

## Reunion

At the age of thirty, his hairline had retracted slightly, and he had lost some of the awkward lankiness that so often haunted boys who were about to become men; but besides this, Lucifer looked himself. Red haired, annoyingly tall, and in his eyes that mixed look of angst and stupid optimism was ever present. No matter how distorted his face became by broken noses and scars, there was always that unwavering look of hope in his eyes, a look that often made Renatika want to punch him to make it go away. But today, she didn't. It was sort of nice to see it again – after nine years she had come to almost miss it.

In the landscape behind them Lucifer's castle rose up like a dark mountain amidst green foliage and white pillars of trees. The sound of crow's caws resonated like a weak echo somewhere high above them. It was the first time she set foot in its convoluted hallways, but in many ways the castle reminded her of a smaller version of Lucifer's childhood home, which she knew all too well. In other words, it wasn't a place she considered appropriate for Lucifer to live. Too dark. Lucifer was used to darkness, but there was a light in him that Renatika feared would extinguish sooner or later in that environment.

"So, I hear you got married," She was a few steps ahead of him as they descended the slope, following a small path through the hillsides down to the ocean. "To some fish girl."

"You did?" There was a slight irresoluteness in his voice, but she didn't bother turning around to see if the look on his face matched.

"Well. You heard correctly," he said, "But too late, I'm afraid; she died five years ago."

Renatika didn't answer.

After a short silence, Lucifer continued, "How about you? Any exciting affairs?"

"You know I don't bother with that sort of thing."

"No one? There hasn't been even one young lad or maiden who've been swept off their feet by your story telling? No warriors or highborns so charmed that they couldn't resist you?"

"None."

"So nobody but me," A slight smile breached his lips.

"There weren't even you, Lucifer."

The ocean lay before them. As they topped a hill, its blue vastness revealed itself and greeted them with the sound of waves roaring and seagulls shrieking. And the unmistakable smell of rotten seaweed.

"I hate the ocean," Renatika muttered.

“I know,” Lucifer shrugged, smiling only slightly less than before, “I’ve grown rather fond of it myself, actually.”

For a moment she regarded him, then plunged her walking staff into the soil and leaned on it heavily, her eyes still fixed on his crooked nose.

“How did she die?”

It took him a moment to understand the question. Or maybe he was considering whether or not he wanted to answer.

“Childbirth.”

“And the kid?” she asked.

“Died, too.”

There was silence for a moment.

“It was a girl,” he added.

“Shame,” she said, moving her gaze to the ocean, “Fatherhood seems appropriate for you.”

Lucifer mumbled something intelligible and shuffled his feet, kicking small stones down the steep hillside and into the ocean below, “We used to go down here all the time, her and I. My wife, that is. We went at least once every day, even while she was pregnant.”

“Makes sense,” Renatika had joined him in kicking stones into the water, using the good leg to kick and the staff to support the bad one, “She was from the family of the fish, she must have spent her entire life on a boat. I’m surprised she was willing to marry a landlubber like you; just sitting around in a dark castle day in and day out. Can you even swim?”

Ignoring the thinly veiled insult, he continued, “When she died, our families were at each other’s throats about what to do with the body.

“My parents wanted to follow our own family tradition and feed her to the crows and ravens of the castle, so that her mind might become one with theirs and she could watch over us through their eyes.

“But her parents were disgusted by that idea. They wanted her to join her ancestors by being thrown in the ocean, allowing her soul to return to the water. The claimed that if we didn’t, the sea would become vengeful and eat away the land our castle stands on.”

Renatika tried to imagine the ground under her feet being dissolved and swallowed by merciless waves, “That’s what you get for interbreeding, I guess.”

“After a week of fighting,” Lucifer continued, “I had had enough. I went to the crypt where her body lay, cut off her head and threw it in the ocean, after which I left her body for the crows and ravens to eat.”

She stopped kicking at stones and turned her head towards him, trying not to grin in amazement, “How did they like that solution?”

Lucifer looked back at her, with a weird, narrow-eyed look on his face, “They told me I had gotten it wrong. The mind is in the head, and the soul in the heart.”

They looked at each other for a moment, and then both burst out laughing.