

The Wicked One

By Chris Minton

She closed the door and, through the peep hole, watched him walk down the hall to the elevator as his semen leaked from between her legs and pooled in her underpants. As soon as he had disappeared from sight, she pressed her forehead against the door and began to quietly cry. From behind her came a familiar voice.

“I thought he’d never leave.”

She began to cry harder.

“Now, now. Come have a seat with me.”

She shook her head, flinging tears on the threadbare carpet below.

“That’s not nice after all I’ve done for you.”

“Leave me alone,” she croaked. The words felt distant and translucent, as if uttered by someone else and intended for an age long since passed. They scattered helplessly on the floor around her.

“You don’t really mean that. I can tell.”

Her knees gave out under the weight of the truth and she crumpled to the floor. Minutes passed, the only sound – low and guttural, dripping with shame and disease – emanated from the place within her where memories are permanently and unforgivingly emblazoned.

“I’m waiting.”

She lay there for several minutes longer before crawling over to the table and pulling herself up. Both the chair and its occupant rocked unsteadily under the weight of the dull apartment. She looked around the tiny chamber, remembering the road that led her to it.

“Why won’t you look at me?”

Fresh tears popped in the stillness. “I don’t want you here.”

“But you’re the one who invited me.”

“Yes, but....” Her voice trailed off, losing its conviction and energy.

“You’re having second thoughts, is that it?”

She nodded, still looking away.

“I understand.”

Time passed. She stared at the exhausted clock on the wall, its hands - frozen since her arrival three months earlier - mocking her like everything else in the stillborn environment.

“Let me help you. That’s why I’m here.”

“But I’ve worked so hard.”

“Yes, you have. And I know it’s been hard since you’ve been here – trying to do the right thing and yet suffocating in this grimy and desolate prison day after day after day. All alone and with nothing really changing despite your efforts.”

She turned and faced the table. “Don’t you try to soothe me,” she hissed. “You’re the reason I’m in this shit hole in the first place.”

“You may want to reconsider that. In fact, I think you have it backwards. It’s been so hard for you here because of my absence. But I’m present now and I want to help. Let me.”

“No,” she whispered. “It was a mistake bringing you here.”

“How so?”

A strangled sob left her. “Look at what I just did for you. I prostituted myself. Again.” Her cries gained traction, the aching in her heart escaping one short breath at a time.

“That’s...not...who...I...want...to...be.”

“Such pain you feel. I can make it all go away. Let me take it from you.”

“I can’t.” The words seeped from her like a prayer, solemn and searching – a mixture of certainty and uncertainty, at once hopeful and hopeless. “I can’t.”

“But why? It’s so easy.”

“You know this is my last chance. The judge said so. I’ve lost so much and I don’t want to lose Alex forever. If I do this, I’ll go away and never see that precious little boy again. I couldn’t live with myself.”

“Listen, the world is full of last chances. Besides, that judge seemed kindly. He doesn’t want to see you suffer. Surely he’ll understand after seeing how strong and faithful you’ve been. No one should be subjected to such constant pain.”

She nodded and buried her head in her hands. “It won’t go away.”

“I know. But that can change right now.”

Her face wore the torment of man, of struggles as old as time. “It’s so hard.”

“It is. It’s hard for you. And for them. It’s difficult for others to understand. They don’t know what we know. If they could only feel it for themselves.”

“Yes.”

“If they could only grasp how it stills the restlessness.”

“Yes.”

“If they could only experience the relief from pain and anguish.”

“Yes.”

“If they knew just how much easier it becomes to interact with the world, they wouldn’t judge it so.”

She knew these things to be true and felt something break inside – a violent wrenching so painful that it didn’t hurt. Her world narrowed to the size of the end of a needle and yet it had the expanse of an ocean. On it, two life preservers appeared. Both rocked gently on the water, beckoning. She wondered who had thrown them and which one to reach for. She knew the choice was momentous. It was, she recognized, a matter of life and death.

She closed her eyes and chose.

“Good. Very good.”

Without expression or thought, her hands began to move. She placed the heroin in the spoon and added water. She lit a candle. One hand held the spoon over the flame while the other stirred the contents slowly, carefully. After a minute, she set the spoon down and picked up a syringe. She placed the needle in the mixture and began to slowly pull back the plunger. Then, in one easy motion, she introduced the needle to her vein and pushed, the contents spilling out and filling her dead black soul.