Prologue - Raum

The night air was chilly as I hovered about ten feet over a Parisian cemetery. The feeling in the pit of my stomach told me this was the right place and I pulled in my wings. I had a moment of free-falling, then I landed, bending one knee down and putting my right hand on the ground for balance. The silver fog that had coated the cemetery danced around me, disturbed by my presence.

            I stood, brushed the dirt off and began to walk. I did not have time to look around. The summons that Lucifer had placed on me did not allow for sight-seeing. Not that there was anything remotely interesting about this place. There was no one of importance here and once you have seen a cemetery, you have seen them all. Humans did not have the intellect to create beautiful things. They only knew how to copy one another or destroy.

            The summoning guided my feet to the large, marble mausoleum of a long dead priest. I smirked at the irony as I pushed in the door.

            I walked around the stone coffin to the back wall and knocked six times. The wall disappeared immediately, revealing a stone staircase that led down. There were no torches and I did not think it wise to step into the darkness. I was not sure why Lucifer was summoning me, but these summons usually did not bode well.

 “Eldur,” I whispered, holding out my right hand, palm up. A tiny flame appeared in the center of my palm and I willed it to life. It grew until I deemed it the appropriate amount of light.

            I began my descent, keeping the light out in front of me so that I could see more. I felt naked at my back, but there was nothing I could really do about it except keep my ears open. Ten minutes went by before I came to the end of the stairs. I quickly glanced around and inwardly flinched. Both walls on either side of the hallway were lined with shelves. And upon those shelves were bones upon bones. I was in one of the many tunnels of the Catacombs. This was definitely not good.

            I let my feet guide me while my mind went through each scenario that could potentially play out. The outcomes were not in my favor. Everyone in Lucifer’s army knew that the Catacombs was his favorite place of torture. Anyone that had even slightly defied him ended up here. After a millennia of seeing what happened in this godforsaken place, I had made it my mission to never be summoned here.

            Yet, here I was. And for the life of me, I could not understand why. I, who was Lucifer’s most loyal subject. What on earth could I have done to deserve this? What had I done to displease my lord?

            I came to an abrupt halt at a door that was no more than a boulder shoved in front of a hole. It would have been imperceptible to mere humans, but I could feel the air coming and going through what little space there was between the door and the wall. With my free hand, I gave the boulder a little push. I narrowed my eyes at the hole. It was too small for me to walk through. I would have to crawl.

I pulled my lips back into a snarl. I could only assume that this tunnel led straight to Lucifer. Which meant that I would appear before him on my hands and knees. Such a pathetic and servantile position. I knew that this route was picked on purpose. A very subtle reminder of Lucifer’s power over his subjects. Over me. I thought he was over such childish things, but it would seem that I was wrong. It would not be the first time where Lord Lucifer is concerned.

I felt a sharp pain in my stomach. I had lingered too long. I dropped to my knees, holding out my right hand. I could not crawl and hold my flame at the same time.

“Sveima áfram.” The flame departed from my hand and moved forward. I quickly followed.

I heard the boulder move back into place of its own accord and I was suddenly trapped. I did not have time to let my claustrophobia take hold, however. My light was moving on without me and I did not want to waste my breath on telling it to wait. The only downside to magic is that it is extremely literal. I had only told it to go forward. I had not specified a speed or to move when I move. If I did not follow close behind, I would lose it.

As I moved forward, the tunnel grew more and more narrow. The top of my wings brushed the ceiling and I pulled them in tighter. And still the tunnel grew smaller. There was no doubt in my mind now that Lucifer had chosen this way specifically for me. He knew of my claustrophobia. He knew how this would affect me.

It was distinctly becoming harder to breathe, but I didn’t know if that was due to my own rising panic or an actual lack of oxygen.

The tunnel was so small now that I was crawling on my stomach. My clothes were catching on rocks and ripping. I was scrambling now, my panic completely taking over. I needed to get out of here. I couldn’t breathe. There was only one thought on my mind: ESCAPE!

I crawled as fast as I could, until the walls were hugging my body so tight that I could barely move. It wasn’t until I was on the verge of tears that I saw the exit. I watched my light go through a hole that I would barely fit through. Relief flooded through me. I was almost out. I was almost free.

I paused at the exit as fresh air flew into greet me. I sucked in a lungful, trying to regain my composure. I would not appear in front of Lord Lucifer looking as such. My clothes may have been in shreds, but I would not let my dignity be the same way. I took a few deep breaths and began my struggle through the hole.

I put my arms out first and instead of dirt, I found marble. Smooth marble. There was nothing to dig into. There was nothing I could use to pull myself out.

I bit my lip to keep from crying out in frustration. I clenched my hands into fists and pressed them as hard as I could into the marble floor. I pulled myself forward inch by inch until my head was free. I could not move my head to look around, but I felt the presence of my lord and a few of my brothers in arms. I could feel their eyes on me, watching me. But I knew none of them would help me. They had probably gone through their own trials to get here.

Getting my shoulders out would be the hardest part. They were wider than the hole and the addition of my wings did not help. I pulled my arms in as far as I could and pushed. Rocks and dirt fell all around me. I wiggled until my shoulders broke free.

I stretched out my wings, my muscles screaming in agony. I was able to pull the rest of me out rather quickly since I had created a bigger hole getting my shoulders out.

I stood as quickly as I dared, keeping my head down as I walked to join my brethren. It was an unspoken rule that you keep your head bowed until Lucifer spoke to you directly. Fallen angels must always remember their place.

“Raum, so happy that you could join us,” Lucifer said, his voice as silky and dark as ever.

I was finally able to look up and take in my surroundings. We were in a rather large cavern that had been turned into a ballroom like space. The walls were entirely made up of mirrors, from floor to ceiling. I was careful not to get a glimpse of myself. It was better that I did not know what I looked like at the moment. A single crystal chandelier hung from the ceiling, reflecting the firelight provided by the only light source in the room: candles. Hundreds of them littered the floor. A few candle sticks about six foot in height were scattered here and there. The marble that I had crawled in on was made to look like the night sky. As black as my wings with a dusting of stars. There was no furniture, except for the throne that Luficer sat upon.

The throne was made of the same crystal as the chandelier and a beauty to behold. The candlelight reflected off of it, creating rainbows on the floor. However, its beauty could not compare to the angel that occupied it.

Lucifer lounged on his throne, much like a cat, wearing nothing but painted on leather pants. His left leg was bent, leaning against the back. His right leg was stretched over the right arm rest, bouncing up and down to a rhythm that only he could hear. His left arm was carefully posed on his stomach and his hand played against the hard muscles that adorned it. His head was propped up by his right hand, his golden hair falling like a waterfall behind him.

His full lips were upturned into a cat-that-got-the-canary smile. It was a smile that promised wonderful and dark things. I did not trust it in the slightest. His nose was the inspiration for many ancient Roman statues. Finally, I looked into his piercing blue eyes. Cold and hard like ice. I could not fathom any emotion from them. His lips may have been smiling, but there was nothing in his eyes. He was the epitome of beauty and his fall had not tarnished it. It was hard to look upon him for very long, but I made myself do it. Just a bit of defiance on my part.

A single eyebrow quirked up and I realized that I had made a faux pas. While I had been taking in his appearance, I had forgotten to greet him.

I bowed, keeping my eyes on him like the humans did while they played at martial arts.

“Greetings, my Lord Lucifer. I, your humble servant Raum, am at your disposal,” I said, using the proper words.

A flicker of amusement passed through his eyes so quickly that I might have been seeing things. “Raum, would you be a dear and put your flame out of its misery?” He made a nonchalant gesture with his hand toward the area I had come from. I looked over to find my ball of flame bouncing off a mirror, still trying to move forward.

I stretched out my right hand, forcing my will onto the fire. I clenched my hand into a fist and the fire went out.

“Good,” Lucifer purred. “We can now discuss why I have summoned all of you here. I will be as quick as possible because I want this done as quickly as possible. If there is even the slightest distraction, I will throw the guilty into the Pit. Are we clear?”

I quickly glanced to my left and counted nine of my brothers. I could safely assume that we were not here to be tortured. I let myself feel a glimmer of relief. However, the threat of the Pit caused a tiny bit of alarm. There was no telling what Lucifer would count as a distraction. It would be best to stay as absolutely still as possible. The Pit was the worst imaginable form of punishment. There were whispers of unspeakable horrors, but no one was certain for no one ever returned once damned to the Pit. And for Lucifer to even mention it meant that whatever he wanted done was of extreme importance.

Lucifer sat up straight in his throne, placing his hands on his knees. “It has come to my attention that I have an heir to my kingdom. A daughter. As you are aware, I have had many offspring, but none that were compatible. I have waited many lifetimes for this moment. You are my most loyal subjects and have been chosen thus so. Now, your purpose is to find my daughter, the most beloved of my line, and bring her to me. Whoever reunites us will have her hand in marriage. I do not believe I need to tell you what that means.”

“Now, you may be wondering how you are to find her when she could be anyone and anywhere. Her mother has gone through great lengths to hide her from me and pinpointing her exact location has proven to be most difficult. I can tell you that she is in the southern United States, but that is all. As for discovering her identity, it will be quite easy. She will smell like me. As I understand it, the spell binding my scent within her has weakened as she grew. The scent may be weak, but if you claim to love me as you do, you will have no trouble recognizing it. But heed this warning, if you bring her to me against her will, the deal is forfeit. You are dismissed.”

I could feel the tension in the room as one of the mirrors swung inward to reveal a spiral staircase. One by one, we began to leave. There would be no discussion of what our lord had told us. We had our orders. Once we left this room, we would no longer be brothers, but enemies, competing for the ultimate prize: the key to Lucifer’s kingdom.

As I reached the opening, I paused as I heard my lord’s voice in my head. “*Raum, most beloved of my subjects, my daughter is in Dallas and works at a company called Perfect Homes. And that is the extent of my knowledge. The rest is up to you*.”

“*My lord, I do not believe you are playing fair*,” I responded, trying to keep the smirk that was threatening to spread at bay.

“*My dear Raum, when have you ever known the devil to play fair*?” and I left to the sound of my lord’s laughter ringing in my head.

Chapter One – Lucy

“Hey, did you hear about the new guy?”

“Hngh?” I asked, trying to talk around my mouthful of burrito.

“I said, did – you – hear – about – the – new – guy?” Maribel asked again, enunciating each word to make sure I heard her.

I gave her a dirty look as I swallowed my food. She just quirked an eyebrow and waited for me to answer the question.

“No, what about him?” I asked before taking another huge bite of yumminess. Maribel and I were on our lunch break. This week was my turn to choose where we ate out so I had chosen Chipotle. I had been craving it for quite a while and now I was wiggling in my seat in pure joy. It was so delicious.

“He’s supposed to be hot with a capital H…and single,” she said, giving me a mischievous smile. She tilted her head to the side and winked. Her curly locks of red fire danced around her face with a life of their own as she moved. It made her emerald green eyes stand out and milky white skin gleam. She had certainly inherited the luck of the Irish.

I frowned at her. “But you’re married. Happily married.”

She rolled her eyes at me. “Yes, I am. But you, oh dense one, are not. You are as free as a bird. And I, for one, think that you should take this chance. You know, before your ovaries dry up and you become a crazy cat lady.”

I flicked a piece of black beans that had fallen out of the burrito at her. She dodged it and it landed in the hood of the jacket of the guy sitting behind her. I felt the blush spread across my cheeks and glanced around to see if anyone had noticed. Everyone seemed to be caught up in their own lives so I assumed I was safe. I looked back at Maribel and her body was shaking in silent laughter, tears threatening to fall down her cheeks.

I glared at her. “Shut up! And I’m only twenty-four. I don’t think my ovaries are going to dry up anytime soon. Why do you insist that I go after every single guy that we meet? I’m perfectly happy with the way things are now.”

Maribel wiped the tears from her eyes as she composed herself. “Because, love, I want you to be over the moon happy. Right now, you’re just plain old happy. You don’t know what you’re miss~ssing,” she half-sang as she gathered up her trash. I did the same and we walked over to the trash can together. “But seriously, Lucy, you need to put yourself out there. I know Sean put you through the ringer, but just because he’s an asshole doesn’t mean that everyone else will be. It’s been a year. It’s time for you to move one and have some fun again.”

I frowned at her back as I followed her out the door and into the frigid Texas winter air. I pulled my coat in tighter around me as we were blasted with a gust of wind. I kept my head down as we walked to her car, thinking about what she said.

It was true that I hadn’t really done much with my social life since Sean broke up with me. Most nights I stayed home and binge watched seasons of shows on Netflix with my two cats. I had gotten into the habit of not really doing much with my appearance either. I didn’t wear makeup and I barely did anything with my hair. Most of the time it was just in a ponytail.

It had been really hard for me after the break-up. Sean had been my first real love and I thought we were going to make it all the way. I even let him have my precious virginity because I thought he would be my forever one, but a few months after I had given him my mind, body and soul, he said that he didn’t want to be with me anymore. He said that he had just woken up that morning and didn’t feel the same way about me like he used to. Well, I came to find out that he had gotten his secretary pregnant. It was such a cliché. I had gone to very dark places after that and was just now getting back into some form of normalcy. Did I really want to jeopardize my hard won happiness just to *maybe* find love? The answer was no, but I could also admit to myself that I was very lonely. Maybe it wouldn’t be so bad to at least have some company, even if it didn’t lead to romance.

Once we were in the car, I turned to Maribel. “Okay. I will ask him out on one date. Just one,” I told her firmly before she started getting any ideas. “If nothing happens, then you will drop this insane quest to find me a husband. If the date goes great, then we’ll see. Do we have a deal?”

Maribel looked like she wanted to argue, but she kept her mouth shut. She finally nodded and we were off back to work.

“What if he doesn’t even agree to go on the date? What then?” I asked after a few minutes of comfortable silence. It’s not that I wasn’t confident, but, like I said before, I had let myself go after Sean broke up with me. I’d put on about thirty pounds from all the late night ice cream binges. Not to mention the no makeup/hair policy I had going on at the moment. I looked okay (average, rather), but there were definitely prettier single women in the office than me. They probably had more of a shot than I did.

“Then he’s an idiot. You look wonderful,” Maribel said, knowing what I was thinking as she so often did.

“Meh,” I replied.

“Don’t even start that with me, Lucille Miller. You know better than that” she chided as she pulled into her parking spot.

I rolled my eyes and braced myself for the cold. Thankfully, Maribel’s parking spot was right next to the front door. I guess that’s what happens when your father is CEO of the company.

Maribel and I work at a company in Dallas that sales insulation material. It’s not necessarily a big company, but it’s growing. As it is now, we’re only allowed one floor of our mother company, which sales all household needs. Basically each floor is a smaller company that sales different items needed to make a home perfect, hence the name Perfect Homes.

  My work isn’t very lucrative. Just book all of our customer’s orders and make sure not to put in the wrong number. The girl that used to have my job once put in 1,000 units of insulation instead of 100. She did not last very long after that.

I can’t really blame her for her mistake though. After doing the same thing over and over and over again for eight hours straight, your eyes tend to start seeing things. Like thinking there’s an extra 0 for instance.

“Are you ready to go back in?” Maribel asked, hand already reaching for the keys. I made a face at her and reluctantly pushed open the door. Biting wind instantly swooped in, making my ears hurt. I hurriedly got out and slammed the door shut, running to the revolving door. I didn’t really care if Maribel was right behind me or not. Ain’t nobody gonna make me stay out there longer than I have to.

A wave of heat met me as I entered the building. I shivered, chills racing up and down my spine as my body responded to the change in temperature. I seriously hate the cold. My body doesn’t handle it very well. That’s why I want to stay in the south for as long as I live. I’m pretty sure I would freeze to death if I moved up north where it actually snowed. I’ll take the muddy slush over snow any day.

Maribel was seconds behind me, grinning from ear to ear. I gave her a dirty look and dared her to say something. She didn’t even bother trying not to laugh. The random people around us looked our way curiously. A blush spread across my face as I stomped my way toward the elevator, Maribel still laughing loudly behind me. I’m glad she could find amusement in my suffering.

“Come now. Don’t be like that,” she chided as I poked the button for the sixth floor a bit harder than necessary.

“Like what?”

“So gosh darn cute,” she answered, patting my head like she would a child. I swatted her hand away.

“I’m not cute,” I grumbled, but only halfheartedly. There was no arguing with her on that point. I would always be cute to her, no matter what I said.

As the elevator doors opened, we were greeted by the familiar sounds of our co-workers talking, whether they were on the phone with customers or amongst each other.

Our office isn’t much to talk about it. It is super small. We only have twenty cubicles all together. And those cubicles aren’t really cubicles. Picture two long desks with five chairs on each side. For each chair, there is a three-sided cloth separator attached to the desk. In that created space, there is a computer, two monitors and a landline phone. There’s just enough room leftover for a personal mug for the coffee that we all need to drink to get through the day. My mug has a unicorn standing in front of a rainbow depicted on it. Be jealous.

I walked with Maribel to her desk before heading to mine. As I was passing my supervisor’s office, the door opened and the most beautiful man I had ever seen stepped out. If this was the guy I was supposed to ask out, Maribel could just forget about it. There was no way in hell I was anywhere near this man’s league.

He was tall, but I couldn’t say for sure how tall. Being short at five foot three, anybody that was five foot five or taller towered over me. He was dressed in a simple black suit, tailored to every inch of his body. I could practically see the muscles in his arms and chest. At his neck hung a silk tie that was a glowing shade of red.

I saved his face for last. One, I knew it would be worth the wait. Two, I always have had problems looking people directly in the face.

His skin was sun-kissed and it was the kind of color that would never go away. He would never be pale like me. His eyes were gray, like storm clouds over a troubled sea. They were framed by thick long lashes that were as black as the hair on his head. It was the same shade of black as a raven’s feathers. I just knew that in certain lights, his hair would look blue.

His nose sat perfectly in the center of his face, but I’m not really a nose person. I don’t usually go around describing people’s noses. I’m not really sure if anyone does.

I stole a quick glance at his lips. They were somewhat thin, but still very kissable. I looked away quickly and decided to study his tie pattern. Were those little devils hidden in all that color?

“Oh, Lucy, there you are. We were just coming to find you. This is Raum, our newest employee. Raum, this is Lucy. She’s the one who will be training you for the next seven days,” Ethan said, coming up from behind the new guy. I gave him a pained smile. I hadn’t been expecting to have to train him. How was I supposed to train him and ask him out? This did not seem like it would end well.

Raum held out his hand and I reluctantly shook it. My hand looked ghostly pale compared to his and I couldn’t help but notice how hot (temperature-wise) he was. It felt like I had stuck my hand near an open flame.

When I tried to take my hand back, his fingers tightened around mine. Not hurting, but it was enough to let me know that I didn’t want to fight him on it.

I frowned up at him as he brought my now upturned wrist to his nose. He gently laid a kiss on my wrist, inhaling as he did so. It sent a shiver of pleasure down my spine, which I tried to hide by awkwardly shuffling my feet.

He gave me a genuinely triumphant smile. I didn’t really understand that smile, but I didn’t really care. I just wanted my hand back.

I jerked my hand away, stumbling a bit because I had used too much force. I had the distinct feeling, though, that I was free only because he allowed it. Had it been his desire, he could have held me there forever.

I glared up at him, fighting the urge to rub my hand on my slacks. I wasn’t going to show him how much he affected me.

“My apologies. That is how we greet one another where I am from. I am still getting use to America’s customs,” Raum said, his voice holding a slight European accent. Maybe Mediterranean. And might I just add that his voice was silky smooth. As if it was something tangible you could wrap around your body and slide over your skin.

“It’s okay. You just caught me by surprise, is all. Now, if you’ll follow me…” I turned, giving Ethan a little wave to show him I’d take it from here.

I led Raum over to my little “cubicle.” Please feel free to overemphasize the word “little.” I pulled over a chair from the empty desk next to me and tried to put in somewhere where he could see both screens comfortably.

“This is cozy,” Raum said as he lounged in his seat. Yes, that’s right, lounged. He looked utterly comfortable, but I guess he was just one of those people. You know, the ones who can adapt to any situation, especially social ones. These are the kind of people who could fit in anywhere and I mean anywhere.

“Yeah, sorry about the lack of space. Luckily we only have to do this for a week. This job is really easy,” I explained as I booted up my computer. I’d complained to Ethan that there was no reason to completely shut down the computer when we left for lunch. All we would have to do is lock it, but he put his foot down. Whatever. The computers were old and took a few minutes to turn on which means less work time for me.

For the next four hours, I taught him how to do my (sorry, *our*) job. There really wasn’t much to it. Just clicking the mouse over and over and over. Sometimes, I even got to type in a few numbers. It probably would only take him a day or two to get the hang of it, but due to company policy, training of new employees MUST last at least a week.

“So, what are you doing after work?

I paused, not sure if this was an invitation or if he was merely curious as to what I planned on doing after I left. I decided to ere on the side of caution and answer as if he meant the latter.

“I’m going to go home, cuddle with my cats and watch another season of “Supernatural” on Netflix. Are you a fan of “Supernatural” by any chance?” I asked, sincerely curious as “Supernatural” was my current favorite T.V. show of all time.

“I am, actually. Who is your favorite character?” Raum replied, patiently waiting as I put layer after layer of my winter protection on.

“Mfffeeeal,” I said, my voiced distorted by my scarf. I pulled it down, mentally reprimanding it for getting in my way.

“Gabriel,” I clarified, starting to walk toward the elevator. I caught Maribel’s eye and she gave me a conspiratorial wink before vanishing into the crowd of our colleagues. I rolled my eyes. Could she be any more obvious?

“Gabriel? That is an interesting choice. My favorite character is Azazel,” he told me as we reached the elevators. I pushed the button for down and the elevator hummed, letting me know that it was coming.

“Azazel, really? After all that’s happened since Azazel last appeared, he’s still your favorite?” I asked, giving him an incredulous look. There were so many awesome characters to like and he chose Azazel. Not that Azazel isn’t a great character in his own right, but there were just so many cooler characters in “Supernatural” to choose from. But I could just be biased.

“Yes, really. I think that, out of all the villains Dean and Sam have faced, Azazel was the best one. I mean, their connection was really personal and it made the storyline great. In my opinion, all of the big bads afterwards were subpar,” Raum told me, gesturing for me to get onto the elevator first as the doors opened.

The elevator was already packed, but we managed to squeeze ourselves in. I took a deep calming breath as the doors slid shut. Did I forget to mention that I’m a tad bit claustrophobic?

Raum had stopped talking me as soon as we had gotten on. Worried, I stole a glance at him. His face had been drained of all color and his entire body was rigid. He didn’t seem to be breathing either. Was he claustrophobic too?

“Try taking deep breaths. It helps,” I whispered, not sure he could hear me, but I didn’t want to put him on the spot either.

His eyes met mine and I watched as he took a deep, shuddering breath. There was something incredibly intimate about that moment. I don’t know if it was because we were so close together or because we were sharing one our deepest rooted fears, but suddenly all I wanted in my life was to be with this man. Physically, emotionally, it didn’t matter. I just needed to be with him.

Then the elevator dinged, the doors opened, and the moment was over.

\* \* \*

When I got home, Moose greeted me at the door like he always did. He’s a beautiful white Persian with these big blue eyes. And super fluffy, which was great, until you notice that everything you own is covered in white fur and it’s a forever kind of thing.

He rubbed himself against my VERY black slacks, leaving a trail of white hair in his wake.

“Hello to you too. Where’s Squirrel?”

As if on cue, I heard a forlorn meow come from my bedroom. I sighed. I guess he was in one of his “oh poor me” moods. Putting my keys, purse, scarf, hat and gloves on the kitchen counter, I walked the five feet it took me to get to my bedroom.

I flipped the switch and waited for my eyes to adjust. Searching the room, I found Squirrel on the window seat, curled into a sad little ball. He meowed again, looking at me pitifully with his bright green eyes.

I walked over to him, petting his silky black head. His purring started instantly, so quiet I could barely hear it.

I rolled my eyes and picked him up, cradling him to my chest. I carried him over to the bed and set him down. Moose jumped up and immediately started to cuddle with him. I smiled at my yin and yang kitties.

“Now, Squirrel, Moose is going to keep you company while I change into my pajamas. Can you be a good boy and wait for Mommy?”

With a meaningful glance at Squirrel that I’m sure was wasted on him, I kicked off my black pumps and padded over to my mahogany dresser. Bending down to the third drawer, I pulled out my Cookie Monster pajamas. The bottoms were fleece, decorated with chocolate chip cookies and Cookie Monster’s smiling face. The top was a simple cotton tank picture Cookie Monster eating a plateful of cookies.

Making sure that Squirrel was still okay with being with just Moose, I wandered into the attached bathroom, keeping the door open just in case Squirrel freaked out. Turning the light on, I looked into the mirror, taking in my disheveled appearance. I blushed, hoping that I hadn’t looked like that all day.

I went through most of my nightly routine as quickly as possible. Get changed, wash face. It took all of fifteen minutes.

Coming back out of the bathroom, I was greeted with an accusing meow. I frowned at Squirrel. “I didn’t even take that long.”

I climbed into bed, situating myself under the blankets. Propping the pillows up, I grabbed my laptop and leaned back. When I stopped moving, Squirrel moved until he was pressed as much against me as he comfortably could.

For the next couple of hours, I watched Netflix, occasionally getting up to get a snack. I tried not to eat heavily at dinner time. Mostly because when I did, my stomach was always upset in the morning.

When I started to fall asleep watching my show, I turned my laptop off and set it on the floor.

I flattened my pillows and turned onto my right side in the fetal position. Interlocking my fingers, I pulled my hands into my chest and prayed like I did every night.

*Dear God, please watch over my family and friends. Please keep them all safe. And, even though I’m not sure about dating again, please, at least, let Raum be interested in me. I can’t tell if he was or not. I mean, I guess you know if I’m ready. So, if I’m ready, then maybe Raum will be interested. If not, then maybe I’m not ready. Ugh. I don’t know. I’ll just leave it in your capable hands. So, anyways, thank you, I love you, and in Jesus’s name I pray. Amen.*

I drifted off to sleep, feeling warm and safe like I always did when I prayed. The last thing that I saw was a huge raven sitting on a branch just outside my window, feathers glowing blue in light of the street lamp. My last thought: *Go south, bird. Idgit.*

Chapter 2 – Raum

The frigid winter wind ruffled my feathers as I watched her sleep. Because I was Fallen, I could feel the chill in the air, but it didn't bother me. My body automatically adjusted to whatever temperature I was exposed to. I could have perched on this branch during a blizzard and it wouldn't affect me.

I needed to tell Lucifer that I found her, but not yet. I wanted to think about everything that had happened today first. I was feeling...something, in the pit of my stomach, but I did not understand it. It had started shortly after I met the girl, but why? I hadn't expected to find her so quickly. Or that her scent would be so strong.

The minute I touched my lips to her skin, it was like Lucifer's blood had erupted inside her. The scent, which smells strongly of the Fireball whiskey that the humans drink, had flared to life and threatened to choke me. She has much of Lucifer in her.

Speaking of which, her mother must have a wicked sense of humor or there is something very wrong with her. She has gone through great lengths to hide Lucifer's daughter from him...and yet, she named her Lucy. Perhaps the mother was still in love with the devil. Perhaps it was an homage. Or maybe she is very clever and did it to appease him if he ever found her. I did not know. Nor did I really care.

Lucy's job of choice was pathetically boring and easy. I could not help feel a bit of pity for her. I soon got over that when I remembered she was to inherit all of Hell someday. Which reminded me that if I took her to Lucifer, she would be my bride.

Is that when the feeling in my stomach started? Did it mean that I found her repulsive?

A cloud must have passed because the moon came out and gently lit up her face. I studied her features. Her hair was oily at the roots, but I knew that could be taken care of with shampoo. Her skin was white, made even paler by the moon. It was smooth and clear but for a few scars on both of her cheeks. I didn't mind the scars either. They gave her more character. After being around perfect Fallen for centuries, character was a breath of fresh air.

I knew from earlier today that her eyes were a peculiar shade of blue. They changed colors depending on the lighting. As such, I had seen them change from gray as storm clouds over the ocean to as blue as spring skies. There was also an oil spill in her left eye or, a more poetic way of saying it would be sand upon the shore. I knew it was called heterochromia and it was a mutation, but it was a rather intriguing one.

Now, with her eyes closed, I could see the length of her eyelashes. They rested prettily on top of her high cheekbones. I think it would be a fair deduction that her eyes were her best feature.

Her nose dipped at the end, giving off the impression that she was a generous and caring person. It also made her look incredibly sad. And perhaps she was. Nevertheless, one would call it a cute nose.

Her lips were pink, with her bottom lip being a bit fuller than her top lip. They were a nice pair of lips, but nothing special. At least they were natural. Not that she-demon that had someone how managed to become famous. I honestly didn't know why Lucifer let her run around like that. It must have benefitted him somehow.

Her hair fanned out around her head, almost as if it were placed that way for a photoshoot. It glowed pale yellow in the moonlight, but I knew it was really the color of gold, much like the pelt of a lion. However, it was almost a cheap imitation of Lucifer’s golden halo. Her mother’s human genes had seen to that.

Her body was completely covered by the blankets and she had been completely covered at the office so I still wasn't sure what it looked like, but I could assume that she had a fairly small frame. Perhaps a little chubby. But that was not something I cared for either.

So, perhaps I did not find her revolting. By human standards, she was pretty. I couldn't compare her to the other Fallen. They didn't have a spec of human in them and so they were perfectly perfect in every way. Angelic, even.

I inwardly snickered at my own joke. But sobered immediately. Why did I have this feeling?

Then it dawned on me that it started after Lucy had told me to breathe in the elevator. She had noticed my claustrophobia. How? How did she know? How had she seen what so few had before? She did not know me that well. How could a mere half human see through me that way? Perhaps I was completely disgusted with myself that I had someone let my guard down around her and she had seen my biggest weakness. Perhaps that was the feeling in the pit in my gut. I could not honestly think of anything else.

Now that I was satisfied that I had solved the mystery, it was time to “call” Lucifer. I closed my eyes and concentrated, sending my conscious down the metaphysical line that connected all of Lucifer’s Fallen to him.

It was a lot like walking down a long hallway in my mind. There were no decorations, although if I truly wished, I could conjure them up, but that would be a waste of power. At the end of the long hallway, was a large wooden door that not even the strongest battering ram could get through. This was the entrance to the fortress of Lucifer’s mind. The only way in was if he let you in.

I knocked, the sound reverberating through my skull and making my ears ring. I waited as patiently as I could, not really knowing how much time was passing. After what seemed like an eternity, the door swung open on its own.

I entered into an empty room and the door swung shut behind me. It was always an empty room. Now that I was completely in Lucifer’s mind, I had no control over anything. This was the only thing that Lucifer ever let his Fallen see of his mind. He never actually even wasted power appearing in this room.

*My dear Raum*, Lucifer purred through my mind. I sighed. Whatever he was doing involved him turning on his seductive side to the max. He wasn’t going to turn it down just to talk to me. It always made it that much harder to talk with him when all you wanted to do was taste him.

*My Lord, I have found your daughter.*

I felt him snap to attention. Then he pulled away abruptly, sending me on a crash course back into my own mind.

Almost losing my balance, I had to flap my wings to stay on my perch. I really didn’t like when he did that. But it’s not like I could complain.

Then I was suddenly whisked back to that empty room. However, this time it wasn’t empty. A large brick fireplace now occupied the room. In front of it sat two leather recliners on top of a bear rug. In one of the chairs sat Lucifer, holding a glass of what appeared to be red wine. Or the blood of his latest victim. One could never be too sure.

He was dressed in an Italian tailored suit that was such a deep red that it was almost black. Underneath was a crisp white shirt that was unbuttoned to show off his muscled chest. Even when there was no one to seduce, he only wore clothes that made you think he was a walking, talking sex toy.

*You have my full undivided attention, Raum. Now, tell me everything.* Even though we could see each other now, we would still talk mind to mind. Talking out loud would only give us headaches.

And so I told him everything. From our first meeting to my failed attempt to get her to join me after work to the elevator incident to following her home. But it was when I got to the part right before she fell asleep that I hesitated. I wasn’t sure how he would react, but I knew that with us connected as such, if he became angry, I was in for a world of pain.

Thus far, Lucifer had been listening quietly, only interjecting with a few questions here and there. He was soaking in every word that I was saying, but now that I stopped, his eyes narrowed and he leaned forward.

*Do not think of omitting anything. You know I will be able to tell.* And there it was. His first threat, a very subtle threat, but a threat nonetheless.

*She was praying to our Father before she fell asleep.*

Lucifer laughed, throwing his head back with his mouth wide open. It wasn’t that he found what I said funny. No, he was laughing at my fear.

*This is what you were afraid of telling me? Many humans pray, Raum. It is a very common practice. Why should my daughter be any different? Especially with her mother trying so very hard to hide her from me. Of course she would want her daughter to pray to the Almighty.* Lucifer still had a smile on his face. I steeled myself for what I was about to say. He would not be smiling much longer.

*That is not all, My Lord. Our Father sent one of our brothers to sit at her bedside and listen to her.*

Lucifer went still, like a snake about to strike and I could feel his anger beginning to awaken. I could hardly breathe, fear coursing through my body as my heart beat wildly in my chest.

*Which brother?* All the merriment of just seconds before was gone. All that was left was a cold emptiness. It was like looking into the black eyes of a Great White shark. There was no feeling, no soul, only death.

I could only look at him. The name was on the tip of my tongue, but I could not force it past my teeth.

*Do not make me ask again, Raum.* There was the second threat, the second strike. One more and I was out.

*Michael*. And even in my own mind it sounded like a whisper.

I shielded myself as much as I could, but the intensity of his rage ignited a fire in my veins. The pain was extreme. I couldn’t see. I couldn’t even catch enough breath to scream. And then it was over. The fire was gone.

I opened my eyes to find myself on the rug, curled into a small ball. I was drawing in one ragged breath after another. I wanted to cry, but I had already shown too much weakness to Lucifer. I would not let him see me cry as well.

*Pull yourself together, Raum. What did our highly esteemed brother say to you?* Lucifer asked, as if nothing had happened. As if he had not just lost his temper as well. If anybody needed to pull themselves together, it was him.

*Nothing. He knew I was there, yet he ignored me. He did not even look in my direction,* I answered, pulling myself back into the chair.

Lucifer was now pacing the room. Ten steps in one direction and ten steps back. I had never seen him so anxious and disturbed. But I knew how much he counted on his daughter being on his side. She was his one and only heir. She would probably always be his only heir. He needed her. And if our Father turned her against him, she would be lost to Lucifer forever.

*So, my daughter is beloved by our Father. He sent his highest angel to her side to hear her prayer. Michael was ordered to not interact with you. What does He have planned? Is it simply because she is His direct descendent as well? Or does he mean to take her from me? But if that were the case, he would have had Michael slay you.* Lucifer stopped pacing and stood in front of the fire, one hand on the mantel, one hand stroking his chin.

*I do not know, My Lord.*

*Of course not. His plans are beyond your comprehension. However, this does change our timeline. I want you to bring my daughter to me tomorrow night.* Lucifer turned toward me, his power burning in his eyes. There was no room for argument, but I could not help myself.

*Tomorrow? My Lord, is that not too soon?*

I winced as Lucifer grew at least ten feet larger, looming over me, his black wings fully spread. It was a terrible sight and it was all for me.

*DO NOT QUESTION ME! I am your lord and king. Do not mistake my favor for friendship or love. Bring my daughter to me tomorrow night. That is final.* At that, he threw me out so hard that I was shocked back into my original form. And since my original form was not ready to hang onto the tree, I fell fifteen feet to the ground. It was not my most graceful moment, but since it was the wee hours of the morning, there was nobody around to see it.

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