

## Damnable (The Illustrated Edition)

by deslea

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**Summary:** The Dark Lord knows his obsession with the wife of one of his most respected lieutenants is a strategic error of epic proportions. He means to remedy the situation. Really.

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He met her - oh, the *irony* - at her wedding.

Oh, he supposed he'd seen her before across some ballroom or other, seen without really *seeing*. There were many such rooms. Maintaining social decorum was a tedious but necessary counterpart to the exercise of power and influence.

Part of maintaining social decorum was attending weddings. Not everyone's, but those of his highest-ranking lieutenants, and their hand-picked protégés, oh yes. Each attendance was carefully thought-out. Each was a signal - of favour, of approval, and sometimes of a corresponding drop of approval for someone else.

This particular wedding was simple, as they went. Rodolphus Lestrage was twenty-eight, old enough to be dedicated and accomplished, but not so old as to have outlived his usefulness. His bride, Bellatrix Black, was nineteen, and of irreproachable lineage. By all accounts, she was intelligent, devoted to the Cause, and a powerful witch in her own right. So far, so good.

He danced with her, and that was where the whole damnable thing began.



[Damnable 1: The Wedding](#) by [deslea](#) on [deviantART](#).

"You look very beautiful today, Madam Lestrange," he said. Conventional nod to the bride.

She choked a little. "I'm not ready to step into my mother-in-law's matronly shoes just yet. Bellatrix. I insist."

He bowed his head, amused. "Bellatrix, then."

"Better. And it's lovely of you to say so, but we all know Narcissa's the beauty of the family." Bellatrix nodded towards her younger sister, deep in conversation with Abraxas Malfoy's boy. She said it complacently, as though she knew that her talents in other areas rendered her alleged deficiency in this one quite irrelevant.

"I beg to differ," he said. "And you should know, Bellatrix, that I don't say *anything* I don't mean."

Bellatrix flushed. "I do apologise, my Lord. You know what these things are like. If I had a galleon for everyone who cares nothing for me who's gushed about how happy they are for me--"

"Indeed," he agreed. "But I don't indulge in ersatz niceties -- a blatant lie! -- and we don't all favour the fair."

"Go on," she said. "I'm intrigued."

He unbent a little - Merlin knew why! - and whirled her around the room as one song melded into another. "I never knew my mother, but I imagined that she looked like me. I imagined dark, wavy hair like mine, and angular features. Very much like you, in fact." He gave a slight smile. "Every man models his image of his ideal woman on his mother, I'm told. For my own part, my ideal is purity of blood, but within that, I'll admit to a preference for the dark." This much was entirely true, although his preference was usually only as long-lived as the time it took to bed and discard.

"In more ways than one," she mused. "Hence your styling of yourself as the *Dark Lord*."

He snorted. "Hardly. What our opponents consider dark is merely what is too powerful for them to understand. But their dramatic nonsense serves the Cause, so it has suited me to encourage it."

"Indeed it has. And did she? Look like me, I mean? Did you ever find out?"

"Unfortunately, she did not. I would later learn that I took after my father. An evil man who left my mother to die."

"In looks only, I'm sure. How abominable. What became of him?"

"I avenged my mother as soon as I was able."

"Quite right, too."

He looked on her, openly amused. "No sentimentality about it, then, Bellatrix? No allowance for the possibility that he was simply young and misunderstood?"

Bellatrix laughed then - the first time he'd heard her do so. Not a feminine little giggle, but a real, throaty laugh. It cut through his protective layer like a knife, the layer he had constructed carefully

down the years to keep people at a distance. Closeness was dangerous, he'd long believed; closeness gave people power. It was a belief he would hold ever more strongly in the light of subsequent events.

Afterwards, he would be horrified - *horrified!* - that he had allowed it to happen, but in that moment, it charmed him. Completely.

"Merlin, no," she said now. "The impure - whether by blood or by deed - add nothing to this world. They should be eliminated, and the sooner the better. I've no time for this waffle about rehabilitation and tolerance. Either you contribute, or you make way for those who will."

He felt the corners of his mouth curling up into a smile. "And the half-blooded allies? What of them?"

Bellatrix sniffed. "Well, some work hard, and take an oath not to reproduce. I would - rather grudgingly - accept that."

His smile broadened. "My lady Lestrangle. You *do* keep your ear to the ground. I'm impressed."

Bellatrix smiled too. "Thank you, my Lord. But I suspect you already knew of my interest. Why else would you have passed, not one, but four dances with me?"

"How very astute of you," he murmured. He turned his gaze thoughtfully to their linked hands. Slid his palm down her forearm, his thumb rubbing her inner wrist. "In a different world, I would have had you for the Cause."

"Why not in this one?" she wondered. They were slowing with the music, and the smile had slid off her features. Her eyes were big and dark.

"I have allowed women, rarely, to take the Mark," he conceded, "but only widows and avowed spinsters. I do not take married women."

"Why?"

"Come, come, don't be obtuse, Bellatrix. One cannot serve two masters."

Something dark and dangerous flashed in her eyes at that. "Rodolphus is not my master."

He arched an eyebrow at her. "And does Rodolphus know that?"

"I've told him so. He doesn't believe me. He'll learn."

"I do believe he will." He tugged her closer, their hips fitting together. Said, in a lower voice, "I could master you."

A pink flush travelled leisurely up that exquisitely pale flesh, over the rise of her breasts, rising and falling, over her décolleté. Her throat *flickered* as she swallowed hard.

"Yes," she whispered. "I believe you could."

"I would mark you," he murmured. "I would mark you as mine."

She closed her eyes. Gave the tiniest sound from the back of her throat, whimper of desire, and that was no surprise. It was an effect he had elicited many times before. The surprise was that he *wanted*, too. Not sex, or the victory of conquest, but *her*. Her with her cascading falls of dark hair atop her slender neck and her aristocratic nose and that *skin* that he could almost lean in and *devour*-

"I say, my Lord, may I cut in?"

With a tiny, feral little hiss, he pulled away from her. She stood there trembling as he turned.

Rodolphus.

With difficulty, he summoned a broad smile. "Of course, Rodolphus. I was just telling your lovely wife what a wonderful addition you've been to the Cause."

Bellatrix summoned a ghastly, pale smile. "Yes, we're all very proud of him. Thank you, my Lord."

With what little composure he had left, he made his excuses, and walked swiftly away.

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"Fuck," he hissed. "*Fuck!*"

Why *her*? Why anyone, but *especially*, why her? Rodolphus was one of his best lieutenants, and no fucking piece of skirt was worth the problems that came with *that*.

Not that Rodolphus was indispensable. No one was. But even if...for instance...he were to see to it that Rodolphus was killed. As soon as he took up with Bellatrix, it would be perfectly clear what had happened, and his leadership would fall into question. The aristocracy could forgive endless atrocities for anything that might feasibly be considered the Greater Good - but Rodolphus was respected, and his cold-blooded murder for personal gain would not be so easily forgiven.

But he wasn't really thinking of that. He was just half-crazy with whatever the hell she'd *done* to him, damn her. Nothing a bloody wank couldn't fix.

Which was why he was standing, Disillusioned on the balcony, tugging angrily on the cock that had fucking turned traitor on him.

Disillusioned or no, though, he drew back into the shadows when the French doors opened behind him. "Rodolphus!" came a reproachful, female voice.

Fucking Bellatrix. It just got better and better.

"Just for a few moments, darling. It's too bad, getting married only to have you swept up with everyone who's ever met you, when all I want to do is get you alone."

Bellatrix gave a rather weak laugh. "That's - very sweet, Rod, really -"

"Fuck sweet," Rodolphus said, "I want to shag you senseless."

"Rod!"

Rodolphus tugged her back against him. "Oh, *honestly*, Bella. I've no doubt you're technically intact, but you're no wilting flower either. If I wanted *that*, I'd have married your stitched-up sister."

"Don't talk about Narcissa like that," Bella said crossly. Her expression was rather annoyed as Rodolphus kissed the side of her neck.

Rage was welling inside him. Rage at being thwarted. He *wanted* her, and Rodolphus had her. How on *earth* had such a travesty occurred?



[Damnable 2: The Balcony](#) by [deslea](#) on [deviantART](#).

With a look of resignation, Bella tolerated her husband's attentions - tolerated them, that was, until Rodolphus' hand grasped her wrist. The wrist he had declared he would mark as his own. At that, her eyes closed, for a long, long moment, and she made that same whimper in the back of her throat. She fell back, into her husband's arms, her head leaned back against his shoulder. Eyes still determinedly closed.

That was the moment he knew he had her, after all.

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"Why do you want to know about my wife?"

Rodolphus asked this sharply one day, so sharply that he lifted his gaze with a *jolt*.

They had been talking business – of *course* they had been talking business – but somehow discussion had drifted around to Bellatrix. More and more, now, it did so, and he had gradually built up a dossier of detail about her. They were details he dwelt on lovingly when he was alone – her favourite colour (black, with burgundy running a close second), her favourite flowers (Black Peony poppies), her favourite dinner dish (quail). Her middle name and her Familiar and her secret, childish penchant for Sugar Quills.

Rodolphus' gaze was steady and without deference. He was one man giving a *hands-off* signal to another, rank and position be damned.

Damn it all. Every time, he cursed himself for it, cursed himself and swore he wouldn't do it anymore (she was just a *woman!*) and then every time he did it again. It was like being a teenager, stuck in the grip of his hormones like an undisciplined delinquent. It was unacceptable. It was unwise.

Now, he sat back and said evenly, "I'm interested in all my most loyal servants' families, Rodolphus. Behind every great man is a great woman, is there not?"

"You've never concerned yourself with women's business before."

"Bellatrix doesn't strike me as the type for *women's business*. Which is why I consider her one of your greatest assets." He chose his words carefully. By referring to her as an asset, he had subtly acknowledged Rodolphus' ownership (though in truth he doubted anyone owned her at all).

"I suppose." Rodolphus was only slightly mollified.

He said with a tone of warning, "I do hope, Rodolphus, that your loyalty to the Cause is not threatened by your possessiveness over your wife. She is a beautiful woman, but only that. Just as some men lay down their lives for their kind, others lay down their wives."

"What the hell is *that supposed to mean?*"

"It means, if she were killed, and it were strategically unwise to pursue her killer, I would expect you not to do so. It means, if she defected to the Order, I would expect you to turn her over. It means," he added pointedly, "that if she loved another, I would expect you to put your jealousies aside and continue to work for the Cause."

Rodolphus was almost purple with rage. "You – you –"

"*We*, Rodolphus. *We* are fighting a war for a *future*. Beside that, petty personal rivalries and attachments are nothing more than dust on the wind. Remember that."

Rodolphus was trembling, but he said nothing.

"Come," he said after a long moment. "Drink with me." He lifted his glass. "To all the women in our lives."

Rodolphus made a half-hearted motion with his glass, and brought it to his lips.

He studied his lieutenant as they drank, and silently, gently entered his mind. He lifted the corners of that troubled psyche and allowed himself to be drawn in and swept up into the maelstrom.

Rodolphus watching them at the wedding, watching them dance. Watching the way their hips pressed together, the way she looked up, meeting his own gaze. Watching the way he caressed her wrist, bare where it should be marked. Cutting in on them, and Bellatrix went with him, but she pressed her face to his shoulder, cheeks burning, not meeting his gaze.

A little later. Their marriage bed. Bella's eyes far away, all of it laborious until finally she turned away from him, leaning back against him, eyes closed. And then, as though released, arching against him. Crying out.

A handful of meetings since then. All of them public, distanced, stilted, but with gazes that locked and never seemed to let go.

Most recently, an argument, about children. Rodolphus berating her, accusing her of taking herbs. Her tearful confession. Unthinkable, that he could want to bring a child into such an awful world! Why couldn't he just *wait*? Didn't he *trust* the Dark Lord? *She* did. Things would be better one day, and there could be babies then. Why did he have to keep *pressing* her?

Rodolphus' mind was running along well-worn tracks, he believed, tracks worn down with the weight of suspicion and dread.

*He suspects*, he thought as he withdrew, and the laughable part of it was they'd done nothing wrong.

But then, perhaps that was the problem. Why hadn't he seen it before? It was the thrill of the forbidden, no more than that. She, above all women, was the unwise choice. So he wanted her. Of *course* he wanted her. It was the nature of men to want what they could not or should not have. And even he was not immune.

Relief swept over him. It was so easily solved! All he had to do was have her, make her his, and the damnable hold she had over him would end. She would no longer be forbidden; ergo, he would no longer want her.

"Your wife wishes to take the Mark," he said presently. "I have told her that I do not give it to women who are subjects of men. But I believe she wishes to revisit the topic with me."

"I'm sure she does," Rodolphus said coldly.

"You will send her to me," he said, imperiously. "Tonight."

Rodolphus looked ill, but said only, "Yes, my Lord."

"Very good," he said. "Let us end this once and for all."

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There were no words.

He'd expected to call on a few. To set the scene, to break down reserve, to coax, to cajole. She wanted him, he knew that, but he'd expected to work for it.

What he had *not* expected was the moment of utter, shared understanding when his eyes met hers. The way she lifted her hand, as though for a courtly kiss but completely out of context. The way he grasped her wrist and she rasped out agonising need when he touched the *nakedness* there. The way he grasped her other, free hand with his, and brought it up around his neck, descending on her, drinking in her upturned mouth. Tugging her into the house, slamming the door, pressing her against it. She came from his kisses alone, and oh, what kisses they were. He needed her, had to have her, had to devour and savour. He was overcome with her. He engulfed her with his need to learn every part of her.



[Damnable 3: Damnable](#) by [deslea](#) on [deviantART](#).

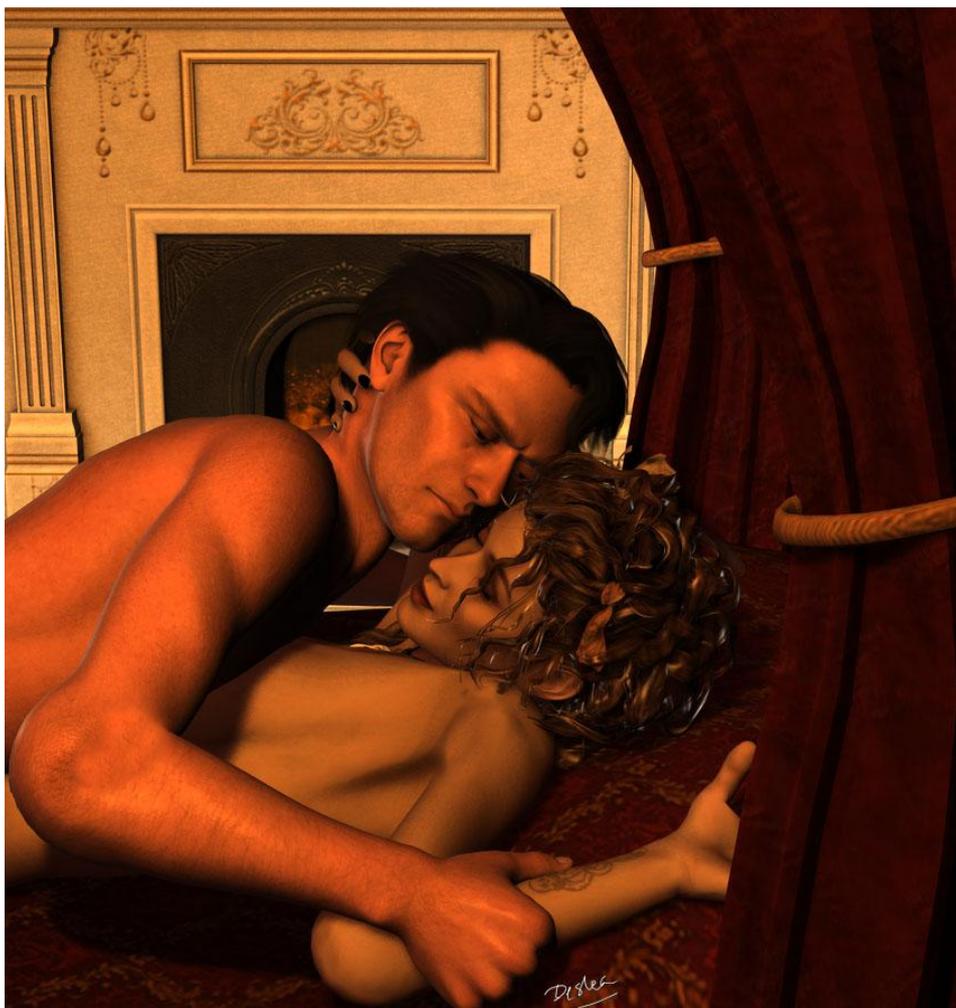
By the time they reached his bed, both of them were damp with sweat and with what had already passed between them. She was barely upright, barely coherent. She was his, he was her love and her Lord, she had only ever belonged to him. His head was pounding and urgent, and his cock was aching with the white-hot pleasure-pain of denial, and all he could hear was *his*. She was his...his...his. He pinned her down with his hips astride her and his cock inside her and his arms lovingly, heavily draped over hers. His palms held her wrists and they were loose beneath him, surrender in every line of her.

"My love," she moaned again, "my love." The words escaped her in low, rasping sounds as he thrust into her. "Oh, please-

"Mine?" he demanded, taking her hard.

"Oh, God yes, yours," she gasped, and that did it, made him come in pounding spasms, made him shout her name and something else that he couldn't quite decipher.

It was only after he'd slumped on top of her, his brow resting on her shoulder, that he realised what he'd cried out. Only when he lifted his head to look at their entwined hands on the pillows above her head that he understood what he had done.



[Damnable 4: Morsmordre](#) by [deslea](#) on [deviantART](#).

What he'd cried out was *Morsmordre*, and what he'd done was mark her as his, forever.

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It hadn't worked.

He thought this as he looked out the window, casting his gaze over the grounds of the Manor.

It was a Muggle manor, conscripted for himself and the Cause. Claiming a false title was one thing, but he could hardly have taken a property from one of the first Wizarding families and claimed it as his own without detection. It had electric lights, and he had pulled the circuit breakers, but the bulbs ran dimly on a continuous low trickle, feeding off the magical energy that lingered in his wake. It was pleasant, like candle glow all around him.

He had removed the bulbs from his bedroom, and the pathway to it. They'd have shattered if he'd left them in. But now, they were done, and Bella lay in a slumber on his bed. He had left her sleeping form, and slipped away to the other end of the house.

He was trembling.

Winning her hadn't slaked his thirst for her. It had only made it worse. What he had felt that day was *nothing* to what he felt now. He wanted to devour her, inhale her. *Consume* her.

The whole night was a disaster. He'd marked her - the one thing he'd sworn he would not do. She would almost certainly have to join in the war, if only to conceal the true reason she bore the Mark. She would fight between him and her husband, and they would be endlessly caught in their own private war. He would never be free of her. It would never end.

It was unacceptable.

He drew a shuddering breath, then, resolutely, he returned to his bedroom. He stood beside the bed, studying her. Committing every line of her to his memory.

"I regret it," he murmured, raising his wand against her, and it was the truth.



[Damnable 6: Hesitation](#) by [deslea](#) on [deviantART](#).

He stood there, unbelieving, for a full five minutes before the understanding finally formed in his horrified consciousness that he really couldn't do it. As it dawned on him that he was not just hesitant, but actually unable, he let out a rasping, horrified gasp. He set down his useless wand on the bedside table with a shaking hand.

He sank down, trembling, onto the bed, his hands dangling loosely between his knees. He looked over his shoulder at her. Alarmed. Dismayed. And more than anything, completely at a loss about what to do next.

She was, quite possibly, the greatest foe he had ever faced.

"My Lord," she whispered, stirring. She sat up behind him, and ran a gentle hand over his shoulders. "My Lord and my love."

He took her hand with his, sank down gratefully into her arms, but said nothing. He wondered:

*What now?*

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Morning brought illumination, although possibly not the sort he'd had in mind.

It was the cigarettes. They were Sobranie cocktail cigarettes, taken from the body of a Muggle tourist a month ago. Rodolphus had been gradually smoking them. Their multicoloured butts were all over the lawn, directly beneath the bedroom window. He had made no effort to conceal his presence.



*[Damnable 5: Sobranie](#) by [deslea](#) on [deviantART](#).*

Well, Rodolphus clearly intended to bring the matter to a head; there was no point in doing otherwise himself. He allowed himself one more leisurely interlude in Bella's arms, then told her to sleep, and summoned her husband after she had complied.

"You were here last night," he said without preamble from his seat at the dining table, peering over fingers pressed firmly together.

Rodolphus sat back in his chair, and gave a single nod of his head.

"So you know."

Again, a nod. His expression was inscrutable.

"And can you live with it, Rodolphus? Can you...co-exist?"

The corners of Rodolphus' lips curled downward into a scowl. "What if I cannot?"

"If you cannot, then it becomes a question of which of you should go."

Rodolphus arched a single eyebrow, expression of supreme surprise.

"Come, come, Rodolphus, you can't have believed I would go into such a thing wilfully. I am not oblivious to the implications for the Cause. You are...valuable."

Rodolphus snorted. "You could have fooled me."

"I have already tried to eliminate her from the equation," he said sharply. Rodolphus' eyes grew wide, and he went on, "I find myself rather unwisely unable. A most unfortunate turn of events."

"What happened to, 'Behind every great man is a great woman'? All pretty talk to excuse your interest in my wife, I suppose."

"Love is a weakness," he snapped. "One I must tolerate, because nearly every man falls prey to it, but a weakness nonetheless."

"Including the great and mighty Master," Rodolphus marvelled. "Oh, the irony."

"I will allow you some tolerance in recognition of the difficulty of this situation for you, Rodolphus, but keep a civil tongue."

Rodolphus started a little, as though suddenly realising where he was, and with whom. Said hastily, "Yes, my Lord."

He looked away. "I won't give her up. So it is up to you. Live with it, or...don't."

"Very well," Rodolphus said grimly. "I hardly have a choice. As she so frequently reminds me, I'm not her master. She chose another for that."

He fought down a grimace at that. The idea that he had mastered Bella only by her own choosing was an unpleasant one indeed.

Rodolphus said presently, "Can I at least ask you to be discreet? I hardly think the others will follow me if they know that I cannot even command the loyalty of my own wife."

"I think you underestimate your friends. I think they will have nothing but respect for you. Remember what I said about laying down one's wife for the Cause?"

Rodolphus looked like he might be about to throw up, but he only rose and made for the door. Once there, he paused.

"Has it occurred to you that she might be your strength as much as your weakness? That she might, in fact, be your last and best lieutenant?"

"And if she is? Would that make it better, or worse?" he asked curiously. He was genuinely interested to know.

Rodolphus pondered this. "Better, I think," he said thoughtfully. "I think I could reconcile that."

"Very wise of you." He lifted his glass. "To wisdom."

Rodolphus nodded. "Indeed," he said, and gently withdrew.

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He sat thoughtfully at Bellatrix's side.

It was not the first time that day. As always, something in him *constricted* at the sight of her sleeping like this; as always, his fingers twitched for a wand in response. She weakened him, simply by existing, and there was nothing he could do about it. His instinct was to smite her down, but he could not; to send her away, but he could not do that either.

"My damnable weakness and folly," he murmured, stroking back a stray lock of that wild black hair. "Everything about you is unwise."

Her eyelids fluttered open in the dimming light. They were wide and preternaturally dark, and they held his, seeing him, knowing him. Knowing him like she knew herself.

"You'd kill me if you could," she murmured. "Wouldn't you?"

"Yes," he agreed. It was pointless to deny it. "Why does that not frighten you?"

"Because if you *could* do it, you wouldn't need to."

He clenched his eyes tight at that. Merlin, how he *hated* the way she knew him so.

There was movement at his side, and he opened them again. She was kneeling up on the bed. Her forearm was stretched out before her, an offering. For all that she was naked in the fading light, she could have been a knight offering his sword.

"Let me show you," she whispered. "Let me show you all the ways I can help you be strong."



[Damnable 7: Benediction](#) by [deslea](#) on [deviantART](#).

"*Bella*," he began, huskily.

"*Please*," she said. "I am no one's but yours."

The things that swept over him were white-hot and unbearable, hunger and need and how he *hated* to need. He grasped her wrist and tugged her close by it, sinking angry, hungry lips to his mark on her, sucking, kneading. Devouring.

"*Oh*," she moaned. "Oh, my love."

"Fight with me," he rasped against her wrist. Let her, then, if she wished; perhaps she could serve some sensible purpose after all. And if she fell, then she could no longer weaken him. He would be free.

Somehow, she seemed to take them as words of love. Everything about her suddenly grew *soft*, and she reached for him. Tugged him down. Drawing him in as he surrendered to her, damn her, damn her.

Damn her to hell, and damn him for allowing her, as well.



[Damnable 8: Let Her, Then](#) by [deslea](#) on [deviantART](#).

END

## Author's Notes:

This story is based on [Perfect](#) by Gamma Orionis at Death Eater Fest 2013, in which Rodolphus suspects, and then finally knows for sure that he has lost his wife to the Dark Lord.

I have written Bellamort previously, each time working on the assumption that Voldemort deliberately entered the relationship with a reasonably calculated mindset, and some sort of rationally-driven self-serving motive (although also with a psychological motive of which he was not fully aware). However, Perfect came at it from a different direction: Voldemort seems to have been simply taken with Bellatrix, and found it difficult to keep away from her or cover his tracks effectively. I was a bit doubtful about the premise at first, but the author made it work, and I kept coming back to the idea. I began to wonder: What happens when an unnaturally self-controlled man, who despises love and human attachment, falls in love despite himself? What does that inner war look like? And it all went from there.

There are some blogs out there written by self-described sociopaths, attempting to make sense of their own place in the world. Some describe an experience of ravenous, possessive, highly sexualised longing for a person, which they consider their equivalent of love. You could argue whether or not they're genuinely sociopathic, as part of the clinical definition of a sociopath is an inability to love, and you could also argue whether or not this is actually love, too. But that was the experience and mindset I drew on in building Voldemort's dilemma here.

One stylistic note: I deliberately avoided using any personal pronoun for Voldemort in describing himself here. I've never been convinced that he would see himself as anything but "he" - I don't believe he necessarily felt personal ownership and identification with either the Dark Lord or Lord Voldemort names, which are both basically honorifics used by others. Tom is probably a bit closer for this 1970ish Voldemort, but I didn't think he would use that either. So I settled for just "he." However, this made the interactions between him and Rodolphus a bit awkward to put together - I hope it wasn't too disconcerting to read.

Oh - and, not for the first time, I couldn't quite resist the temptation to shamelessly foreshadow the death of Voldemort's "last and best lieutenant." What can I say, I'm a sucker for that particular line.