

I lay in my comfortable king-size bed in Josselin. The warm flesh of beautiful women surround me. Eager, they please my every need.

Enjoying them, I have my ways with the redhead, blonde, brunette, and raven beauties. Ecstasy nears. Deep in the shadows of the room, I see a woman standing, watching. Very appealing she appears. Long locks of silver hair hang down the side of her ears and spill over her shoulders. Shadows form the silhouette of her face.

“Are U going to come to bed?” I ask.

Propped up by pillows, I pat my bed.

In a warm soothing voice, she asks, “Are U sure U want me to do that?”

“Of course,” I declare.

Suddenly, two icy-blue dots appear in the darkness.

They are the woman’s eyes, so cold they would burn if touched. I go to scream but it’s too late.

In an instance, she is on me. Like an owl she swoops down upon me. Her talons clutch my shoulders. I am her prey.

The woman hisses, “Where’s Chloe? Huh? Where’s my sweet little Chloe?”

“No!” I scream.

Snapping up out of a deep sleep, I find myself in complete darkness. I sweat. My heart pounds. Disoriented and terrified, I try to figure out where exactly I am at. Quickly, from the pin-pricking straw, I realize that I’m lying on the bed in the tower.

Did I just dream everything? Even last night? Is Chloe mine? Oh my god! What the hell is going on?

I climb out of bed. Into the darkness, I call, “Chloe! Chloe! Where are U?”

Receiving no answer, I dress. Make my way for the stairs, I charge down them. Racing over to the south hall, I pound my fists against the wall.

As I search for the secret stone, I keep screaming, “Chloe! Chloe!”

Within seconds, I trip the trigger and the wall slides to the side.

Shockingly, though, the chamber has been completely stripped of all of its contents.

Falling silent, I simply look around stunned by the strange turn of events.

As I silently stand there stupefied, the only normal door in the room suddenly swings open. Hearing the squeaking of its hinges, I turn.

“Chloe! What’s ...”

Lady Melusin  stands in front of me. She steals away my words. She stares thru me. Her eyes devour me. She’s taller than I expect. She moves like a shadow. Her dark-olive skin, raven-black hair and regal dress conjure power. Power beyond me.

An unnerving feeling swells within. I feel sick. I study the woman. Her face is stern as stone. With each thought, my stomach churns panic. Control slips from my hands.

Stepping back from the woman a sudden realization hits.

My God! She’s the demonic woman from my dreams. Her hair is pitch-black instead of snowy silver but her eyes are unmistakable. Though not burning they are a match just the same.

“What are U yelling about, this early in the morning?” she demands. “More so, what are U doing in this room? Monsieur Lusingna, don’t U think that U have already done enough? Isn’t it enough that U have gotten Chloe into trouble?”

“Where is Chloe?” I order. “What have U done to her?”

“Excuse me! What have I done to her? I have done nothing to her. It is before noon. She is where she belongs, out in the field with the rest of the peasants. And if I am not mistaken, that’s where U belong,” she barks.

Her words rip at me like a rabid dog. Relentless. With each thing she says, she tears my small simple world to shreds. Quickly, I try to figure what I should do as she hounds me. Hastily, I hatch a plan.

Lady Melusiné blasts me with more questions, I turn to leave.

“Where do U think U are going?” she demands.

“I am going where I belong,” I reply.

Walking to the opened secret passage, I stop before leaving.

“I am sorry, if I have gotten Chloe into any trouble.” I declare. “She is an angel.”

Saying nothing Lady Melusiné glares at me as if seeing my every thought and disapproving of each one. Her stare scorns me. I squirm. She stands beyond all of my charms. Ancient is her stare. It weighs heavy like the stone of this home. Cunning are her eyes.

Without hesitation, I bow and back away from her.

Quickly, I disappear from the view of the doorway. Worried, I sprint down the hallway passing pillar after pillar. The stone walkway goes on forever. My boots seem fashioned from lead rather than leather.

I exit the house. I race toward the orchard. My side aches. Still I run. I run till I reach the large oak at the edge of the southern fields. Reaching it, I collapse. I drop into its cool shelter. My chest heaves in and out as I try to catch my breath. On my hands and knees I rest. Looking up, I spot Chloe walking toward the barn.

I go to her.

Preoccupied, Chloe does not see me approaching.

Startled, Chloe staggers back a step with my sudden appearance. Snatching a hold of her arms, I steady her. As she regains her balance, I release her.

Smiling, she remarks, “Do U think that was really necessary? U could have just said hello, instead of sneaking up on me,” she says wiping her sweaty brow with her forearm.

A soft smile forms on her face.

“As always, U are drawing attention. Daphne and her cousin miss U,” she adds.

“They don’t matter. Only U matter.”

About to say something, she stops. Her cheeks flush as she looks at me. I peer deep into her eyes hiding nothing from her. We smile. She feels the excitement that I feel. In the hot humid air, though, each moment feels like it might be the last. Overwhelmed by the thought of losing her, I snatch a hold of her arms and guide her into the shadows of the barn. Locking my lips on hers, I rekindle the passion of last night. Wrapping her arms around me, she holds me close as my racing heart pounds against her. With a slight tremor, my fingertips touch her face. I struggle to smile.

As I do, she squirms where she stands.

Rising up her hands, she breaks the hold that I have on her. Looking at me, she studies me.

“Jesus, Saul! What’s wrong?” she asks. “U’re white as a ghost! U look like U ran all of the way here from the house.”

“I did,” I declare.

Falling silent, I have her attention. Tight-lipped, she waits for me to speak.

“Chloe, run away with me, right here, right now,” I ask.

Laughing, she remarks, “Knock it off, Saul. Quit your playing. U were worrying me, for a moment.”

Snatching her arms, I lightly shake her. Staring, I bark, “I am dead serious, Chloe. Something is up. Your chamber is completely empty.”

“What? Everything was there, this morning. After I finished cleaning up the dining room, I went back to the chamber to check on U. I hate to say it but U’re losing it, Saul. U were sleeping in...”

“I woke up in the tower, Chloe. Worst yet, Lady Melusiné is back. She came into the chamber when I went looking for U.” I declare.

“Lady Melusiné is back?! Oh my and she found U in the secret chamber?” she exclaims.

Pulling free of my grip, she moves deeper into the shadow of the barn. Looking out across the fields, her eyes nervously dance from side to side.

I give her space but fear that someone will appear at any moment. I glance back at her, waiting for her answer. Slowly she looks up at me. Becoming still as I notice her stare, I smile at her.

Even as doom looms, she picks me up.

She readies to say something.

I interrupt her, “Chloe, I know that I am not the greatest of men. Hell, I have forgotten about doing things that would have forever shamed most people. And I know U know this, so I will understand if U simply walk away from me right now, but I must say that I have never loved anyone. But, I think I love U.

“I know how scripted that may sound but it is the truth. I have not known true love until U. There is just something about U that I can’t resist. It goes beyond your physical beauty. Even though that in itself would have kept me around, under normal circumstances. Beyond all of that, though, your wits are sharp and U’re not afraid of keeping me in check. I love that. Hell, I need that.

“Most of all, U govern yourself with a unique outlook on life. Though quite proper in your own right, U’re still quite willing to step over some standards that suffocate free-spirit.

“I wish I could promise U the world but I can’t, not right now. And though I know that hard times are yet to come, I shall always stand by your side and give U all that I have.”

Still smiling, Chloe moves close enough to touch my face. She cups my cheeks with her outstretched hands.

With a serious look on her face, she remarks, “With all of the girls that U have been with, has any of them ever told U that U talk too much?”

Smiling, she leans forward and kisses me.

With a whisper, she adds, “I will go with U to the far ends of this earth if that’s what it takes to be with U.”

“Beautiful. I will gather my things and make my formal departure. West of here is a field of standing stones, right?”

“Yes.” she agrees with a smile.

“We’ll meet there. Okay?” I state.

“Sure but, how are U just going to be able to leave without Lady Melusiné refusing.” Chloe quickly questions.

Laughing, I declare, “Even before coming here, I had a plan for leaving. I wasn’t going to allow anyone to make me a slave. So I devised a way that would allow me to leave whenever I wanted.

“Chloe, U know that my father forced me to draft a letter.”

“Right. Right, everyone knows about that letter,” Chloe laughs.

“Well at the same time, I drafted a second letter. It declared that I must leave Carnac and immediately head back for Josselin. I had my father sign the first one that Lady Melusin  received. Afterwards, I acted as though I had spilled ink on it. This way my father had to sign a second letter, also.

“Quickly, I sealed up both scrolls and sent Lady Melusin  the letter that my father had first instructed me to write.”

Laughing, she jokes, “I don’t even think that the devil, himself, could catch U.”

Laughing, I reply, “Let’s hope not.”

“Everything is going to be fine. Just wait and see,” Chloe declares with a reassuring smile.

Reaching up and touching her cheek, I remark, “I know that, now. Come on, though, we must hurry.”

Without hesitation, Chloe goes to leave.

Gently, I snatch her arm and stop her.

“What?” she asks as she turns back.

I kiss her one last time. After a moment of tense surprise, her lips melt around mine.

I slowly pull away from her.

“I love U.” I declare.

“Quit messing around, silly, before we miss our opportunity,” she orders.

Smiling, I release my hold on her.

Causally, she walks into the orchard. A few long strides and she disappears from view. Quickly, I follow suit.

Heading back to the house, though, I cautiously approach it.

First, coming from the east, I spot Lady Melusin  out on the cobblestone patio sitting in the cool shade of the house.

What is she staring at? Her expression is so cold.

Shifting directions, I step to the left. With a snap, my foot breaks some unseen stick. I freeze still as a stone.

Spotted just the same, something swoops down at me.

I collapse to the grass. Looking over my shoulder to face my attacker, I spy a great horned owl gliding down the open alley between the rows of trees. Huge are the bird’s uge are the bires’s powerful wings. They nearly span the width of the open row. Gracefully, it turns and perches up in one of the orchard’s trees. Talons locked on the limb, it stares at me studying me but doing nothing more.

For some reason, I think of Lady Melusin . Slowly getting to a vantage point without spooking the snow-white owl, I look to I see if I have disturbed Melusin .

Still sitting where I last saw her, her eyes are closed as if napping, now.

Glancing back at the owl, it still studies me hard. Quickly I make distance between us. Within the shelter of the countless trees, I circle west around the other side of the house.

Quickly, I cross the lawn and enter the manor thru the main entrance. I race down the hallway that empties into the dining room. Reaching the end, I see no one. I make my way around the large wooden table. Cautiously I approach the archway between the dining room and the eastside of the house. I inch up closer and closer. The two patio doors stand open. I feel the breeze from the outside. Still she sits there sleeping with her back to me.

My heart races as I watch her.

I shoot for the doorway to the tower. Snaking up the stairs, I go to the corner of the bed where I keep the second scroll and coins hid. I search thru the straw-stuffed mattress.

For a moment, the darkness of the tower scares and tortures me.

Soon I find the scroll and my heavy leather satchet. Jamming them inside my shirt, I go back downstairs. Standing in the shadows of the stairwell, I watch Lady Melusin . She hasn't moved from where I first saw her. I streak out from the stairwell and into the dining room. Going out the same way I had come in, I race towards the main entrance.

I am the thief.

Once outside, I sprint to the main gate. Lifting the heavy brace, I drop it to the side. Swinging open the thick heavy door, I go to the gate's bell. Upon reaching it, I slam the bell with its inner-hanging hammer.

I remain a few moments outside the wall.

Afterwards, I race toward the house shouting, "Melusin ! Melusin ! Come quickly, dear lady. Please come quickly. It's... It's urgent news from Josselin."

Playing out my ploy, I charge thru the house.

Meeting me in the dining room as I circle around the table, I fall silent as I come face to face with Lady Melusin , once more. With hawk-like eyes, she peers thru me.

Angrily, she screeches, "What is all of this shouting about, boy? U act as if U're on fire. That can be arranged."

I try to pass the sealed scroll to her as I catch my breath.

In between light gasps for air, I remark, "A rider... just... brought this."

"Hah! If that's the case, how did U get it, already? I thought that U were..." Lady Melusin  starts.

"I was in the barn. I had come up here to get some material to fix the plow," I cut-in. "That's when I heard the tolling of the bell. Please open it! It's urgent news from Josselin the rider said."

Leering at the sealed scroll, she refuses to take it and quickly adds, "There is no real news that I don't already know about."

"But there is! It's right here. Look." I declare.

Without warning, Lady Melusin  slaps the scroll from my outstretched hand. As it lands on the table with a little thud, she turns away from me. Walking a short distance, she, then, turns back to face me.

"So! How much begging and pleading did U do with my sweet little Chloe before U convinced her to go with U?" she sneers.

"Huh? What do U mean?" I ask.

"U know damn well what I mean. Don't try to play your little games with me, boy. I've been playing games years before U were even born. U have no clue who U are dealing with," Lady Melusin  barks.

Though my inner conviction wavers, resilient, I remark, "Lady Melusin , I do not mean any disrespect but I feel that U are obligated to open that scroll. The rider expressed great urgency regarding it."

"I know. I know. U keep on telling me the same shit over and over. If U think it is so damn important, why don't U go ahead and open the letter, then. But before U do that, tell me this. What are U going to say when U open it and the letter doesn't say what U think it's suppose to say?" Lady Melusin  asks.

“Huh?”

“God, man! Are U that stupid?” Lady Melusin  declares. “U’re too dumb to realize when U have made a mistake. Go ahead. Go ahead and open the letter, Saul. And U will see that it is the introductory letter that your father forced U to send to me. And that letter, the one requesting that U leave immediately for home, hah, I received a few weeks ago.”

No. I kept my eye on the dropping scrolls. She lies. She must be lying.

“So, what are U going to tell me now,” she asks. “That U have no idea what I am talking about? Please, spare me the speeches, Saul. U are pathetic. U are the noble decadence that Charlemagne warned about while he was still alive. Hah! That old son of a bitch must be turning over in his grave, right about now. U’re his living prophesy.”

Stewing, I stand silent as Lady Melusin  smirks. Looking back and forth between the scroll and her, I do not know what to think or do. Believing in myself, I snatch the scroll, spin the seal face out and slam it down hard on the edge of the table. With a loud whack, the seal cracks in half. Busting free the blue wax used to secure the scroll, I untie the ribbon. For the first time in a long time, the palms of my hands become sweaty. My heart races. Ever so slowly, I unroll it and as I do, my heart sinks into a deep dark despair.

Curtis, U son of a bitch! U fucked me, again.

Speechless and parched, I stare at the scroll.

“Believe me, boy, when I tell U that I was quite bewildered for a moment when I first saw your other letter. But after I spoke with the old woman everything came quite clear to me. Quickly I realized what U were going to try to pull. It was easy to figure out especially since I know how much of a pig U are. I know your type, monsieur Lusingna. Men like U are the same all over this pathetic planet. U’re only out for yourself.”

“How did U ever hear of me, Lady Melusin ?” I ask.

“I found out from a sweet little flower named Lilly, Lilly of Le Mans. At one time, she was to be mine just like Chloe was,” Lady Melusin  declares.

Lilly? How does she know of Lilly? What connection does she have with Lilly? Or is it the Bishop of Le Mans where the connection is at?”

I study Lady Melusin  as the woman glares at me.

“I bet that I know more about U than U do,” she sneers.

Slowly, she walks towards me. Nearly as tall as me, she stands six-foot high, black hair and beautiful. She stares straight thru me.

Intimidated, I take a step back away from her.

Seeing this, she smiles and remarks, “Do I make U nervous? I should.”

Opening my mouth to say something, she snatches my throat and squeezes off my words, instead. At that moment, I realize I could die by her hand.

“Silence, dog! U shall show me respect or U shall die, painfully,” she screams her spraying words.

Crippled by her grip, I struggle simply to breathe. Her fingers refuse to retract from my throat. Even as I hammer my forearms against her arms, I cannot break her hold. Lacking air, my head feels on fire, swelling, and ready to explode. Seeing this, she smiles and tosses me backward onto the table as if I was a napkin.

Moaning, I gasp violently for air. Released from her unbreakable hold, I curl up on the large table top.

Laughing, she remarks, “U are truly a fool. U just have no clue what U are up against, here.

I brought U here to teach U a lesson. But it looks like U're going to die a fool.

"Do U see yourself as being lucky, though? I hope U do because U are, Saul. Most people are forced to simply accept things the way they are. But, this is not the case for U. I am going to give U actual choices. They are quite simple, at that. So, even, U can handle it."

Pausing, she allows me to regain my breath. By doing so, she receives my full-attention.

"First," she declares in her sharp biting tone. "U could be your usual self, and foolishly think that, somehow, U're going to escape from here, alive. Which U won't.

"Or, U could come to your senses and tell me where Chloe is. She is all that I am concerned about. That is, if U haven't completely poisoned her with your deviant ways. If U tell me where she is, I will gladly give U clemency for your crimes."

"Crimes? What crimes? What are U talking about, woman? Chloe gave herself freely to me. I did not coerce her, in any way," I testify.

"Don't feed me your bullshit and expect me to eat it, boy. I know U. I know your history and what U did to Lilly. Don't tell me U did not get my sweet little Chloe drunk with the wine from the cellar. I still smell it in this room. Its stench sickens me. It seems as if U two bathed in it."

Remembering moments of spilled wine I force back a smile.

I glare at the woman, studying her complexity. Within her eyes, I see no fear, though. I feel helpless against her.

Unable to not say something, though, I bark, "If I end up dead, don't U think U will have a whole lot to answer for?"

With a wicked smile, she declares, "No. U, yourself, gave me the perfect alibi. Remember the letters, monsieur Lusingna?"

As I think about it, she explains, "U must see that I can do whatever I want with U and nothing will ever happen to me. So just make this easier for everyone involved and tell me where Chloe is. Now!"

Slowly I slide off the table and backpedal away from her.

"Still, U can't kill me. U need me, alive, to tell U where Chloe," I declare.

"Ha! I knew it," she barks as she points at me. "I knew it. U don't care about my sweet little Chloe. U are using her just like U use all women. And the only reason that U wanted her to go with U is so that U are not stuck being alone. Not even U can stand yourself.

"Tell me this much, at least, monsieur Lusingna. What were U going to do when U finally impregnate that poor girl with your poisonous seed? What then? Were U just going to leave one day and never look back while U think of ways of stealing your daddy's coins? God Saul, U sicken me."

As the cold hard truth sinks in, I struggle to think of anything as I suffer my own sudden doubts. Approaching ever so slowly, she backs me up further.

Stumbling into the suit of armor, I try to keep it from toppling over. Lady Melusin  moves in on me. In an instance, I throw the suit of armor at her. As she tangles with the plate-mail, I charge the fireplace. Leaping up, I snatch the long wooden spear. Spinning around, I face her.

"Back off, witch," I order. "I will have no trouble impaling your ugly ass, so back off."

Unafraid, the tall dark-hair woman smiles and steps closer to me.

"This is your last warning, woman. I swear! I will!" I bellow. "I am going to give U two choices," I start. "Most aren't that fortunate."

Finding no humor with what I said, she moves almost within arm's reach of me.

“One of two things is going to happen. U’re going to let me go, right now, and U will live. Or, U’re going to try and stop me and U’ll die. Either way, though, I’m leaving, right here right now.” I declare in a clear and commanding tone.

Smiling, she shakes her.

“No,” Lady Melusiné retorts, “That’s not how it is going to happen. What U’re going to do is, hand over that spear and we’re going to get my sweet little Chloe before something terrible happens to her. U just don’t know the trouble I have gone thru to find girls like Lilly and my sweet little Chloe. And for what? To have U take them both away from me? Damn U, Saul. Either one of them could have easily carried me into the tenth century. I still have a chance with Chloe, though. She’s much strong than Lilly.

“So U see monsieur Lusingna, she shall be me and I shall be her, for she is mine and that’s how it shall be.”

“What?”

She inches even closer. I cock back the spear.

“Step back or I’ll...” I order.

She stretches out her hand.

I jab at her. At the last second, I try to halt it.

Failing miserably, the steel spearhead pierces straight thru the woman. Stunned, I stare at what I have done.

Unfazed, Lady Melusiné remains silent and smiling.

Horrified, I tug on the long spear. The barbs of its head dig into the flesh of her back. I yank harder on the blood slick shaft. Still, it refuses to dislodge.

Still smiling at me, Melusiné slams her palm against the spear. In an instance, she snaps the shaft like a twig. I watch the woman reach around and pull out the head of the spear from her back. Dropping it, it clatters loudly on the floor.

I still hold the broken rod in my blood-covered hands. I fight back the mounting nausea.

She snatches a hold of my shirt. In one swift motion, she swings me up off my feet and slams me straight down on the ground. Within a blink, blackness consumes me as my head bounces off the floor.