry up or we'll be late for our appointment with the tailor at Berkinbocks." He saunters toward the door. "You're welcome, by the way," he throws over his shoulder.

Severus reluctantly rises to his feet and follows his friend. "I'm not taking your money," he says.

"Sure."

"I'll pay you back."

"Of course."

Even with Lucius' back to him, Severus can feel his smugness. "Sly bastard," he mutters.

"Ungrateful cad."

And Lucius steps into the Floo.

The memory dissipates and so does the smile that it brought, leaving Severus with a heavy sense of loss. He misses that bloody bastard, his pretentious drawl, his smirks, his bothersome obsession with fashion. Over the years he's got so used to all those little things, he feels bereft without them. Most of all, he misses the companionship that Lucius had provided for almost twenty years. Had it not been for him, Severus would never have survived the battle. It was Lucius who looked for him afterwards and took him, bloodied and unconscious, to St. Mungo's. Severus traces the ugly scars on his neck. *The Dark Lord's last present*, he thinks and stifles a shudder.

He has been told that Lucius had created quite a ruckus, back then. Apparently, the mediwitches hadn't been to his liking, and the Aurors had had to drag him from the room. Bloody, demanding bastard! Damn him and his heroics! Why hadn't he run when he could? It's a rhetorical question, of course. Despite Lucius' many faults, his arrogance, bigotry, and thirst for power, he had always been a loyal friend to Severus; indeed, his only friend. He couldn't have left Severus to die.

It's been two years since Severus last saw Lucius. In Azkaban, it seems, there is no policy of visits. He has forgotten how many times he has attempted to see him, always unsuccessfully. Ever since his release from St. Mungo's, he has tried to free his friend from that hellhole. He has pleaded, demanded, fought, always in vain. He simply hasn't been able to break through the wall of bureaucracy.

As he looks back, he sees how faulty his strategy has been. He has lost so much time for nothing. Regrets...the bane of his existence. He loathes just how many of them he has. It seems that each new point of his life brings a set of brand new regrets. He just never can get it right, even with Lucius. He could have got results much earlier if he hadn't been so proud. It was only when he heard from Narcissa that Lucius wasn't well that he finally swallowed his pride and sought help. Even then he couldn't bring himself to go to Potter, so he chose Miss Hermione Granger. She quickly found the right laws to exploit, the right people to pursue, and yet, even with her help, it took a year to accomplish anything. Today, their joint efforts will come to fruition...Kingsley Shacklebolt has promised to sign a transfer order, and Lucius will be moved from Azkaban to house arrest on the grounds of his declining health.

Severus sighs, trying to manipulate his cufflinks with his numb fingers. Dark thoughts attack him, and he can't help worrying that Lucius' condition may be worse than reported. It's only natural for him to think the worst...he has been a life-long pessimist, after all. The fear that he may have failed his only friend makes his muscles spasm and ache, making it hard to draw a breath. He gasps and reaches for the vial he always keeps handy nowadays. His quivering fingers hinder the process, but he manages to open it. Moments after swallowing the potion, he breathes freely again.

As soon as he stops trembling, he puts on his overcoat and buttons it. He thinks about Miss Granger. Just yesterday she said that he ought to stay positive. He tries. There's really no other way to keep the ghosts of regret and loss at bay. Perhaps, for once, he'll be lucky, and the reports of Lucius' condition will prove to be exaggerated. Perhaps, he isn't going to lose the old bastard.

He fastens the last button and straightens his clothes. He's ready, thank Merlin. Scowling, he limps toward the Floo and departs.

Lucius

The small white puffs of his laboured breath show how freezing it is in his cell, but Lucius can't feel the cold. He has been burning with fever for several days.

He lies on a narrow cot, covered with a damp rag. His short hair is tangled and dirty; those bastards take sadistic pleasure in cutting it with rusty scissors. He doesn't care. The hair is his smallest loss. His face, once handsome, has changed beyond recognition. He is too thin, ill, and filthy to resemble the Malfoy patriarch he used to be. This

change, too, he finds silly and unimportant. Vanity is the last thing on his mind right now. Of course, if he had been healthy and strong, he would never have allowed himself to fall into such disrepair, but he has been sick for far too long. His body has betrayed him; his willpower has abandoned him; his Malfoy spirit has been crushed. At least he can't feel the cold; he's untouchable for its sharp teeth now. This thought brings a smirk to his chapped lips, which is rare nowadays.

He closes his eyes and savours his delusional state, floating in the deceptively blissful sea of unconsciousness. Its warm waters engulf him, and it feels nice. It has been quite a while since he felt so much at ease. A long while.

The thoughts that visit him are disjointed and nonsensical, a mixture of memories and hallucinations. It's impossible for him to tell what is real and what isn't, but he doesn't mind. Only a fool would feel sorry to miss the experience of dying from phthisis in a filthy cell in Azkaban. *Phthisis*, that is according to their so-called Healer. Lucius, of course knows that this diagnosis has nothing to do with his decline...the heavy burden of guilt, regret and self-loathing are the true reasons for it. That doesn't change the fact that he prefers his dreams to reality. True, they generally end badly. But he's willing to pay the price. Dreams are better than oblivion, after all. He can already feel the chilling presence of death, and he is holding on to every last bit of life in him. It's cowardly, he knows, but he has never been the heroic type. He isn't Severus.

A stray ray of sunlight has come in through the metal bars of a pitiful excuse for a window. It warms his face, and he imagines that he is in the Manor, in his sunny bedroom. He takes a deep breath and perceives the scent of Narcissa's hair, the most delicious scent in the world. He opens his eyes and sees her standing by the door, young and beautiful and pure. She smiles at him, and her blue eyes sparkle with joy. She beckons him to follow her. He tries to catch her hand, but she is just out of reach. Laughing, she rounds a corner and disappears. He runs after her through the endless corridors of the Manor, but no matter how many turns he makes, he can't catch up with her. As he runs up the spiral staircase, her melodious laughter turns into Bella's devilish cackle. Once again, his wonderful dream has become a nightmare. There's nothing he can do about it. He's at the mercy of his subconscious, just a little white sailboat in the sea of his delusions.

Now he sees Narcissa's ashen face and haunted eyes, watching him with the same reproachful expression she had when the Dark Lord occupied their beloved Manor. She shakes her head, and even through his madness his guilt catches up with him, whispering that it was he who put her through that horror and made her porcelain skin ashen and her eyes sunken. He has put his family into harm's way. He, Lucius Malfoy, has failed them all. He sees the Dark Lord's finger stroking Narcissa's face and panics. He knows that it never happened. Perhaps his mind keeps showing him that scene as a punishment. If so, he deserves it.

Lucius tears his eyelids open, and glimpses the patch of grey sky in the window. For a while, he watches white clouds before falling back into his trance. This time, he sees Draco. The chubby toddler is running across a flowery meadow, giggling and calling, "Dada, dada, dada." His blond locks flutter in the breeze, and he's absolutely perfect.

Happiness bubbles in Lucius' chest, and he runs after Draco, calling, "Wait for papa." He wants to hug him. Why has he hugged him so rarely? Why? He speeds up, but the distance between them doesn't get any shorter. He shouts, "Draco, Draco!" The boy stops and turns to him, and there is so much hatred in his eyes. Lucius freezes in the middle of the meadow, watching his son turn into an adolescent.

"Why, father?" he says. Lucius tries to explain, but no sound comes out of his mouth. "I hate you," says Draco and walks away.

No, he yells in his mind and tries to stop him. Alas, he stays rooted to the ground. Something seems to break in Lucius's chest, and he wants to cry. He produces a muffled moan and starts convulsing. A coughing fit brings him back to reality, and the mucus in his throat makes him gasp for air. Wiping his mouth, he sees blood on his fingers and palm. It's nothing new; he has been coughing up blood for quite some time now. Bright red against his skin brings another vision to him, his last memory before Azkaban.

He sees himself dirty and distraught in St. Mungo's. Severus is in his arms, and he can feel the blood dribbling through his fingers. He calls for help, but the mediwitches are maddeningly slow and unwilling to help. They don't care that he's losing his only friend. He shouts and curses, feeling useless. Finally a Healer appears and levitates Severus' lifeless body. Still grasping his friend's cold hand, he follows, even though he can hear the pops of Apparitions and knows that the Aurors have come for him. He stares at Severus' white face, willing him to open his eyes. He cannot leave before he knows that Severus is alive. The Aurors, however, have other plans, and he feels them grabbing him and pulling him from the room. He fights, but it's futile; there are too many of them and only one of him. Someone punches him in the face and everything goes black. Deep black. As black as Severus' eyes.

A pair of black eyes is looking down at him, and he smiles. This dream is a novelty. He misses his friend and is glad to see his face, even if it is only in his mind. "Severus," he says.

"Yes."

Still convinced that Severus is just a figment of his imagination, he closes his eyes and says, "I've been waiting for you, ungrateful cad. Where have you been?" He tries to chuckle, but another cough rips through his throat.

"Shh. Easy, easy." He feels a soft, warm cloth on his face. He opens his eyes and realises with astonishment that it really is his friend, seated on the narrow cot near him.

"Severus, old chap, is that really you?" he says between coughs.

"Yes," Severus says. His voice is rough and scratchy. "Can you please stop talking?"

Lucius laughs. He doesn't care that he's coughing up blood; his only friend is alive and well, and that is all that matters. "I don't think I've ever been so glad to see your face." He inspects him more closely. "Your nose looks longer. I like it," he laughs.

"You know me. I strive to please," Severus replies and checks Lucius' pulse.

"You're right on time, you know."

Severus frowns, probably suspecting that Lucius is delusional again, and says, "What exactly am I on time for?"

Still chuckling, but feeling on the brink of collapse, Lucius says, "I'm not going to last much longer. There are a few things I have to discuss with you." He pauses. "As always, your timing is perfect."

Severus' voice grows alarmed. "Stop talking nonsense. Better yet, stop talking altogether. You're going home. You'll see Narcissa and Draco in a few hours. As soon as Miss Granger finishes the paperwork, we're leaving this hellhole. Do you understand me?"

Lucius sighs, shakes his head and tries to focus on Severus' face. His eyes betray him, and everything goes blurry. "I never doubted you. I always knew that you'd come. You're so much better than me at friendship." He grasps Severus' hand. "I need to ask one more favour of you. Look after Narcissa, please." He coughs. Blood reddens his lips. "And don't let her see me like this."

"You aren't going to die. Don't be so melodramatic," says Severus, but his words lack confidence.

Lucius ignores him and continues, "Tell Draco that I'm sorry. Truly sorry."

Severus watches him in silence, his lips drawn into a thin line and his eyes even darker than usual.

"Do I have your word?" asks Lucius. He can feel blood trickling from the corner of his mouth.

"Yes."

"Good." And Lucius closes his eyes. Grey clouds swallow him, and he floats away from that filthy cell, away from his friend.

Through the fog, he still can hear Severus saying, "Found an easy way out, Lucius. I envy you, you lucky, sly bastard." Severus' voice sounds wistful, and Lucius feels guilty. He doesn't want to go away like this, but he cannot find the strength to return. It feels so pleasant to float among the grey clouds, so peaceful. Perhaps he really *is* just a sly bastard after all.

Narcissa

It's been a month since they buried Lucius. She is sitting in her favourite armchair and waiting for Severus, knowing that he'll be here in exactly three minutes. He's always on time.

Narcissa sighs and focuses her gaze on the garden. It's in bloom, but she doesn't notice that and just stares at something only she can see. Apathy has been her faithful companion lately, making her not wanting to eat or talk or breathe. She doesn't want Severus to come, and she doesn't want to go to the cemetery. She doesn't want anything but only one thing...she wants her husband back. She refuses to believe that Lucius is gone. Her Lucius gone...it doesn't make any sense. She can't understand how her brilliant, beautiful husband could become nothing more than a handful of ashes. Unthinkable. Inexplicable. Simply not true.

They hadn't allowed her to see him. Severus says that his body was contaminated. What nonsense. Maybe, if she had seen him dead, she could have made herself believe in it. Or maybe not. She doesn't know.

The clock chimes three times, and she sees the green flames of an activated Floo. A moment later, Severus is limping toward her. She watches him in silence, not knowing what to make of his attentiveness. What is it that he wants from her? He comes closer, extends his hand, and says, "Please, Narcissa." *Always so laconic*, she thinks and stares blankly at his hand. Seeing the plebeian roughness of it, she thinks about Lucius. He had beautiful, soft hands, and she misses them. She misses his touch, his caress. She misses *him, all of him*. And hates him. How could he leave her like that? Bastard! Sobs choke her, but she doesn't cry; it wouldn't be polite. Blood thumps in her temples as she fights back her tears.

A white handkerchief lands on her lap, and she hears Severus' voice. "I miss him as well, Narcissa. We all do. Yet we still need to go on. There's always a reason."

She lifts her face to him and says, "So tell me the reason, Severus. I fail to see one."

"Draco needs you."

"He has Miss Granger. I don't think I am still relevant to him," she says, but she knows that her argument is faulty. Draco does need her.

"It's not the same, Narcissa, and you know that better than I. Draco needs you, just as he needs Miss Granger."

"And what is *your* reason, Severus? Why are you here?"

"I gave my word," he says and, without any further explanation, offers her his hand once again. "Please."

She thinks for a moment. The Slytherin in her knows that if she has to carry on, it'll be easier with Severus by her side. She decides and allows him to take her hand. It feels strange to have her hand held by Severus. Strange. Different. And, perhaps, hopeful.

Fin

