

Those Tangled Webs We Weave

by Dreamy_Dragon

Lucius knows that something is wrong when Voldemort summons Severus to the Shrieking Shack.

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Chapter 1 of 1

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*Love in fantastic triumph sat,
Whilst bleeding hearts around him flow'd,
For whom fresh pains he did create,
And strange tyrannic power he show'd.
From thy bright eyes he took his fire,
Which round about in sport he hurl'd;
But 'twas from mine he took desire,
Enough to undo the amorous world.
From me he took his sighs and tears,
From thee his pride and cruelty;
From me his languishments and fears,
And every killing dart from thee:*

*Thus thou and I the God have arm'd,
And set him up a deity;
But my poor heart alone is harmed,
Whilst thine the victor is, and free.*

~ Aphra Behn "Love Armed"

'The Dark Lord requires your presence.' Lucius was careful not to betray the anxiety he felt.

Severus gave a barely perceptible nod, no emotion visible in his dark eyes. 'Where?'

'The Shrieking Shack.'

Severus nodded again.

Lucius didn't know what else to say. Severus's powers had reached new heights as he was drawing fully on his knowledge of the Dark Arts, whereas he was degraded to running errands for their master. Or was that an upgrade from being a wandless prisoner in his own home?

He just briefly reached out and laid his hand on the other man's shoulder. Severus looked back at him, acknowledging the small gesture, and turned to leave.

'Oh look, it's snivelly Snivellus!' James Potter, Sirius Black, and Peter Pettigrew made their way out of the Great Hall following Severus, who was hurrying back to the Slytherin common room.

'I bet he's never seen so much food in his whole life. Tell me, what did your mum feed ickle Snivelly in your hovel? Worms?'

With that James threw the apple core he had been holding in his hand, sending it flying after Severus's back while Sirius and Peter nearly doubled over with laughter.

In one graceful, fluid movement Severus took his wand out, turned around, and sent the apple core flying back. Only now there were suddenly three of them, none of which looked particularly fresh, each hitting one of the boys squarely in the face.

James, his glasses splattered with rotten, squishy bits of apple, yelled, 'You are going to pay for this, Snivellus!'

Sirius and Peter now had their wands out too.

Lucius, who had been observing the whole scene from behind a statue of armour, chose this moment to step forward. 'What's going on here?'

Looking at the three Gryffindors, he said, "Surely you weren't going to use magic between classes, now? It would be a shame if Gryffindor lost more points, wouldn't it?"

Lucius turned to Severus, whose wand had mysteriously disappeared. 'All right there, Snape?'

The dark-haired boy nodded. Together they watched the hasty retreat of Potter and his friends.

'Didn't know they taught that in first year.'

'They don't.'

Lucius eyed Severus's retreating back, a sinking feeling in his stomach. This should have been a day of glory. Somehow all of this hadn't turned out as it was supposed to. It seemed their side was finally winning the war, and he wasn't happy about it. He had lost the Dark Lord's favour, and it had become abundantly clear that there was little chance he'd ever regain it. Did he even want to? The wizard who was supposed to bring a new order to their world had turned out to be a psychopath spreading terror among his enemies and followers alike. Lucius wasn't sure what mattered anymore other than that he wanted to get out of this alive and that he had to find some way to protect Narcissa and Draco. And Severus. Though it seemed more likely that he would need Severus's protection, now that the other man had become so important to Voldemort's plans.

'Malfoy.'

'Snape.' They shook hands.

'So, what's that I hear? Seven N.E.W.T.s, eh? And all outstanding. Excellent.'

'Thank you.'

'Call me Lucius.'

It was a Malfoy tradition. Each year, after they left school, the most promising students from Slytherin house were invited to the manor for a weekend to meet the right people. Connections were made, alliances were formed. Sometimes a quiet word was spoken to the examiners to ensure that everyone passed the N.E.W.T.s they would need. That was a tradition, too. In Snape's case no word had been necessary, as the young wizard was truly brilliant, which was the reason he was here even though his background was decidedly lacking.

'What do you plan to do now? The Ministry? With your N.E.W.T.s you could have any job you want.'

The look on Severus's face indicated that he wasn't overly fond of the idea of working for the Ministry. 'Slughorn gave me a recommendation. I'll do a Potions apprenticeship.'

Lucius had already suspected that the younger wizard's interests might be more directed towards research. Still, it would be a shame if he couldn't get his abilities to work in other ways as well. 'Hm, there might be more options for someone with your talents; something that would gain you recognition, even fame.'

Lucius couldn't help the feeling of impending doom as he stared after Severus when he suddenly felt a weight settle in his pocket.

Surprised, Lucius slipped his hand into the pocket of his robe and pulled out a shrivelled little stone and a vial. He quickly identified the stone as a bezoar. The vial contained a pearly silver liquid that didn't resemble any of the more common potions. Upon closer examination Lucius recognised the phoenix tears. He drew in a deep breath; those were extremely rare and hard to come by. It was no surprise that Severus would have some, but why was he carrying these things with him? And why had he chosen to part with them now?

With the formal dinner over, people were chatting casually, milling about in the salons of the manor. Lucius was about to search out Rodolphus in order to do a little plotting when he ran into Slughorn. The man was a real genius when it came to forging alliances and currying favours, but having to talk to him always made Lucius feel as if he were stuck with a pompous rhinoceros. He finally managed to escape Slughorn's clutches with a polite lie and went out into the garden to get some air. He nodded to friends and acquaintances as he strolled away from the throngs of people enjoying the warm night, when he saw Severus. The tall, dark young man leaned against a tree, looking out over the grounds. He was on his own. That was odd. Usually their guests didn't venture that far out into the grounds unless they wanted some privacy. The kind of privacy that required two people. Come to think of it, he hadn't seen whom Severus had brought with him for the weekend. Lucius walked over to his fellow Slytherin. 'These grounds have been in my family for centuries.'

'They are impressive.'

'Our evening guests rarely walk that far.'

'Needed a bit of fresh air.'

Lucius nodded. 'These formal gatherings can be a bit overwhelming. One gets used to it after a while.'

Severus looked at him as if to ask why on earth he would need to get used to these things, but apparently chose not to pursue the topic.

Unable to rein in his curiosity, Lucius asked, 'Where's your girl? Who did you bring? The invitation was for two.'

Silence.

'No girlfriend, then? Not still on about that little Mudblood, are you?'

The stubborn, defiant look of the schoolboy was back. 'Her name's Evans. How do you know?'

'I keep track. I hear she's going out with that Potter git now. Not letting a Gryffindor best you, are you?' As if any Slytherin ever would.

'No.' Severus seemed to relax a little, now looking more like the adult he was.

'So, no girl then. A boy? Who is it, Avery? Lestrangle?'

Again, silence.

Slowly, it dawned on Lucius as he looked intently at Severus's prominent features, and he asked softly, 'Tell me, Severus, have you ever been kissed?'

The young man continued to stare mulishly on the floor, exuding a mixture of pride, insecurity, and defiance that Lucius found extremely appealing.

He brought his face very close to Severus's and whispered, 'Would you like to?'

Now Severus looked up, something indiscernible that closely resembled longing briefly flitting through his black eyes.

That was invitation enough for Lucius. He touched his lips to Severus's. At first the younger man didn't respond, but he didn't pull back either. Lucius did it again, becoming a bit more insistent, tentatively trailing his tongue over Severus's bottom lip, never losing eye contact with him. Slowly, Severus opened his mouth, his tongue darting out to meet Lucius's. Their bodies moved closer, seeking out the warmth of the other. One of Lucius's hands sneaked up into Severus's hair and around to the back of his neck, drawing the other man closer to him. Their kiss deepened, eliciting a little moan from Severus which sparked a reaction from a region of Lucius's body that was already most interested in the proceedings. There seemed to be certain amount of interest from Severus's body as well, judging from what was insistently pressing into Lucius's stomach. Around them the world seemed frozen in time as they lost themselves in their kiss. Then, Severus broke the contact. Taking a step back, he looked at Lucius. 'Thank you.'

With that Severus turned and left.

Thank you? What the bloody hell did that mean? Lucius stood rooted to the spot, staring after him for quite a while before he, too, made his way back to the cheerful crowd.

His feeling of dread increasing, Lucius decided to follow Severus as quickly as he could, his body reminding him of the repeated punishments the Dark Lord had inflicted on him. He was so damn tired of it all; tired of grovelling to a madman whose promises of a better world had turned out to be hollow and false. Tired of all the lies and the web of deceit. Tired of feeling disarmed without a wand because Voldemort had wanted it so, thinking it a particularly ingenious punishment to humiliate him in that way. Tired of fearing for those he loved: Narcissa, Draco, and Severus. Was that what he felt for Severus? Well, the shagging had always been good. No, the shagging had been spectacular. But that wasn't all there was to it; Severus was family. Severus was his equal, his partner. He had never told him. It just wasn't something he did. Suddenly it seemed the most important thing in the world that Severus knew. With that, resolution kicked in. Nobody defeated a Malfoy. Not the Ministry, not the Order, and most certainly not some self-proclaimed Dark Lord.

It was time to get his life back. Power, wealth, and most importantly the safety of the people who meant more to him than anything else in the world. This would require some careful planning. It wouldn't do to rush into anything like a silly Gryffindor. Yet he couldn't help the feeling that time was running out, quickly. He made his way back to the Shrieking Shack as fast as he could.

The most important thing was he needed a wand. He had had enough of feeling powerless. He looked around him. A body was lying only a few feet from where he was standing. Friend or foe? Dead or alive?

Lucius had no idea as he carefully made his way over to it. It was nobody he had ever seen before. Probably one of the Order, then. The man was also quite dead, his face contorted and his body twisted in a grotesque way from the curses that had hit him. Lucius quickly searched through the man's robes, but he didn't find anything. A few feet further away he saw another body in an equally bad shape. Another man, also dead. His features looked somewhat familiar, but after a few *Crucios* and an *Avada Kedavra* one corpse pretty much looked as bad as the next. He frantically searched him until he found what he had been looking for. The wand was of average length, made of dark wood. Lucius tried a few simple movements with it. It felt comfortable enough. Not as good as his own wand had, but the feeling of being once more in possession of something so essential to him more than made up for it. Severus's wand was made of Ebony, he suddenly remembered. Somehow he had always found the dark,

extremely powerful wood very fitting for the other wizard.

'Welcome, my friends; today we gather to introduce these new recruits into our circle.' Voldemort looked around at his group of dedicated followers and the three young men standing in front of him. They had assembled in the old Riddle mansion; a draught of the cold February air was finding its way into the ancient building despite the crackling fire. Lucius was cold, yet he refrained from drawing his robes tighter around him. The Dark Lord had no tolerance for weakness of any kind. Lucius let his eyes wander to the tall, slender young man who stood in the middle of the three future Death Eaters. Severus was dressed in his usual black, his face relaxed despite the anticipation he must surely feel. Something had changed over the past year. Gone was the pallid, stringy boy he had been. He stood tall and slim now, exuding confidence. He'd never be conventionally handsome, but the way he carried himself, his unique features, his intense black eyes combined with his intelligence and brilliant if caustic wit made him incredibly desirable. Lucius felt warmer immediately.

'All three of them have already proven their worthiness, dedication, and loyalty to our cause. Now we will formalise our union.'

Lucius watched as Severus stepped forward and knelt in front of the Dark Lord, extending his left arm. Voldemort tapped his wand to the bared wrist, murmuring a spell. Three dark red flames shot out of the wand tip and wound themselves tightly around the other's arm.

'Do you swear allegiance to our cause and consent to be tied to it?'

'I do.'

Lucius noticed that Severus had almost completely lost the dialect that had so clearly marked his origin.

After the words were spoken, the Dark Lord murmured another spell, and the flames suddenly flared a bright red and then disappeared, leaving the Dark Mark clearly imprinted on the lower left arm of the new Death Eater.

Lucius felt very proud as Severus was formally inducted into Voldemort's followers. Now he was truly one of their own.

Lucius had nearly reached the Shrieking Shack when he saw the Dark Lord approaching. He quickly hid behind a tree. Voldemort flew by in a cloud of dark smoke, a smug expression on his reptilian face, the cage that held Nagini floating next to him. For a brief moment Lucius had the impression that the snake was smirking. A smirking snake? Where was Severus?

Lucius made his way to the derelict wooden building as fast as he could. Once inside he heard voices. The Potter boy and his sidekicks. A confrontation with the trio was the last thing on his agenda now; he had more important things to do. He quickly dug into one of the dark, empty and, as it turned out, very dirty rooms, hoping whatever it was that the three did here would be done quickly so that he could search for Severus.

With the clandestine meeting over, the small group of Voldemort's followers prepared to leave. Lucius, recently ascended master of Malfoy Manor, bid them goodbye. As Severus took his cloak from a house-elf, Lucius said, 'Why don't you stay for a bit? I was recently able to acquire some very rare Dark Arts' manuscripts. You might be interested in taking a look at them.'

'That would be nice.' The way Severus's eyes lit up at the suggestion told Lucius that seeing the valuable old parchments would be a lot more than just nice.

He led Severus to the library, where he left him to peruse the rare texts at his leisure, then went up to his bedroom to make sure that everything was ready. He had been preparing this for some time, the acquisition of the manuscripts just one step in his plan. He was certain that giving Severus the chance to work with something he cared so much about would pave his way nicely. Lucius checked his appearance in the ancient mirror. When had this thing with Severus become so important to him? Usually people were ready to fall into his bed or wherever else he wanted them as soon as he so much as flicked a strand of hair at them. Usually he as quickly forgot about them afterwards. So why was all of this so important?

For weeks now Lucius had shown the other wizard his attention in many small ways. He knew that it had not gone unnoticed, for he had caught Severus looking at him more than once when he had thought himself unobserved. Not that he hadn't done his share of looking.

'Lookin' spiffy,' the mirror drawled in a bored voice.

Back in the library, Lucius stood for a moment, watching Severus as he read the manuscripts. His head was bent forward, his face for once unguarded, a look of pleased concentration on it. Lucius enjoyed the view. He had never met anyone before who had such a sensual relationship with the Dark Arts. Well, time to remind Severus that there were other sensual pleasures as well.

Lucius walked over to the other man. *'Anything interesting in there?'*

'Gods, yes, it's amazing how much knowledge is buried in these old texts.'

'There are other kinds of knowledge worth pursuing,' Lucius murmured into Severus's ear as he suggestively trailed a finger up the wizard's arm and neck.

'Hm, are there? I wonder what these would be,' Severus answered in a low voice.

Lucius pulled him to his feet and drew him into a kiss. What started out tentatively quickly became a passionate embrace, with tongues duelling with each other and hands exploring bodies.

'Why don't you find out,' Lucius suggested huskily as he Apparated them quickly to his bedroom.

Lucius manoeuvred them onto the bed as he continued to ravish Severus's mouth while he undid the buttons of his robes and the shirt underneath, exposing inch after inch of pale, smooth skin covered sparsely with fine black hair; his mouth followed his fingers until he found a pink nipple. He gave it a tentative flick with his tongue. Satisfied with the moan this produced from Severus, he continued to pay attention to it. He felt Severus's fingers raking through his long hair and sneaking around to unbutton his own robes. The sensation of Severus's fingers exploring his body made heat go through him right down to his groin.

Despite their need, they took their time in getting each other's clothes off, hands and mouths exploring, stroking, licking, nibbling until they both almost whimpered with wanting each other. Finally Lucius bared that part of Severus that had incited his imagination for quite some time. It was no disappointment. In fact, he found it marvellous as he stroked it and then lowered his mouth to it, lavishing it with attention. Severus's hips jerked up in response. The little, delectable noises Severus made were so enjoyable that Lucius nearly came from it. The blond wizard continued what he was doing with his mouth and his hands until Severus came undone, the look on his face one of sheer, utterly unguarded pleasure. As Lucius slowly kissed his way up Severus's body, he decided that he would like to see this look on Severus face again, often.

They lay together quietly for a while until Severus recovered a bit. Kissing him, he went back to exploring Lucius's body. Lucius moaned when he felt Severus's hands on him. This was so much better than he had imagined it. It was obvious from his tentative movements that Severus had never done this before. He was awkward but not clumsy, paying attention to Lucius's reactions. The knowledge that this was a first for Severus made Lucius even harder than he already was.

'Oh, Severus, yes.'

Apparently that was just the encouragement Severus needed. He quickly found out what it took to please Lucius, sending him spiralling into a realm where nothing but sensation existed.

It seemed to take forever until the voices grew fainter and finally disappeared. Warily, Lucius moved out of the room, never bothering to brush off his already soiled robes. As quickly and silently as possible, he ascertained that Potter and his friends had indeed left while he went looking for Severus. He finally found him in the room the Dark Lord had used earlier in the day. Lucius's heart nearly stood still at the sight before him. Severus lay sideways on the floor like a broken doll, deathly pale and utterly still, a large pool of blood visible under his neck and face.

'Severus, you idiot,' Lucius murmured as he rushed over to him, his hand quickly searching for a pulse. He breathed a momentary sigh of relief when his fingers felt a fluttering, terribly weak and barely discernible, but distinctly there. He wasted no time with being overly careful, but grabbed Severus's head, opened his mouth and forced the Bezoar down his throat, using the unfamiliar wand to cast a spell that would propel the healing stone down into the unconscious man's stomach. Fortunately the wand complied easily with his magic. He then took the vial of phoenix tears and applied all of it to the gaping wounds in the neck. He cradled Severus's head and shoulders into his lap, waiting for the pearly liquid to take effect, never caring that blood was soaking his once pristine robes.

'She's dead, Lucius.'

That didn't make sense at all. Who was dead; what in Merlin's name was Severus on about?

Lucius wasn't sure what kind of welcome he had expected from Severus when he made his way to the Hogwarts' dungeons, but certainly not this. How could anyone live in these cramped surroundings? Being a teacher obviously didn't come with decent living conditions. Lucius had rehearsed several possibilities in his mind; they needed to come up with cover stories in case anyone dared to accuse them of being Death Eaters now that Voldemort was gone.

Severus was slouched in an armchair, a nearly full bottle of Firewhisky in front of him. Clearly, a glass was too much trouble. His robes were crumpled as if he had slept in them; his hair hung lanky and unkempt in front of his face; a slight stubble visible on his chin as if he couldn't even be bothered with a shaving spell.

It took Lucius a few moments to catch on. Severus was talking about Lily Evans; no, Lily Potter. Her death seemed to bother Severus a lot more than the fact that Voldemort was gone. Without a word Lucius summoned two glasses. Sitting down across from the desperate looking man, he poured them both a generous amount of Firewhisky. He refrained from pointing out that the woman had merely been a Mudblood as he somehow had the impression that that wouldn't go down too well with Severus. They sat quietly, drinking.

'Were you...?' Damn, he had no idea how one asked these kind of questions. 'Were you in love with her?'

Severus looked at him as if he had completely forgotten the presence of another in the room.

'No, not anymore. I had this giant crush on her when I was fourteen.'

Lucius found him surprisingly coherent for someone who had apparently been drinking. But then, the fact that Severus was actually talking to him about something so personal was probably a sign of his intoxication.

'And?'

'Nothing. It sort of wore off after a while.'

'What do you mean it wore off?' Lucius was sure that there was more to the story than Severus was telling him. In his experiences crushes rarely just evaporated, but then he had never pined after anyone as he usually made sure to get what he wanted.

Severus glared at him. 'Well, things changed. But she was nice to me, the first friend I ever had. And I kind of loved her for that.'

'Do you still love her?'

Severus didn't answer, only stared into his empty glass. Lucius decided that tea was a better idea than yet more alcohol. Standing up, he tried to find out if Severus had a kettle somewhere. As he passed the other man, Severus reached up for him and drew him into a desperate, bruising kiss.

Severus almost dragged him into his bedroom, fumbling to undo Lucius's robes and the shirt underneath until he reached bare skin. With a moan Severus buried his face into the crook between Lucius's neck and shoulder, kissing the exposed flesh as he frantically continued to undress the other man.

Lucius was a bit surprised by Severus's onslaught, but happy to go along with it as he made sure that the other man's state of undress kept up with his own.

Naked, they tumbled onto the bed, Severus still clinging to him like a drowning man, desperately kissing and nibbling at every bit of Lucius he could reach. Lucius felt raw, hot desire shoot through him.

'Fuck me, Lucius.' It was not a request.

Lucius wasted no time as he spread Severus's legs. Using his magically lubricated fingers, he tried to gently prepare the other man for the intrusion, but Severus pushed back against his fingers almost immediately. Obviously gentle was not on the menu today.

Lucius positioned himself, entering the other man. He stilled when he heard Severus cry out softly, but again the other wizard pushed back against him. 'Yes, more.'

Overwhelmed by the tight heat around him, Lucius gave in to his own desire, thrusting harder, egged on by Severus's moans. When he felt hot liquid gush over his lower belly, his own thrusts became more erratic until he followed Severus over the edge.

Afterwards neither man said a word; they just lay there, holding each other.

Lucius was already half-asleep with Severus snuggled up against him when he heard the whispered words, barely audible. 'Not her. You.'

Time seemed to stretch endlessly while he waited and the words he had never spoken finally spilled forth in the dark. 'Severus, don't leave me. I promise I'll make it up to you ... I don't know what to do without you. You have no idea. It's not the sex or what you can do for me. It's you. It has been all along.'

With no more left to say, Lucius cradled Severus closer to him as if he could give his own life force to him. It seemed to take forever for the wounds on his neck to slowly close and the bleeding to stop. Lucius checked for a pulse again. Still there; very faint, but there. Severus's face still looked deadly pale, but it seemed to be a little bit less ashen, certainly.

What next? Hogwarts was nearest. He could try to Apparate to the gates of the school, but there was no chance he would make it up to the infirmary without encountering either Order members, Aurors, or some of Voldemort's followers. Lucius didn't fancy dodging hexes or having to explain what he was doing. There simply wasn't time for it. He needed another solution and quickly. The manor wasn't an option either. He didn't know if Voldemort had left any of his sentinels there, and who would take care of Severus? He needed a Healer, preferably one who knew what he was doing. That left St Mungo's. Lucius wracked his brain. Surely there was someone who was indebted to him. Despite his time in Azkaban and the subsequent fall from the Dark Lord's grace, there were still enough people who had either reason to fear him or owed him a favour. Who was that blasted Healer specialising in antivenin again? The one that had made the Wizarding medical journal with curing Arthur Weasley? Smythe something or other. No. Smethwyck. It was worth a try; the Malfoys had always given generously to St Mungo's, and wasn't there some oath that made Healers treat whoever needed it? Well, he would make sure to get treatment for Severus.

Lucius carefully lowered Severus to the floor and got to his feet, none too steady, anxiety and exhaustion starting to take their toll on his already frail body. He almost growled. Now was not the time for weakness. He pulled his strength together to pick up Severus and Apparate. It took three attempts for him to materialise in front of the shabby department store that hid the entrance to St Mungo's with the unconscious Severus in his arms.

'I need to see Healer Smethwyck. It's urgent,' he said to the ugly dummy in the shop window.

The dummy nodded, and Lucius stumbled forward through the glass that felt like a cool curtain. The welcome witch took one look at the pair and quickly waved them to the front of the queue. Lucius again asked for Healer Smethwyck, casually inserting his own name into the question. The young witch nodded immediately.

'First floor, the green door,' she said, summoning a stretcher for Severus.

A nurse went with Lucius, levitating the stretcher. To him it seemed to take forever until they finally reached Smethwyck's consultation room.

'Mr Malfoy,' the Healer greeted him, overlooking the dirty and dishevelled state of the usually immaculate wizard. 'Poison?'

Lucius nodded. 'Snakebite, same snake that bit Weasley.'

The Healer immediately spun into action. 'Kerry, get the three blue vials from the storage cupboard in my office. Claire, get me a dose of Blood-Replenishing Potion. No, make that two.'

Lucius somehow felt better. He wanted to stay but it was better to get back to Hogwarts. No need to cause suspicion by his absence and endanger Narcissa. They also needed to find Draco. Before he left he made arrangements with the witch at the reception desk to have Severus transferred to a private room for his recovery. He still didn't know if Severus would survive, but until he knew otherwise, he would believe that he did.

He Apparated back to the Hogwarts gates and rejoined the Death Eaters, glad to find Narcissa alive and well among them.

And then it was all over. In the end he didn't give a damn about it all. Neither did Narcissa. They found Draco, alive, and that was all that mattered. As they sat together in the Great Hall among the people who had been their enemies until a few hours ago, Lucius felt a surge of despair as he remembered how Severus had been lying alone and abandoned on the floor of the Shrieking Shack. He hoped it hadn't been too late. Lucius looked at his family, glad that he hadn't lost them. Yet something, or rather someone, was missing. Severus should have been here with them. He felt Narcissa's eyes on him. 'Severus?' she asked softly, so that Draco didn't hear.

'He'll be fine.' That was hardly convincing, even to himself. 'Rachel?'

Narcissa shook her head. 'I don't know.'

'Let's go home,' he suggested quietly. 'Before anyone notices that we shouldn't be here.'

Back at the manor they quickly assessed the damage. It was bad, but nothing that couldn't be repaired. After Draco had gone to bed, Lucius quickly Flooed St Mungo's. It took ages until someone answered his call. He was tempted to give them a piece of his mind about that, but he only enquired after Severus, aware of where his priorities lay. He learned that Severus had received all the treatment they could give him. If he made it through the night, he would live. He knew that he didn't need to explain, that Narcissa understood, as she was trying to find out at that very moment what had happened to her lifelong partner, Rachel.

He quickly went into the shower. The hot water felt good, washing all the dirt and grime away. Pity it couldn't wash everything else off as well, he thought as he dressed in clean robes and Apparated once again to St Mungo's. The welcome witch quickly flicked through the parchments on her desk when he asked for Severus Snape. 'First floor. The private rooms are at the very end of the corridor, he's in four.'

The usually tall, powerful wizard looked oddly small as he lay white and motionless in the hospital bed, a thick bandage wrapped around his neck. Lucius pulled over a chair. Sitting down next to the bed, he took one of Severus's hands in his. Those hands, so skilled at so many things, seemed to embody the man in their mixture of elegance and power, marked by small scars where he had cut himself despite his usual precision in preparing potion ingredients. Lucius caressed the hand with his thumb. He didn't know if his presence changed anything but desperately wanted to believe that it did. 'Don't leave me,' he whispered.

'Severus?'

'Mmmh?' A muffled reply from under the duvet.

'You are doing it again.'

Slowly a hand emerged, followed by strands of black hair and the top of a head.

'Whassematter?'

'The duvets. You are snatching both of them. I am bloody freezing.'

'Hmph,' was the only answer he got, but Severus lifted the corner of one of the duvets in question so that Lucius could crawl under it. He snuggled up to Severus's warm body. Really, the best place in the world.

Lucius sat there watching Severus, wondering if the other man was still unconscious or merely sleeping. A nurse came in twice to check on the Blood-Replenishing Potion that was slowly trickling through the tube stuck into Severus's arm. Lucius had never noted how still the night was, with Severus's shallow breathing and the muffled sounds of the hospital around him as the only company. He never let go of Severus's hand, even as sleep finally claimed him shortly before the dawn of a new day.

Lucius woke up to find two obsidian eyes looking at him. He was still tired and stiff, his neck hurting from the uncomfortable position he had been sleeping in, but it felt like the best morning of his life. Relief washed over him as he smiled at Severus. 'Hello there, sleepyhead,' he said.

Severus just looked at him. 'Why?'

Lucius was about to say that it was because Severus had saved Draco's life and that a Malfoy always paid his debts, but then he remembered the promise he had made to the unconscious man in the Shrieking Shack. 'Because I couldn't imagine a world without you in it.'

Severus smiled one of his rare genuine smiles, those Lucius found utterly disarming each time he saw them, and promptly went back to sleep.

When the day nurse came in, she took one look at Lucius. 'You should get some rest.'

'No, I am fine.'

The nurse looked at him in a way that told Lucius that he was by no means the first stubborn relative or partner she had ever dealt with. In the stern voice that takes nurses and teachers years of practice to develop she said, 'You won't be of any use to him if you collapse from exhaustion; go and get some sleep, and then come back.'

Lucius knew she was right and left.

A few hours later saw him back at Severus's bedside. When Severus woke up again, his usually irresistible silky voice was still croaking. He asked, 'Is it over?'

Lucius nodded.

'Good.'

'When did you stop working for the Dark Lord?'

If Severus was surprised by the question, he didn't say so. 'A long time ago.'

'I thought so.'

Lucius hoped that Severus knew that he didn't need to ask the next, seemingly obvious, question. It had never occurred to him to inform the Dark Lord of his suspicion. The question never came.

Instead Severus looked at him, his feelings visible in his beautiful dark eyes. He took one of Lucius's hands. 'Are you staying?'

Lucius leaned forward. Pressing a kiss on Severus's lips, he whispered, 'Always.'

~fin~

A/N: Originally written as response to the prompt "Lucius disarmed" for the Snape_after_dh fest on LJ. Many thanks to Dacian Goddess and Logical Quirk for beta reading.