

CHAPTER ONE

I meandered along the edge of the cobblestone street. Red light tainted the sky; dark wisps of clouds swirled above. The dormant air hung between ancient buildings that morphed to keep up with modern styles on earth.

Activity flourished in the shadows. Lesser demons skirted the edges of the world. Angry, nervous energy filled their movements. Their transitions fraught with pain and challenge, catching me would lessen the burden on their tormented souls.

Gripping the handle of the guitar case tighter, my pace quickened. It wouldn't take long for the gadgets to come out and the world to see through my cleverly crafted guise. I smiled. Nothing changed and those seeking power always found a way to muck up the fantastic plans I created, whether they intended to or not.

I stopped in front of the small house I claimed as my own. Thin lines of mortar between the black bricks glowed.

Protections lay behind the windows. Ancient spells I carried with me when they banished me from earth decorated my entryways.

Licking my lips, I glanced over my shoulder. The faint sounds of shifting wings and shuffling feet carried from distant locations while somehow sounding closer. I shuddered pulling my jacket tight around myself.

The protections wavered as I passed through them, solidifying when my feet hit the stairs. The door swung open in front of me. Lights flickered to life, flames dancing within the sconces lining the walls.

I drifted through the entryway, the door closing behind me. I veered left into the living room. Setting the guitar case on the rough green fabric of the couch, I let out a long sigh. Ancient magic shifted around me relaying information back to me. The source of my power veiled in the darkness I found myself buried within.

Laughing, I rubbed my eyes. Nothing chanced in the harsh landscape surrounding my home. Human souls warped and twisted into an army rumored to be mine but controlled by someone far darker, someone working with the man who put me in hell.

"Oh, isn't this precious?"

Jumping, I spun toward the doorway leading into the kitchen. He leaned against the wooden frame swirling a glass of red wine in his hand. A swamy grin plastered his face. The fine suit he insisted on wearing gave him a timeless feature, one I

appreciated more with its absence.

"Why are you here Bernard?"

He sipped the wine. "Just to check on you, my dear."

"Your concern is touching." I crossed my arms over my chest. "Might have been better if you'd shown it before we ended up here."

He shook his head sauntering toward me. "We were starting a revolution Lucy." His free hand slid around my waist. "Our youth made us impetuous."

"I suppose it did. Why did you really come?"

Sipping his wine, he chuckled. His thick earthy scent swirled around me. A tingle started in the pit of my stomach. I found myself falling into his blue eyes. Leaning toward him, my hand rested on his shoulder.

"I think you know why." He set the glass on the table, both hands sliding along my sides. "We need to get out of here."

"Where did the sudden urgency come from?"

He licked his lips, gaze diverting away from mine for a moment. Pain flickered across his face. "Arthur's enacting his overarching plan."

"Took him long enough." My hand slid along his shoulder, slipping into his short brown hair.

"I know."

He leaned closer, his breath falling against my cheek in a small, warm bursts. His lips brushed my cheek. Eons of feeling

traveled through the small action.

Questions lingered in the back of my mind. I blocked them out, calling them problems for later, wanting nothing more than to prolong the moments with him. His duties carried him far afield, while I found myself idle and dispossessed.

"We'll worry about it in the morning."

"Best plan I've heard yet."

His hands slid down my body, one settling on my lower back, the other sliding down to my knees. In a singular motion he lifted me off the floor cradling me against his chest. I rested my head against his shoulder feeling safe for the first time since I found out about the bounty.

He maneuvered through the small house to the bedroom. Stopping in front of the bed, he kissed my forehead. My fingers wrapped around his tie tugging the knot free. Letting the fabric hang from his neck, my fingers pushed buttons through the buttonholes revealing the tan skin beneath the white fabric.

He set me down on the plush comforter. His fingers slid beneath my shirt, sliding it up my body. Heart racing in my chest, my hand trailed away from his body as he pulled my shirt over my head. Lips grazed my neck, his fingers unfastening the white lace bra remaining against my skin.

Sitting topless before him I reached toward him again, almost uncertain if he was actually there. My hands collided with his shoulders. Slipping his jacket off him, I took his

shirt with it leaving his chest bare.

Scars from ancient battles populated his skin creating an intricate record of our violent history together. My lips grazed the long, thin line of raised flesh running from his right shoulder across his chest. He shivered beneath me, his hands pressing into hips. Neither of us wanted to admit how much we needed each other, or how much we missed each other.

His fingers shifted forward sliding along my belt before coming to rest on my buckle. He stared into my eyes. Glancing down, he worked my belt through the metal before unbuttoning my jeans.

He pushed the denim off my legs, his hands traveling in its wake. My breath caught in my chest. Heart racing, words rushed to queue turning into a jumble of well-meaning phrases. I longed for him in my loneliest moments, his soul completing mine in a way I would never be able to describe.

I stepped away from the pile of fabric surrounding my feet to stand before him. The space between us disappeared. His fingers slid along my thighs, transversing my hips to come to rest against my lower back. His lips grazed my shoulder.

"Luci." He murmured against my neck. "You know I would have come sooner if it was possible."

"I never should have left your side."

My hands slid across his chest exploring the rough flesh. The physical scars almost mirrored the ones decorating his soul.

He took on my corruption for me, letting his own soul become darker so mine might remain pure.

Sadness flashed across my mind blocking out the growing thrill of anticipation. His hands flowed across my curves settling against my rear. Lifting me off the floor, he deposited me onto the plush comforter.

"You had to go. They would have corrupted you too." He knelt in front of me, his head resting on my chest. "And that would have been far worse than anything else I've endured. You are still my shining star in the darkness of this perpetual night."

My fingers slid into his hair holding him against me. I kissed the top of his head. Guilt spread between us overtaking any sort of peace or happiness we might eek out.

"Come lay next to me."

He leaned back, staring into my eyes. His brow furrowed. "Is that all you want?"

"No." My hand drifted along his jaw, settling on his cheek. I leaned into him. My lips brushed his. "That's not all I want." I kissed him, desire overtaking me. "But now might not be the best time."

He grinned. "You're afraid you're going to do the thing, aren't you?" I licked my lips, eyes darting away from him. "You are." He laughed. "Luci, baby, it's okay. No one's going to find us tonight."

"They might."

He shook his head. "We won't do anything you don't want to." Standing, he crawled past me taking up the other half of my bed. Laying against the pillows, his arm stretched out toward me. "We never have."

Laying down, I settled against his shoulder. He arm wrapped around me. Strong fingers caressed my hips. My lips grazed his chest; contentment spread through me overtaking all the uncertainty building up in the back of my mind.

"Thank you Bernard."

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