

## First Lesson

”Can you even fight?”

Renatika watched as the lanky guy visibly squirmed at the question. He put his hands on his hips and leaned back in a not at all nonchalant but incredibly awkward-looking position, peering at her with one good and one scarred eye.

“Yeah,” he said, “Of course.”

“Okay, then show me,” she hopped to her feet and put up her fists, walked a few steps towards Lucifer.

Slightly hesitating, he put up his hands as well, his eyes constantly shifting from her face to her feet to her fists. He mimicked her stance as well as he could. When seemed content with his position, he sent her the dumbest of all the subtle smiles she had ever seen.

“Who taught you to fight? One of your servants?” She drew out the last word and took a step toward, the sight of Lucifer jerking back tugging at the corner of her mouth.

“No – ah! Whoa there – I taught myself, actually.” He waved his fists around a bit. They were large, looked heavy, but he didn’t know how to use them.

“Good, good,” she nodded, “If you’re going to hang out on the street, you need to teach yourself all kinds of stuff.”

“Yeah,” his face lit up for a moment. The way his eyebrows knitted together as he smiled made him look even younger than he probably was, “You gotta look out for yourself.”

“Sure. Look out,” Renatika said and punched him in the face.

He staggered back, long limbs flying, before crashing into the stone wall behind him. Renatika had to suppress a snigger, but allowed herself to grin widely while Lucifer crouched over and hid his face in his hands. His expression before the impact was the most satisfying thing she had seen all day.

“Oh my gods—“

“You don’t know how to fucking fight, you piece of trash.”

He made some incomprehensible sound from behind his crooked hands. “I think you broke my damn nose.”

She scoffed at him, “I’m sure I didn’t. Come here, let me see.”

As she took a step forward, Lucifer jerked back once more, nearly slamming his head into the wall anew. He raised a hand in warning, hissing at her to stay away from him. Blotches of red decorated his outstretched palm. She cocked her head to get a better look at his half-hidden face; the gory mess did look somewhat distorted.

“Geez, fine,” Raising her own palms, she turned halfway around and retreated from the cowering figure, “I was just trying to help. Maybe next time you get in a fight, you’ll suck less. Not getting hit helps a lot.”

In reply, he shot her a glare, “I’ll keep that in mind, thanks. Maybe people are right when they say not to trust foxes.”

“Yeah, well.” She sat down again, crossed her arms over her knees and rested her chin on them, “Maybe they’re right about orphans sucking at everything, too.”

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The Foxhound was so named because while he belonged to the family of Dog, he made his living doing odd jobs around the city like a common fox. Furthermore, it was told he preyed on young foxes, although Renatika never figured out exactly what that was supposed to imply. She had no idea where he was now, but back then, he seemed to be everywhere. He was the first person she met when she first came to town at the age of twelve, and he appeared as the embodiment of her new home. Not only was he as dirty and smelly as it, but he was just as unpredictable, as well.

She found him – or he found her, perhaps – on her first day in the city. He was lying on the soft fabric canopy of a closed market stand, eating his way through a sack of apples. When she offered him what little coins she had in exchange for an apple, he threw her one free of charge and jumped down.

“Gosh, kid,” He inspected her, bobbing his head up and down so that his scraggly, blonde hair swayed wildly, “Can you even fight?”

She chewed a bite of apple carefully before swallowing it and answered, “Yeah.”

“Alright, pup, show me your moves. Curl your fists and put ‘em up. No, come now, higher up with the right one.”

“I know how to do this,” Renatika said, having placed her apples on the ground and now shifting her weight from one foot to the other, “My father showed me.”

“If you say so – show me some punches, then.”

She did, aiming for the highest point on his stomach that she could reach. The Foxhound dodged lithely, and Renatika felt the weight of her fist pulling her forward sharply as it flew into empty space. The counterattack came immediately. His rugged fist hit her squarely in the nose.

She barely felt the pain of falling backwards onto her back for the throbbing in her face. *Oh gods*, she thought as she clutched her hands to it, *I can't feel my nose. He punched my nose straight off.*

“See! See!” she heard the Foxhound screech excitedly, “I told you to put it up higher. I told you to.”

“I’m bleeding, you jerk!”

He grabbed her wrist almost gently and pulled her to her feet, “Oh, I’m sure you’re not, let me see.”

Wincing, she allowed him to pry her hands off her face and examine her, holding her hand in one hand and roughly poking her nose with a thumb. She watched his dirt-stained face through squinted eyes and budding tears, and before she knew it, her head was jerked to the side and she was hiding her face in her hands again.

“Ow! You punched me again!!”

His voice was so loud that she could hear it clearly even through the ringing in her ears, “You’re damn right, I did! That’s the first lesson, pup; don’t trust anyone. You’re a *fox*, you hear? Nobody is going to trust you, so don’t go around doing any favours that won’t be returned.”

She removed one hand and glanced at it. No blood, thankfully.

“You can keep the apples,” his voice was fainter now; he must be moving away, “Though you might want to scoop them up before a rat grabs them. And I mean the actual animal, not those nosy human bastards.”

She kept listening, but the Foxhound spoke no more. When she finally opened her eyes fully, both he and one of the apples were gone. She scooped up the remaining one as quickly as she could.

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Lucifer was still there, slouched up against the wall and holding his nose when she came back ten minutes later. She would have been surprised if he hadn't been; his face and shirt were covered in blood, and even if he had dared walk through the bad part of town in that state, his family likely wouldn't welcome him looking like some sort of criminal. Earlier, he had pointed out that his parents were somewhat stricter with their adoptive son than his siblings. Renatika had no reason to doubt that statement.

His eyes flickered up as she neared, but the alertness died as soon as he saw who was approaching, and he went back to staring into his hand.

"Here," she dropped a piece of cloth into his lap. It wasn't exactly clean, but Lucifer didn't exactly have many other options. "You might want to fix yourself up before eating. This food may not be the best of the best, but blood isn't going to improve its taste, either."

With a somewhat confused expression, he picked up the cloth and only now noticed the bowl of gruel Renatika had brought along. She squatted down and handed Lucifer one of the spoons she had brought. He took it cautiously, once he had dried off his face.

"You're not going to last long if you go around letting people punch you in the face, you know."

He gave a sharp, annoyed exhale and stuffed a spoonful in his mouth instead of replying.

"... does this have apples in it?"

"Yeah," Renatika answered, "You can have those. I don't like apples much."