

# Coffee and Faerie Cakes

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*Coffee and Faerie Cakes*

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This story has come a long way from the short piece of urban fantasy I scribbled in June 2017 and it could never have become what it is today without the help of my sister Talia, who was with me every proofreading, world building, detail-tweaking step of the way. Plus the help of my friends, especially Adrian and Yoni.



# Chapter 1

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## In Which A Deal Is Broken

On the whole, faerie heritage was quite easy to hide. Nowadays most people tried to pretend that anyone of that kind had died out anyway. Nobody could deny they had existed *once*, but that didn't stop people from saying that they didn't exist *anymore*. That was advantageous. It's much easier to hide in plain sight if the people looking don't really *want* to see you.

Jeanne knows that the average customer would rather not believe in fae and they take full advantage of that. Their little café is as popular as it is tiny and most of the regulars have no idea that it's the magic in the food and drink that keeps them coming back. Not that Jeanne actually *makes* them come back. They don't lay spells on people, they pride themselves in that. All they use is a little glamour...and a little glamour goes a long way. Some of the customers do actually taste the burst of happiness Jeanne bakes into their pastries, but that doesn't mean that they can tell the difference between faerie magic and the other glimpses of ancient power that some people are still born with.

Which is good, because when they *do* believe in it, faerie magic freaks people out. Jeanne doesn't resent this, but it does make them smile sometimes. Or the way people talk about it does at least. The days of faerie rings are long gone. They have never lived in a grassy mound with a hawthorn growing on its top.

They live in a little apartment above their café, like so many people do. And they don't wish themselves back in the old days either. Jeanne likes the city and they *love* their shop.

Because faeries make deals, that's what they're all about, and Jeanne makes a deal with every customer that walks through their door. They offer the shimmer of the silver and gold that they earned and Jeanne gives them the food and drink they crafted with their own hands. That is the deal and Jeanne honours it, for a faerie is never in debt. This way they can make countless deals, countless trades a day. They smile at every customer and everyone smiles back, because far away in their mortal subconscious, they know they ought to. It's wonderful. Jeanne loves their life among the mortals. Loves to be surrounded by the bustle of the city. And adores to see the same happy faces coming back to their counter week after week.

They have favourites, of course. The three young men that come in with laptops, books and pamphlets every Friday for instance. They are always friendly, always full of conversation, and their backpacks are adorned with pride buttons. Jeanne likes them. Just like they're always pleased to see the two girls that treat each other to scones most Wednesdays. They are here again today. Jeanne is watching them laugh and talk together. One of them, a tall brunette, is nicknamed Principessa, Jeanne has learned. She always comes in with a lovely plump girl with bubble-gum-pink hair, who they presume is her girlfriend. Or girlfriend-to-be, perhaps. Jeanne is still discretely watching them when the shop bell rings and a small crowd of semi-regulars comes in. Jeanne turns back to the counter, smile at the ready, when they stop breathing for a full second.

Coming in behind the group of chattering women is the prettiest mortal Jeanne has ever seen. For a moment they doubt whether he really is mortal, so graceful are his movements. The young man is tall, clad all in black, and has such a striking combination of fair skin and dark features that it makes Jeanne's heart ache. He moves with ease and confidence and the faint smirk around his lips looks as if it never leaves him.

"Luce!" Principessa suddenly calls out.

The smirk turns into a grin as the young man joins her table, kissing both her and the pink-haired girl on the cheek in greeting and suddenly Jeanne *understands*. For the first time in their life they know why their ancestors played their flutes in the dark woods just at the edge of hearing and wove spells in the moonlight. *Because of mortals like this.*

It takes all their willpower to serve their customers with a tolerable appearance of care and attention, because the young man named Luce has risen from his seat and is joining the queue. They try to keep their eyes on the hot chocolates they're making, but the tall, dark shape is still at the edge of their vision.

The three women that placed the order are still counting out their money when Luce steps past them and leans on the counter.

"Double espresso, please," he says.

"Nothing else?" Jeanne asks, their eyes firmly fixed on him now that they finally have an excuse. His eyes are green. So green...

Luce glances over the various piles of freshly baked goods displayed both on the counter and behind the glass and shakes his head. "No thanks."

Jeanne would be offended, but that grin...

"I'll get you your coffee then," they say, turning away. When they turn back, Luce is still leaning against the counter nonchalantly, while the women laughingly hand over a handful of coins.

"We always forget to hit the ATM before we come here."

Jeanne's café is the last cash-only place left on the block. Because it's the shimmer that counts as well as the value and even paper money has a glitter to it.

"It's really Manou's fault this time," one of them says conversationally, but Jeanne isn't listening.

Luckily they don't seem to mind. They move to a table by the window, chatting happily all the while.

"Here's your espresso," Jeanne says, turning back to Luce.

He takes his hands out of the pockets of his leather jacket. It looks expensive. Jeanne doesn't like leather much, but he wears it well. Very well. "Thanks," he hums and he flashes them another grin.

Jeanne watches him take the cup and walk back to his friends. They barely manage to swallow a sigh. No spells. They *aren't* allowed any spells. Not even a little hint of magic mixed into the



coffee to suggest coming back. They promised themselves they'd *never* do that, to anyone...

Soberly they return to stacking the clean cups. Every now and again their eyes inevitably drift in the direction of the table where Luce sits with the two girls. They seem to be having a good time, only Luce is sitting with his back to the counter, so Jeanne can't really tell. After a while the two girls get up.

"You coming?"

Jeanne lets out a breath. He's leaving and the thought alone makes them miserable, but at least they'll get to see his face again as he turns.

To their surprise, however, Luce hesitates and then shakes his head. "You go ahead."

Jeanne feels a flutter in their stomach. He is staying behind? Alone?

"Okay," Principessa shrugs. "See you!" And she leaves with her pink-haired companion.

Luce seems to shift in his seat uncomfortably, but then he chooses a new spot in the corner and picks up one of the magazines scattered around the tables. Jeanne considers going up to him to ask if he wants something else to drink, but they decide against it.

Customers come and go, the chatty trio of women leaves, and still Luce remains. Sometimes he gets up and walks through the café as if he's about to leave...but then he doesn't. Jeanne is

watching him more often than not now, but Luce never looks in their direction.

“Enjoy your muffins!” Jeanne smiles at the old man with the friendly eyes that comes in once a week just to buy some pastries to take home. They’re pretty sure he buys them for his sister.

“We always do,” the man replies happily and he gently closes the door behind him, leaving the café empty for the first time that day.

Well, empty apart from Luce, who is still sitting in the corner. Jeanne makes a decision and speaks up:

“Hey, can I get you anything? I do sandwiches too...”

Luce’s head snaps up from the magazine that he clearly hasn’t actually been reading, because he hasn’t progressed at all. He tensely glances around the now deserted café and then quickly gets to his feet. “No,” he says, his voice oddly strained. “You can’t get me anything. You can do something for me.”

Jeanne raises their eyebrows. They’re not sure they like that tone of voice. Pretty as he may be, he does not get to order them about. “And what might that be?” they say, crossing their arms.

Luce walks up to the counter with long, almost threatening strides. “*Let me leave*,” he says roughly.

Jeanne blinks in surprise. “Let you—”

"I can't leave," Luce snaps. "You did something to me. I can feel it."

A spark of panic ignites in Jeanne's chest and they hurriedly feel around for their own magic. They hadn't— They *couldn't* have. Weaving a spell takes effort and concentration, they couldn't have done it unconsciously.

"You can look sweet all you want, I've been to the hidden places in Paris," Luce growls, leaning towards Jeanne across the counter. "I know magic when I feel it."

Jeanne lifts their eyes to his and something clicks. When they speak again their voice is sunk, suddenly calm and nearly triumphant. This *isn't* their fault. "Then you should have known better," they say deliberately, "than to steal from a faerie."

Luce's eyes widen and Jeanne feels their cheeks burn. They shouldn't have said that. It's an utterly stupid thing to do. But this guy has no right to come in here with his too green eyes and his too perfect smirk and accuse *them* of spellbinding while *he* is the one that stole from *them*.

"I..." Luce begins and then he draws back, running a hand through his hair as he steps away.

Jeanne can tell that he's shocked, but he is not as shocked as he could have been. Obviously the existence of faeries is not a surprise to him, just that he happens to be stuck with one at the moment. A flutter of curiosity shimmers through their other feelings for a second. How does he know? Who told him fae

still live among mortals? More importantly, what made him believe it?

Their thoughts scatter in the face of Luce's conflicted grimace. "I took a damn muffin," he says finally.

"Freshly baked lemon-curd muffin," Jeanne corrects smugly. "And it doesn't matter what you stole. You stole from me. You broke the deal."

"What deal?" Luce groans. He's still standing a few paces away, full of very belated caution.

"You took coffee and a muffin," Jeanne says accusingly. "You only *paid* for coffee." They smile at Luce and they use their actual faerie smile for once. "You have a *debt*."

One corner of Luce's mouth twitches and Jeanne can't help but notice that he is neither actually angry nor really afraid. If anything he looks slightly amused now. He's uncommonly cocky in the face of all this.

"Fine," he says and he comes back, closing the distance until it's once again only the counter between them. "Then I'll pay. How much are they?"

Jeanne scoffs and shakes their head. Now it's their turn for amusement. "It doesn't work like that. A contract broken can't be mended that easily."

"So I'll pay you more," Luce says, spreading his hands against the counter. He smirks. "Or are you just trying to keep me here, fae?"

"You can call me Jeanne," Jeanne says pointedly. "And don't blame me for your thieving fingers."

The smirk wavers a little. "Look," Luce sighs. "I'm sorry, alright? Force of habit..." He gives Jeanne a slightly gentler look. "How can I repay my debt?"

It's not much of an apology, but Jeanne is willing to take it. That doesn't mean they need to be entirely helpful however. "We'd have to make a new deal," they say airily. "You give me something in return for your freedom..."

"My freedom," Luce scoffs, but the shine in Jeanne's eyes is dead serious.

"That's what's at stake here, isn't it?" they say and they flash Luce another smile. He really is a little too confident. "And I don't *have* to let you go..." they add. "Maybe I could use some help around the kitchen."

Now there actually is a shimmer of nervousness on Luce's face, but it's immediately buried under a sneering smile. "You can make me stay, but you can't make me *work*," he says.

"True," Jeanne hums. "And you'd probably be rubbish at it anyway."

Luce opens his mouth in an offended manner, but Jeanne interrupts him.

"So, what are you willing to give in exchange for your freedom?" they ask teasingly. "Are you a traditionalist? There's always firstborn children...or the ability to speak..."

Luce doesn't answer that, but he is neither sneering nor smirking anymore.

"Or..." Jeanne hums, really enjoying herself now. "Something smaller, like the colour of your eyes, or the darkest shade of black from your shadow..."

"You're not serious, right?" His expression has grown very uncomfortable.

Jeanne snorts and that sound alone is enough to dispel the tension in the air. "Of course I'm not!" they say, in a kinder tone of voice. "But I don't hear *you* making any offers."

"It's not like I know what would be a proper price," he grumbles, looking away, and for a moment he looks a little younger. Slightly softer around the edges.

"And here I thought you knew so much about magic," Jeanne teases. "There's all sorts of things you could give me. An object you made with your own hands, a secret you've never told anyone." They wave their hands about, trying to think of something else. Something that means enough to break a binding. "It could be anything, as long as it's worth something. A word you've never spoken before, a tear shed for joy." They smile again, because they haven't felt this face in a long time, and add playfully: "A kiss..."

The green eyes spark. "Really?" Luce grins. "Why didn't you lead with that?"

And before Jeanne can even say a word in reply, he curls his slender fingers around the front of their apron and, leaning

across the counter, presses his lips to theirs. Warm and soft and startlingly sudden.

Jeanne's eyes open wide in shock as Luce's close for a moment. Then he opens them again and pulls away.

"There," he grins.

Jeanne gapes at him. "You can't do that!" they blurt out. If 'never make a deal you can't keep' is rule number one, 'never kiss a faerie' is *definitely* rule number two. Their heart is racing and the twinkling lights in Luce's eyes aren't helping. "I could have stolen your *soul*," they breathe, mildly horrified.

"Maybe," Luce grins. "But you wouldn't." He chuckles. "Takes a thief to know one, and you're not."

Jeanne shakes their head helplessly and straightens their apron.

"So," Luce smirks, leaning comfortably on the counter. "Is my debt repaid?"

"Yes," Jeanne mutters, trying to will the blush out of their cheeks. "You're free to leave."

"And free to come back, right?" Luce says, smiling slowly. "Because I think I'd rather like to come back..."

Jeanne folds their arms again and hides their confusion of feelings behind a stern look. "Do whatever you like," they say. "Just try not to steal anything next time."

"Oh I don't know..." Luce muses. "If this is the only penalty..."

"A faerie never exchanges the same thing twice," Jeanne warns him seriously.

"Pity," Luce sighs. "I'll keep my hands to myself from now on then." He turns around and strolls to the exit, as calmly as if he's not even slightly anxious whether he'll actually be able to leave. "Au revoir," he chuckles softly.

"Bonsoir, Luce," Jeanne replies and all their mixed feelings of flustered indignation and reluctant admiration are clearly audible in their voice.

"Actually," Luce grins, turning back in the doorway. "It's Lucien." He winks and lets the door slam shut behind him.

Jeanne stares at his retreating form through the glass pane. They stand glued to their spot behind the counter until he is completely out of sight. Then, slowly breaking through the genuine shock, a smile starts spreading across their freckled face.

Rule number three: *never* give a faerie your true name...



## Chapter 2

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### In Which A Wound Is Tended

Lucien is above running – unless he’s running to disappear – but he’s moving a lot faster right now than he usually would. When he bursts through the door of the should-be-vacant house he calls home, he is actually a little out of breath.

“Dante!” he raises his voice. “Dante!”

A door opens and Dante appears, giving him a dismayed look that Lucien only sees because he knows how to look past the long dark hair that Dante refuses to style and just has falling in front of his face in what Lucien has considered a personal insult from the first day they met. People with good hair should have it styled properly. “You’re excited,” Dante grimaces. “What the hell did you do this time?”

Lucien grabs his friend by the arm, grinning widely. “I found a faerie.”

Dante stares at him with a blank look on his face.

Lucien waits, grin never faltering.

“You’re lying,” Dante says bluntly.

“I’m not.”

“A *fullblood*?”

“That’s hardly an appropriate question to ask at a first meeting,” Lucien says airily. “But considering I couldn’t leave their shop after stealing something from them...”

The look on Dante otherwise restrained face is priceless, his olive skin has turned a whole shade paler. “You found a faerie working in a *shop*?”

“Right here in good old Paris,” Lucien grins. “I don’t think anyone knows. They only told me what they were because I accused them of spellbinding me.”

“And they still let you go, free of consequences?” Dante gapes. He looks genuinely angry now.

“I’m here, aren’t I,” Lucien grins, but he remembers the beautiful, unnerving smile Jeanne gave him when talking of the price of faerie contracts and for a moment a thrill slides down his back.

“Can’t be a fullblood,” his friend grunts, looking away.

Lucien lets out a loud laugh. “You’re just pissy because your magically inclined ass never managed to find one.” Honestly, this is a great day.

Dante snarls. “Screw you.”

“I’ve never accepted that offer before but you just keep on trying,” Lucien calls after him as his friend turns away.

He doesn't get a reply, but there is the satisfaction of Dante slamming the kitchen door behind him.

Still chuckling, Lucien trots up the stairs to his own bedroom. He puts up with being on the second floor because it gives him more privacy. Guillaume is loud whether he is asleep or awake and since Clarice moved in she runs in and out of Lucien's room enough without her being actually across the hallway. She runs in and out of everywhere actually. All the time. Lucien would bitch about it if he didn't like the kid so much. Of course they all pretend they only let her move in to keep her off the street. They have an entire house to themselves after all.

Technically they are squatting there, but under the cover of Dante's illusions – that keeping the place looking like it's still abandoned – they've managed to get a very comfortable household up and running. Clarice is a good addition, if only because it means Lucien isn't the youngest anymore. He has a clean three and a half years on Clarice, so she can complain about being an adult all she wants, he definitely has the right to call her a child. In any case, it's much better being with four than with three. Three is too much like a coven. And they are *not* a coven. That would make Dante the leader, by virtue of his magic alone, and Lucien won't stand for that.

With a smirk Lucien sits down in his old leather chair. He gives Dante's self-control about two minutes.

He's not quite right. A full five minutes pass before Dante suddenly stalks into the room and sits down on the chest at the foot of Lucien's bed. Lucien hadn't heard him coming up the

stairs, but that's nothing new. Dante is as quiet as Clarice and Guillaume are loud.

"What did they look like?" Dante asks, as if their conversation was never interrupted.

Lucien smirks, but graciously decides not to be any more of a jerk about it. "Beautiful," he says and he can't quite keep the genuine admiration out of his voice.

"Might not be real," Dante points out.

Lucien shrugs. He doesn't really care. Jeanne was beautiful standing before him and they are beautiful in his memory.

"Specifics?" Dante prompts.

Leaning back in his chair a little, Lucien considers how much he should tell his friend. He told him about Jeanne because he was too smug about finding a faerie not to, but right now what happened this afternoon is still all his own. He's not sure if he wants to share.

"Come on, man," Dante hisses. "You're not keeping this from me."

"I think I am," Lucien says languidly. "At least for now..."

Dante's arms jerk in an angry movement. It's not directed at Lucien specifically and he is not fazed by it. Dante won't really be angry. He has been wanting to prove there are still faeries left in Paris for years. Ultimately the fact that Lucien found them

won't really lessen his victory. It just tarnishes it a little. Which is something Lucien is going to enjoy rubbing in his face.

"I have no idea what kind they are," he says. "And I might not have made a first impression that allows me to waltz back in there with a friend and expect a friendly reception. I'm thinking of going back sometime next week to be a little more charming." He grins. "If we hit it off, I'll take you with me next time."

Dante gives him a resentful look from behind his long hair, but doesn't argue. Lucien regards him quietly and considers that if Principessa tells Dante he met her and Gigi at their favourite café today, it will probably take him about three seconds to put two and two together. Maybe he won't wait an entire week to go back...

"Have you got *any* idea what bloodline they are?" Dante asks eagerly after a frustrated silence.

"Not really," Lucien says. He wishes he did. If he had had Guillaume with him it might have been different, he reads about this stuff. About courts and clans and all those ancient traditions. But then again, Guillaume would have immediately called Dante. "They were..." He waves his hands about. "Delicate. In looks I mean. Not so much in— They got really pissed when I accused them of using magic on me."

Dante listens intently. Lucien can see the eagerness in his eyes. That right there is why he doesn't want to share yet. Dante is interested in faeries in a way Lucien never has been. Not really. But...he can still see Jeanne so vividly in his memory. The feel-

ing of their hazel eyes, fixed on him with such sparks of anger that he would never have guessed to look so good on so gentle a face. Lucien may not have sorcery in his soul, or even magic in his blood, but he knows what he saw in Jeanne wasn't faerie glamour. He doesn't know what it *is*, but he knows it's real. He *felt* something real and he wants to know what that is before he lets this secret go. He may not have cared about faeries before, but now he does and Dante will have to wait. It's selfish. It's indulgent. But those are two of Lucien's favourite things.

Despite this, or maybe because of this, he doesn't stop talking. And of course Dante knows how to listen like no other.

"They looked young. But they felt young too. I don't think this was one of your centuries old faeries."

"Young for a faerie might still be decades old," Dante points out.

"Yeah," Lucien retorts. "About two whole decades I'd wager."

Dante pulls a face and Lucien grins. There's a silence that would be tense if Lucien's mind didn't wander off immediately. Their hair had been so gorgeously auburn...

"When are you going back?" Dante breaks into his thoughts.

Lucien turns his eyes on him, slowly. "Dante," he says. "I'd trust you with my life, but there's no way in hell I am telling you that."

Before Dante can answer that with more than a roll of his dark eyes there is a loud slamming of doors downstairs.

“Riri or Gui?” Lucien asks, slanting his head.

A clamour of loud voices comes rolling up the stairs.

“Both.”

The voices don’t stop, however, and when they hear the raised sound of Guillaume’s voice they both get up to see what’s going on. Guillaume is loud, but he rarely raises his voice at Clarice. They find their two housemates in the kitchen. Guillaume’s huge form is hunched over Clarice, who is seated, telling her to sit still. She does, for about a second, but as soon as Lucien and Dante come in she immediately turns towards them and flashes them a wide grin.

Lucien winces. Clarice has a big bruise by her left socket that’s well on the way to becoming a black eye.

“Jesus, Riri,” Dante hisses.

“What did you do?” Lucien asks wearily.

“I—” Clarice begins proudly and then lets out a painful yelp as Guillaume presses against the wound while trying to look her over.

“I told you to sit still,” Guillaume grumbles. He gives Clarice a shove and gently pushes her hair aside to check for further injuries. Guillaume has no sorcery, but he has skilful hands. “She got herself into a fight, didn’t she,” he answers Lucien. He sounds as proud as he does accusatory.

"They deserved it," Clarice states. She looks at Lucien from under Guillaume's arm. "Some asshole called you a—" She cuts herself off and huffs. "I broke his nose."

Lucien's mouth twitches. "Next time you go defending my honour," he says. "Take care you don't get hit back."

"That wasn't him," Clarice says immediately. "That was one of his loser friends."

"Well, he got you good," Dante remarks, looking over Guillaume's shoulder. "Luck not on your side today?"

Dante is actually the only one of them that has sorcery, magic he can actually *control*. Clarice does have magic, but she can't control it. It merely manifests as an amazing amount of good luck. The girl spends most of her time falling off high structures and putting her hands on other people's property and yet she rarely gets either hurt or caught. When she *does* though, it always seems bad.

"Nah, I *was* lucky!" Clarice crows. "Dude that hit me lost his balance trying to get a second swing in." She grins again. "I hope he cracked his head open on the pavement."

Guillaume grins in spite of himself and Lucien can't hold back a chuckle.

"Well, this could definitely have been a lot worse," Guillaume hums, grabbing an ice pack from the freezer. "Hand me a towel?"



It's addressed at the room in general, but it's Lucien that walks over to grab a dishcloth from the rack.

"Little jerks tried to gang up on her with the three of them," Guillaume mutters, wrapping up the ice pack. "Should have stuck around to teach them a proper lesson."

Lucien makes a sharp sound at the back of his throat. Dante and Guillaume say nothing and Clarice lets out an unconcerned hum that is the result of eighteen years of near consequence-free impulsivity.

"What about you guys?" she asks merrily, trying to duck away as Guillaume comes to press the ice pack against her head. "Anything interesting happen to you?"

Lucien can feel Dante's eyes burning on the back of his head. "Had a day off," he replies casually. "Didn't do much of anything."

"Had a little run-in with Cassandra," Dante says after a short silence.

Lucien looks up. "What did she want?" he asks sharply. He really thinks it's a rotten deal the one sorceress in the neighbourhood even close to Dante's level of strength has to be a damn clairvoyant.

"Just another couple of friendly cautions," Dante says indifferently. "Nothing to worry about." He smirks. "She won't bother us. She's too busy with her happily cursed husband."

“Don’t joke about that,” Guillaume mutters, looking up from his work. Real curses are rare, but they do exist. From a distance it is nigh impossible to tell the difference between someone with eternal bad luck and someone who has actually been cursed.

Dante glances at him, making eye contact for a fraction of a second. He doesn’t say sorry, not out loud.

Guillaume turns back to Clarice. “If you don’t keep this on, I will tie it to your head,” he threatens, grabbing Clarice’s hand and pressing it to the ice pack resting against her temple.

“*Fine*,” she grumbles.

“Well Clarice,” Lucien grins, slinging an arm over the girl’s shoulder while Guillaume finally steps away with a last disgruntled look. He really can’t stand any of them getting hurt on his watch. “What did we learn?”

Clarice looks uncertain for a moment.

“We’ve learned that *before* we punch transphobes in the face, we check if their garbage friends are close enough to punch us back,” she says and Lucien lets Clarice go with a friendly shove against the shoulder.

Clarice beams with the implied approval and bounces on the balls of her feet. “We got a job tonight?”

They all glance at Dante, who shakes his head.

“Then I’m gonna ask Dauphin if he’ll go out with me,” Clarice grins.

“Don’t let Principessa catch you,” Lucien smirks, but he knows his friend is completely aware of her little brother’s current late-night excursions.

She told him herself, sourly adding that when she was his age she had no chance of sneaking out that often. Lucien feels for her. Her parents are so superstitious and anxious for the safety of their children that both their children have no less than three first names, *plus* a nickname completely unrelated to any of those for everyday use. Protective is too mild a word for them. Of course this had the immediate effect of both Principessa and Dauphin sneaking out as much as they possibly could in search of the magic their parents were so afraid of. That’s how Lucien met Principessa, they were in similar circumstances. Except *his* parents were content with a text message every week or so. Principessa once told him she was never sure whether to envy or pity him for that, but Lucien is pretty damn sure which one he prefers. At least since she met Gigi, she has a good excuse to be out.

“Come here for a sec,” Dante orders and Clarice obediently comes to stand before him.

Dante gently touches the side of her head and Lucien watches how the swelling that is changing the shape of Clarice’s eye in an unsightly manner seems to disappear until only the discolouration of the bruise remains. It’s only an illusion, but it looks a lot less unseemly.

"There," Dante says with a slight smirk. "Enough to brag about, not bad enough to freak him out."

Once again Clarice beams and she darts out of the kitchen and up the stairs to her room.

"If you keep the damn ice pack on you won't *need* magic to hide the swelling!" Guillaume calls after her.

"And put a clean shirt on!" Lucien adds.

There's no answer but the cheerful slamming of her bedroom door.

"Did anyone get seriously hurt?" Dante asks Guillaume.

"Nah," he shakes his head. "Told them all to get lost." He sighs. "She was out of my sight for no more than ten minutes. I come back and I have three little shits to threaten and a bruised Riri to drag home."

"You'd make a shit dad, Gui, but a damn good older brother," Lucien chuckles.

"She should be more careful," Guillaume mutters. "The luck gets to her head."

"Lots of things can get to someone's head," Dante says snidely.

Lucien ignores him. While Guillaume starts on dinner and argues amicably with Dante about the latest client that has asked them to get their hands on something magical that none of them were convinced even existed, Lucien lets his thoughts drift off.

He thinks of muffins, barely repressed smiles and large, shining hazel eyes. He actually feels something like heat creeping onto his face when he remembers Jeanne's soft lips against his. The surprised intake of breath and the smell of baked goods mingled with that of freshly gathered flowers. He smirks. Never kiss a faerie...

Whoever thought that was a rule worth keeping had clearly never broken it.

## Chapter 3

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### In Which A Name Is Burnt

*Lucien. Lucien. Lucien.*

The name seems to reverberate through Jeanne's body with every dancing step they take as they run up the stairs to their apartment above the café. Their faerie blood is boiling within them. The most *beautiful* of mortals. The *greenest* eyes. A name *freely* given. They touch their lips and smile.

A kiss...

The air stirs when they breeze in through the door and the many plants scattered throughout the room seem to grow a little greener.

Jeanne feels giddy. They haven't felt like this in all their twenty-one summers. "Steal from a faerie!" they laugh, their voice ringing out with sudden loudness. "Mind you don't get stolen yourself!"

Their smile vanishes like smoke in the wind and their hand clasps over their mouth in shock. They did *not* just say that... Dread settles in their stomach and drags their elated excitement down with it. Slowly Jeanne lowers their hand and takes a steadying breath. It's fine. They just got a little carried away, that's all.

Nervously they bite their lip and try not to think of elegant smirks and green eyes, but instead of what this *means*. They were discovered. They might be outed. Lucien knows two of their regulars. At the very least he might tell them and sweet as the blonde and the brunette are, they are human. They should not be allowed to know. Jeanne feels unbalanced. They have no idea what to do. So they do what they usually do in that situation. They dig their phone out of their pocket and select the only contact in their recently called list. Magic is all well and good, but modern communication is much less invasive and usually faster.

After the third ring a slightly distracted, but infinitely comforting voice answers. “Evening, Jeanne.”

“Noé, I messed up.” Jeanne can feel the shift in attention on the other end of the line immediately.

“What happened?” Noé asks, concerned.

“I’ve been discovered,” Jeanne says. They sound appropriately worried, but there is a thrill deep inside their treacherous chest, because Noé is about to ask by whom and—

“By whom?” Noé asks sharply.

“By a mortal,” Jeanne whispers. The *prettiest* mortal. “A customer...”

There’s a soft, nearly relieved sigh on the other end of the line. “Well, that was only a matter of time, I suppose. How did it happen?”

Jeanne tries to tell the story in neutral terms. Simple terms. A young man stole a muffin and knew enough about magic to sense why he could no longer leave. That's all. Nothing else.

"So you made a trade to let him go?" Noé asks.

"Yes," Jeanne replies and they silently beg that Noé won't ask what they traded.

He doesn't, he merely hums. "You must have given him quite the scare. But maybe there's no harm done. Let's hope he doesn't come back."

That's a sensible wish, but Jeanne really can't share it. Instead of saying 'but I want him to come back', they mutter: "Except he said he would..."

There's a short silence on the other end of the line. "Jeanne..." Noé begins slowly. "Did something else happen?"

Jeanne can feel their cheeks burning. Noé's ancestry consists of kind, helpful faeries. Much more used to concern themselves with humans than with the wild dancers in Jeanne's bloodline. Technically Jeanne is more powerful and they both know it. But Noé is older. Much older. And wiser.

"He told me his name..." Jeanne confesses. Maybe that will help them get away with not mentioning the kiss.

Because in a way, this is even more shocking. Names are important. Names are something to be guarded. It is the one thing all people still actually do. Even those that believe in neither fae nor sorcery. Even the people that teach their children to scoff



at crows flying in threes and to be indifferent to standing between two mirrors. Yes, even sceptics that scorn everything still think twice before telling anyone their true given name. It's engrained into the culture. A remainder of the times when faeries still stole babies from their cradles before they were named and when sorcerers and sorceresses were so common that everyone knew at least once person carrying either a blessing or a curse. So maybe the fact that this light-fingered stranger willingly told a *faerie* their name will shock Noé enough to prevent him from suspecting something else happened.

It certainly has a dramatic effect.

"*Green earth*, why?" Noé cries out.

"I don't know!" Jeanne squeaks. "He just did. I heard one of my customers use his nickname and when I called him that he corrected me!"

"You didn't ask for his name?" Noé presses.

"*No*," Jeanne says and at least that is true. They are completely innocent in that regard. They didn't ask for anything. Lucien chose to steal. Lucien chose to kiss them. Lucien chose to give them his name. *Lucien. Lucien. Lucien.*

Noé makes a sound of nonplussed incredulity. "He gave it freely?"

Jeanne sits down on their bed and fumbles with the handwoven bedspread. "I don't know why..." they mutter.

There's a heavy sigh from Noé and Jeanne is certain he is pinching the bridge of his nose. "Are you sure he doesn't have sorcery?" he asks urgently.

"I don't think he has any magic," Jeanne muses. Lucien had said he knew magic when he felt it, that didn't sound like someone that had magic actually flowing through their veins. Besides, Jeanne would have felt it if that had been the case.

"That's....good. But it's no guarantee you're safe." There's another tense pause. "Well," Noé says grimly. "You've got his name. If need be you can make him forget."

Jeanne's stomach churns. *Forget*. Make Lucien forget about them? About everything that happened? That's—

"I know you don't place spells on people," Noé says kindly, misinterpreting their sudden silence. "But you might not have a choice here."

"Yeah..." Jeanne mutters and in glancing idly round the room they accidentally catch their own reflection in the mirror on their closet door. Their mouth is almost contracted into a pout. They look like a petulant child. For some reason that realisation only makes them feel more defiant. Why should they listen to Noé with his talk about forgetting and never coming back?

"If he really does come back," Noé interrupts their thoughts. "You should at least find out if he means you any harm."

Jeanne raises their head. “Yes,” they say, brightening up. “Yes, I could do that.” They have his name after all. His first name even. That makes it that much more wonderful.

In human society first names were reserved for true intimates, close friends and family. Business partners and colleagues might know and use each other’s last names and in public people used nothing but nicknames. Those nicknames are what mortals generally know each other by and Jeanne quite likes this human practice. Faeries are different. Faeries have a given name, which they keep from the world and a chosen name, which they use. Jeanne has been ‘Jeanne’ since they first learned to speak and named themselves. Just like Noé chose that name as his own. A chosen name and a nickname are very different things. The latter is made by other people for you, the former you give yourself. A chosen name is a stronger protection than a nickname. Not only because nicknames are often based on real names, but also because what you made for yourself is not as easy to turn against you as something that was always intended for the use of other people. Still, the idea of nicknames like the mortals use them is endearing to Jeanne. They often sound so cute. They love listening to the conversations of their regulars and by now they have managed to learn quite a couple of their nicknames. The three young men that come in to study together (at least Jeanne thinks that’s what they are doing) call each other Alex, Nico and Jo. Jeanne knows this because they are often loud. They overheard them calling out to each other like Principessa called out to Lucien. But if ‘Luce’ is his nickname, Lucien almost has to be his actual given name. In that case a reading should be frightfully easy.

"Please be careful about it, though," Noé says seriously. "If he knows about magic and faeries he might have someone with sorcery in his life. If you use something that leaves a trace, they might find out."

"I will," Jeanne says. They feel better, lighter. The thought of being able to do something with the name that was bestowed on them makes a difference. They could find out who Lucien is. Something beyond the thieving fingers and the teasing grin... But no, they shouldn't, they only need to know if he might be a danger to them. Nothing more.

"Are you going to be okay, Jeanne?"

Jeanne feels a little guilty. Noé is a good friend, the best friend they have. "I will," they say. "Promise. Thank you, Noé. I...thank you."

"What are friends for," he answers warmly. "Promise to call again if anything happens? Preferably *before* things go wrong."

Jeanne laughs. "Yes, Noé," they chime.

Their friend lets out a long-suffering sigh. "Alright then, I've got to get back to work."

"Send me a picture?" Jeanne begs. Noé is an excellent leather worker and his bags are true works of art. They never tire of looking at them.

"When it's finished," Noé answers with a grin in his voice.

Jeanne hums happily. "Okay, bye then!"

“Stay safe.”

Jeanne lowers their phone and takes a moment to collect their thoughts. They need to watch themselves, that is certain. But that doesn't mean they need to be gloomy about it. Lucien had made them feel a lot of things, but not fear. No, he would not be able to truly harm them. That was no guarantee of his good intentions however. Jeanne gets to their feet and kneels beside their bed. They feel around underneath it, rummaging through the various objects too big to tidy away in their cupboards.

“Come on,” they mutter. “Where— ah!”

Triumphantly they pull out a piece of wood. It is just an old piece of board, but it is oak wood and oak is powerful. It doesn't matter that it has been a table. What matters is that it was once a mighty tree. With roots that spread through the earth and branches that spanned the sky.

Jeanne places the piece of wood on their desk and takes out their ink and brushes. They sit down, smiling slightly with the anticipation of magic bubbling in their chest and unscrew the top of the inkwell. Black. Black is the right colour. Jeanne chooses a brush and holds the tip over the black liquid. They smile and, in the interest of magic, indulge themselves for a moment.

*Elegant fingers spread out on the wooden counter. Twinkling lights hidden in green eyes. Black locks tumbling in front of curved eyebrows. A knowing smirk twitching the corners of a mouth towards defined cheekbones. A voice dripping with insolent pleasantries. Soft, cherry lips. The faint taste of lemon and thievery.*

Without looking Jeanne puts the ink-drenched brush to the wood and paints. They paint letters. Bold and dark, yet curved and elegant. The hairs of the brush twist and turn and the letters flow into one another with ease.

### *Lucien*

When Jeanne lifts their brush, the name is complete. They stare at it. It looks good. Beautiful. The letters look like how Lucien had felt. That is very important and Jeanne is pleased with their handiwork. They sit back and wait for the ink to dry. Even if this is only a middle name that will be enough for this to work. First names are more powerful, of course, and for human sorcery you'd definitely need a first or even a full name, but faerie magic is different. Besides, Jeanne has only good intentions. Not entirely disinterested perhaps, but good nonetheless. Curses require much more than benign magic.

The letters are almost dry and Jeanne gets up and kindles a small fire in the little ceramic tile stove that is nestled in one corner of the room. Jeanne still wishes they could have an actual fireplace, but they know they shouldn't be picky. They are lucky this place came with a stove. The landlord even offered to remove it for them. Strange man.

Jeanne stares at the beginning fire, the slowly growing flames reflected in their hazel eyes, until it starts crackling merrily. Then they fetch the oak slab from their desk and carefully brush past the letter with their pale fingers. The ink does not smudge. Jeanne draws herself up to their full height and breathes in the smell of the fire. For a moment the wood grows

heavy in their hands and when they speak the rustle of magic is audible in their voice:

“Friend or foe?”

They close their eyes and cast the oak slab into the fire.

The board falls with a thump and eagerly the flames wrap themselves around the wood. Jeanne stares with very mixed feelings. If the wood burns up, Lucien is a threat. If it stays unharmed, he is not. The flames whirl and dance and once again there is that thrill in Jeanne’s chest. The wood is not burning. The flames are not scorching it. But just as a smile is beginning to form on their lips, a spark flares green and not the wood, but the *ink* catches fire. Jeanne takes a startled step back as the entire fire dies out except for vibrant flames that burn the carefully crafted letters deep into the wood until they are scorched there instead of painted. With a hiss the flames die down and die, leaving the otherwise unblemished piece of oak lying in a pile of ash.

Jeanne stares at the scorched letters. There is something mocking about their frayed edges and the smoke smells of magic turned against itself. As the heat of the quickly dispersed fire begins to fade Jeanne’s eyes begin to glitter with unrestrained, wild curiosity. They know what went wrong. They *understand* what just happened. Why their magic hasn’t worked.

Lucien, the most enticing mortal they had ever met, the one that had dared to steal from them, insult them, and then *kiss* them, goes by a chosen name.

## Chapter 4

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### In Which A Word Is Spoken

It is Friday afternoon and the café is busy with people. If there had been a bell at the door it would have been ringing non-stop. (There had been bells, of course, but Jeanne had gotten rid of them immediately. Their ringing had made them terribly nervous and this was *their* shop, there would be no bells here.) Today most of the customers are only running in and out to get some treats to take home. The new raspberry tarts are flying off the shelves.

“I don’t know how you do it!” a woman laughs. “When I bake with raspberries the pips always get stuck between my teeth.”

“Practice makes perfect,” Jeanne winks. It certainly does, but magic is faster.

Jeanne loves days like these, when their shop is full of friendly faces. It’s even better today, because the Friday regulars are here and they’re cheerfully loud again. They have pushed two of the tiny tables together to make room for their books, but they clearly abandoned their attempt at studying long ago.

With a cheerful “Have a lovely day!” Jeanne bids the last customer at the counter goodbye, just in time to hear the young man called Jo say:



“...about faeries, honestly Alex.”

Jeanne freezes for a moment.

“Well of course I can’t prove it,” the one named Alex answers. “But that doesn’t mean they don’t exist.”

Jeanne relaxes a little. They have seen Alex with books about magic before. He is clearly a student of the occult, but Jeanne can’t feel a spec of magic in him, so it never worried them.

“There must be faeries around,” says the shortest of the three friends, who Jeanne thinks is called Nico. “Or people with faerie blood.” He grins. “*They* can’t all have died out. Everybody says my abuela is part duende for sure.”

“Nico,” Jo says. “If there was as much magic in the world as you see in it, we would *notice*.” He shakes his head.

“We *know* magic is real,” Alex points out. “Duende or no duende, Nico’s grandmother can heal people.”

“Yes,” Jo says gravely. “And she is an exception. If there really were sorcerers on every street corner don’t you think we’d see more marvels? Both of the terrible and the amazing kind.”

Jeanne listens with a faint smile on their face. Magic rarely creates marvels. Most magic is of a smaller, more subdued sort. The few individuals, be they fae or human, that are capable of creating actual marvels are usually too sensible to do so.

The discussion amongs the friends, or rather between Alex and Jo, is growing more heated, until Nico wraps an arm around Alex and leans his head against his shoulder.

“Leave Alex alone,” he pouts at Jo. “We can believe in faeries if we want to.” His dark eyes spark merrily. “Besides! If you need living proof, look no further, there’s one right there!”

He waves dramatically in Jeanne’s direction and Jeanne stares back at him in shock.

“*Nico*,” Jo groans embarrassedly.

“It was just a joke!” Nico says hastily.

Jeanne starts breathing again and manages to look tolerably calm when Jo gets to his feet and walks over to the counter.

“Please don’t mind him,” he says, smiling apologetically. “He didn’t mean it.”

“I don’t mind,” Jeanne says, glancing back at the curly-haired Nico, who makes eye contact for a second to gauge whether he actually offended them.

“People accuse me of being a faerie all the time,” Jo confides sympathetically. “It really isn’t funny.”

Jeanne looks into his brilliant blue eyes framed by cascading golden curls and smiles. They have never seen a mortal that looks more like a fae. Not even Lucien. They’ve thought that from the first time Jo walked into the café, but this is the first

time they have time to study him up close. The one called Nico usually orders for all three of them.

"It's the hair I guess," they shrug with a smile, shaking their own locks.

"It's silly," Jo says.

"I really don't mind," Jeanne assures him warmly. "But while you're here, can I get you guys a refill or anything?" They wink. "It'd be a shame if you had to walk all the way back."

Jo laughs. The café is so tiny it's hardly five big strides from side to side. "Actually," he says. "Are there any chocolatines left?"

"Sure there are," Jeanne chimes. "One for each of you?"

"Please," Jo nods.

There are only four chocolatines left, so Jeanne just hands Jo the entire plate. "There you go," they say. "The fourth one is free," they add with emphasis, and then with a smile: "It'd be a shame to let it grow stale." Not that Jeanne's pastries grow stale, of course, but people don't need to know that.

"Thank you," Jo says earnestly. When he pays he adds a tip that's nearly big enough to pay for the fifth pastry anyway.

Jeanne carefully puts the extra money in the tip jar. They never keep tips, they give the money to a different charity every month. A tip is freely given, but Jeanne doesn't take risks in that department, a faerie must never be indebted to anyone.

When the three friends finally leave, they get an extra particular goodbye from Jo and Nico flashes them a good-natured grin. With them gone the café is empty and Jeanne really isn't expecting any more customers before closing time, so they start to clean up. The café is usually as spotless as a cosy clutter can allow, but the kitchen much less so. Jeanne is a messy baker and their pastries are so good because they are actually handmade, albeit by magical hands. The point is that they haven't been made out of nothing. Food created like that doesn't fill, it only leaves you hungrier.

Halfway through loading the dishwasher Jeanne hears the click of the door back in the café and they quickly wipe their hands on their apron.

"You're just in time," they say cheerfully, swinging the kitchen door open. "I was about to—" They freeze in the doorway.

Lucien is leaning elegantly against the counter. This time without his leather jacket, but in a wine-red dress shirt. "What?" he grins. "Didn't you believe me when I said that I'd come back?"

"To be honest, no," Jeanne lies, letting the kitchen door close behind them. Their heart is jittering in their chest. Their memories hadn't made Lucien any more beautiful or any more intriguing than he actually was.

Lucien tuts at them. "I never lie about matters of pleasure," he says smugly. "So believe me—" He grins. "—when I tell *you* I'll come back, I definitely plan on coming back."

Despite Jeanne's best efforts they can feel their cheeks burning. They did want Lucien to come back, but now they really wish he hadn't. They also wish they weren't blushing and that Lucien wasn't quietly laughing at them for it. "Well, you should have come back at a more convenient time," they say coolly. "I close in five minutes."

"Oh," Lucien says and before Jeanne can slap his hand away he's snatched a mint brownie from a platter and stuffed it into his mouth.

"You-!" Jeanne cries, throwing their hands up.

Lucien swallows. "Oops," he says, smirk immediately back on his face. He swallows again and then makes a smacking sound with his tongue. "Hey, those are really good."

"I know they are!" Jeanne says indignantly. "And I made them to be *enjoyed* not swallowed in one bite."

The green eyes soften a little. "You're right," Lucien says. "Let me try another one." He pulls out a leather wallet. "I'll even pay."

Jeanne huffs. "I don't want your money," they say and that's true, they don't want his money. They want other things, things that are absolutely not what they need to be thinking about right now. Lucien's smile reminds them of moonlight and bare feet on dewy grass... "How do I know your money isn't stolen as well?"

"Oh no," Lucien grins. "All my money is hard-earned..."

The way he says it invites questions and Jeanne *wants* to question him. They want to lock the café doors and listen to him talk through the night.

In the time it takes them to pull themselves back together Lucien has opened his wallet and suddenly he is offering them a five-euro note and a nearly apologetic smile. "Please?"

Silently, still carefully keeping their expression at least partly disapproving, Jeanne takes his money and then hands him another brownie and his change.

"Thank you," Lucien says politely.

Jeanne *knows* he's pretending, but that doesn't mean it isn't affecting them. They sigh slightly and watch Lucien as he slowly bites into the brownie.

"How do you get the texture like that?" He's talking in between bites, but somehow without ever talking with his mouth full. "Is it magic?"

"No," Jeanne says measuredly. "Just good baking."

"Hm," Lucien hums in approval. He swallows and licks some stray crumbs from his lips.

Jeanne doesn't look away because at this point, what's the use?

"That is without a doubt the second-best brownie I have ever eaten," Lucien says sincerely.

It's obvious bait and Jeanne shouldn't take it, but again, what's the use. "And *what*," they ask with a gentle eye roll. "Was the best one?"

"That first one just now," Lucien grins. "Stolen things *always* taste better."

Jeanne shakes their head, because Lucien looks far too pleased with himself, but they grin all the same. "Why did you come back?" they demand to know.

"Because I wanted to," Lucien answers immediately. "And believe it or not, I have *very* poor impulse control."

This time Jeanne laughs and Lucien looks so surprised and delighted that they laugh again. A faerie laugh does not sound like a human laugh. Laughing out loud in mortal company is risky. But it feels *good* to laugh out loud and it feels good to see those green eyes light up at the sound of it. And why should they have all the self-control, when Lucien is *clearly* doing all of this on purpose? He came back because he *wanted* to. Just to see them again.

"Have you thought of what you're going to give me in return for my stolen goods yet?" they ask teasingly. "I like to stick to my closing times..."

Lucien's face falls a little. "Oh," he says, looking away. "Of course... I mean, I'll leave if you want me to."

"You can't leave," Jeanne reminds him playfully. "Yet."

Lucien glances up at him. "True," he says, already grinning slightly again. "Did you have anything in mind?"

Jeanne can almost hear Noé scolding them across time and space, but they walk around the counter and pull out one of the chairs of the most nearby table. They gesture invitingly at Lucien and they both sit down. "What you could do..." they say, leaning their elbows on the table, "is tell me why you have a chosen name."

Lucien is lounging in his chair and he keeps his relaxed position, but Jeanne can see the mild shock on his face. They definitely take pleasure in seeing it too. It shouldn't always be them on the back foot. They are the fae here.

"Mortals don't use chosen names," they press curiously. "Except for some sorcerers and sorceresses..." They smile. "And you may look like you have magic, but you don't."

"Oh?" Lucien says, drawing up an eyebrow. "Tell me. What part of me looks magical?"

"I'm not answering any questions before you answer mine," Jeanne says decidedly.

Lucien slants his head. "How can you tell who has magic or not?" he asks with a curious look.

Jeanne presses their lips together meaningfully.

Lucien grimaces. "You're wrong about mortals and chosen names... Everyone in my house has one."



“Clever,” Jeanne hums. “Did your sorcerer friend teach you that?”

“Something like that,” Lucien hums. He looks amused, but suddenly also a little doubtful. “...how do you know about him?”

“You know too much,” Jeanne shrugs. So Noé had been right... “Does your friend know about me?”

Clearly Lucien has heard the tension in that question, because he looks more serious when he answers: “I couldn’t resist telling him I found a fae, but I did not tell him your name or where you are.” He sits up a little. “And I won’t, if you don’t want me to.”

Jeanne can hear the honesty in his words. Lucien’s voice sounds like it’s accustomed to lying. *Very* accustomed. But he’s not lying now.

“He’ll be annoyed with me,” Lucien continues. “Because he’d give pretty much anything to meet you.”

That’s a little concerning. “Why is that?”

“Because he’s been saying there must some be faeries left in Paris for as long as I’ve known him,” Lucien smiles. He laughs. “He was so pissed off that I found one before he could. Insisted you couldn’t be a full blood.”

“It would make very little difference if I wasn’t,” Jeanne says meaningfully. “Even a quarter faerie blood is enough.”

Lucien wisely does not ask 'enough for what'. "I could bring him..." he says after a short silence. "If you'd be okay with that."

Jeanne hesitates. They're never met a sorcerer. They are getting quite scarce nowadays and fae try to stay out of their way. But Jeanne is curious. Human magic is so different from faerie magic. They've never met a sorcerer...and they'd love to.

"What kind of magic does he have?"

"He makes illusions," Lucien answers.

Jeanne raises their eyebrows in surprise.

"What?" Lucien asks.

"Nothing," Jeanne hums. "That's rare, is all."

"Ha," Lucien snorts. "Dante will be pleased with that."

Jeanne nods slowly. Dante... That must be a chosen name for sure then. It really is intriguing. A sorcerer with the ability to craft illusions. They were quite common once. But that was in the old times. Back when... They glance up. "Yes," they say brightly. "Bring him. I want to meet him."

Lucien's face lights up. "When?"

"Whenever you like," Jeanne grins. "But—" They glance at the windows. "—you should leave... The sun is going down." Lucien shouldn't be here when twilight sets in. He really shouldn't.

"I'm not afraid of the dark," Lucien grins.

Jeanne smiles. "Maybe you should be."

Lucien looks at them in silence for a while.

Jeanne looks back, leaning their elbows on the table and their chin on their hands. "You still haven't really answered my question," they point out.

His expression turns just a shade more serious. "That's because I don't want to."

"Okay, pick another payment then." It's probably for the best if they don't know.

Almost immediately a smile begins to dance in Lucien's eyes. "One of my choices last time was a word I'd never spoken, right?" he says, sinking his voice a little.

"Not any word," Jeanne says. "It has to mean something to you."

Lucien nods and leans forward. He's doing it slowly, as if he wants to give them time to pull away, but they don't. Instead they stubbornly keep their position, staring straight ahead until Lucien's mouth is right by their ear. They can almost feel his breath on their skin when he whispers:

"Jeanne..."

Jeanne blinks and Lucien pulls back, gracefully getting to his feet and stepping away from the table. He is almost smiling, almost grinning, but not quite.

"You can't just give me back my own name!" Jeanne says, skin burning with heat. "That doesn't count."

"Doesn't it?" Lucien grins. Slowly he gets up and walks to the door and Jeanne can feel he will be able to leave. Any first word will do, as long as it means something to the speaker...and the listener.

Lucien rests his hand on the curved door handle. "Am I allowed to leave, Jeanne?" he asks, dropping his voice to a tone that would be meek if Jeanne had thought him even remotely capable of that.

"Yes," they say quietly, even though their spoken permission is wholly unnecessary.

"Thank you," Lucien grins. "Au revoir, Jeanne."

Jeanne gets to their feet with their heart beating furiously in their chest. Yes, he had *better* come back.

"Au revoir, Lucien."

With a movement that is almost a bow Lucien opens the door and steps outside. Jeanne watches him walk away with feelings that are so scattered across their mind and heart that they know only one thing for sure: they are not telling Noé about any of this.

## Chapter 5

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### In Which A Door Is Opened

Lucien is pretty sure that when he promised Clarice she could come along to the club next time Dante had to meet a client, this promise did *not* include bringing Dauphin.

“Does Principessa know you’re here?” Dante says with narrowed eyes.

“Yes?” Dauphin tries, his young eyes wide and innocent.

“She definitely does not know you’re here,” Lucien says firmly and he pulls out his phone to call her.

“Oh come on,” Clarice protests. “Dante, if you can bring Luce then I can bring Dauphin.”

Lucien looks up from his screen to glare at her. He doesn’t appreciate the reminder that he doesn’t possess any magic himself. Clarice quickly shuts her mouth and looks away, but Dauphin tries again:

“*Please* let me come?”

“Sissi?” Lucien puts his phone to his ear. “Just so you know...Dauphin is with us.”

Even through bad speakers Principessa manages to sound appropriately exasperated. "Well, he better be," she grits. "Where are you guys going?"

Lucien glances at Clarice and Dauphin's pleading faces and then at Dante. His friend looks back for a moment and then he rolls his eyes and gives an acquiescing flutter of his hand.

"To the club," Lucien says. "To meet a client, maybe have a drink or two."

There is a short silence on Principessa's side which means she's deciding how cool of an older sister she's going to be. "Fine," she grunts eventually and she adds in a decidedly threatening tone: "You keep an eye on my baby brother or I'll kill you *and* your obnoxiously lucky friend."

"Cross my heart," Lucien says soothingly and when he's hung up he gives both Dauphin and Clarice a smirk. "Alright, you brats, off we go then."

"As long as you know that *you're* doing the babysitting," Dante mutters as they walk to the metro, Clarice and Dauphin darting ahead with exuberant steps.

"Yeah, yeah," Lucien grins. "Whatever." He knows Dante is as fond of Clarice as he is and they both have a soft spot for Dauphin, poor kid would never get to do anything fun if they didn't let him tag along every now and again.

Lucien can tell that both of the kids are kind of disappointed when they arrive at their destination. He doesn't blame them. The building doesn't look like anything special, but that's ex-

actly the point. There is no crowd at the door and the sign above it is modest. It reads "Club Destin" in letters that look like they're melting and about to drip off the wall. To those that know the different kinds of magic, that is a tell. It's a design that suits the club's owners. The magic around here drips and flows. It has seeped deep into the ground all around this place. Between them, Mira and Aisha command a considerable amount of power and their sorcery works particularly well together.

"This is it?" Dauphin whispers and Lucien wonders if Principessa, who has exactly the same eyes, ever looked this young and excited. She probably did, around the time they met. Except he never noticed, because he was just the same back then.

"This is it," he grins. "Go on, knock on the door."

But even Clarice draws back at that, so Dante walks up to the shabby door instead, smirking slightly as he does. He knocks and the door is opened by a young man with bare feet that Lucien knows on sight, but not by name. He knows him and Dante though.

"New arrivals?" he asks, glancing at Clarice and Dauphin.

"A luck child and a tagalong," Dante smiles.

The doorman squints critically at Clarice for a moment and nods. "Alright, go on then."

"Merci," Dante hums and he waves them all inside. Lucien nods at the doorman in passing and grins back at Clarice and Dauphin, guiding them down a winding corridor that seems to

get darker and darker before it suddenly stops. A moment later they are surrounded by loud music, dim lights and such a blur of mingled magic that it tingles on his skin. Lucien *adores* club Destin.

There is not another place in Paris that has so many different kinds of magic packed into one space. The air is heavy with it.

Lucien can hear Dauphin breathe out a heavy breath and looks back at him. The boy is holding Clarice's hand, which accounts for the faint blush on her cheeks. He glances up at Lucien and whispers: "Is it always like this?"

Lucien glances around. The club is small and filled with every variety of young person. Some of them are dancing, others are lounging on couches in the corners, a few are hanging at the bar. "Pretty much," he grins.

"That looks like our clients," Dante mutters, lowering his voice enough so that the other two can't hear. He gives a nigh invisible nod in the direction of a far corner and Lucien spots a woman they have dealt with before, accompanied by a posh-looking man that is glancing around rather impatiently. He looks just as insufferable as he sounded over the phone. Lucien knows his type, rude and greedy. They wouldn't have agreed to take his commission if the witch-daughter hadn't vouched for him.

"Want me to come with?" he offers.



“No, just keep the kids busy,” Dante mutters and he moves past Lucien towards the woman, who has just seen them and raises her head in recognition.

She looks relieved and Lucien is now pretty certain she is nothing but the go-between for her posh friend this time. Last time she wanted to buy some rare herbs, the man doesn’t look like he’s after something that simple. In any case, Lucien agrees with Dante, it’s best if Clarice and Dauphin don’t see enough to recognise either of these people.

Luckily there’s need for him to think of a distraction to keep his young charges occupied, because the two of them seem fully engrossed in watching the other patrons. Lucien feels a burst of heat and movement and turns his head to see a kid that hardly looks older than Dauphin snap literal sparks from their fingers. The small crowd of friends around the firestarter erupts in cheers of encouragement. Dauphin gasps and Lucien can almost feel Clarice’s excitement. Magic being used out in the open, just like that... She looks at Lucien, silently, but with eyes shining like stars.

“That’s what this place is all about,” he says with a smile. “That and the drinks, of course.” His smile turns into a grin. “Let’s go get a drink.”

Jittering with excitement they follow him to the bar. Behind it, the familiar, plump form of Aisha is moving behind the counter distributing glasses among her patrons. As soon as the small group of customers leaves, she turns towards him, looking from him to Clarice and Dauphin with laughing eyes.

"*Well...*" she says with a smirk. "Look who it is! Luce and some darling ducklings."

"Riri, Dauphin, this is Aisha," Lucien says smoothly, glossing over her teasing. "She runs this place."

"Tsk," Aisha tuts. "*We* run this place," and she gestures to the beautiful, dark woman that is laughing and talking with some of the patrons on the other end of the room.

"Mira looks the part," Lucien grins at them. "But Aisha's the one with the real talent."

"Your flattery is of the most insulting kind," Aisha chides, but Lucien knows he's right. He is sensitive enough to the feel of magic to be able to tell that Aisha's magic doesn't feel like most of the magic in this room. It feels more like Dante's sorcery, strong and very deliberate.

"But," Aisha says with a smirk. "I suppose it's true. My drinks are famous." She winks at the kids. "Or they would be if I wasn't so liberal with my shots of amnesia. So, what can I get you three?"

"What have you got?" Clarice asks eagerly and Aisha laughs at their eagerness, but Dauphin is still staring. Lucien gives him a questioning look.

The boy swallows. "You really sell magic?" he says, looking from Lucien to Aisha in wonder. "And people know?"

"That's what they come here for, honey," Aisha smiles. "Well, that and some other things."

“What sort of stuff can you make?” he asks excitedly, joining Clarice where she’s leaning eagerly against the counter, looking at the rows and rows of coloured bottles behind the bar. Lucien smiles. This is all very nostalgic.

“I can make most things,” Aisha replies amusedly. “Take a look on the menu.”

Behind the bar there is no mirror like in many other places, nor a blackboard, but above the rows of bottles words seem to have been scorched into the painted surface. To Lucien they are familiar by now. Contentment... Fear... Excitement... Joy... Surprise... They’re the different drinks Aisha can mix, or rather, the feelings the drinks will get you.

“You might have told your little protégés what they were getting into,” Aisha reproaches Lucien good-naturedly.

“I wanted it to be a surprise,” he grins.

Clarice beams at him. “What do you usually get?” they ask eagerly, but before he can answer Aisha interjects.

“Why don’t I start you off with something manageable,” she decides for them. “I’ll get you both a glass of light-heartedness.” She gives them a meaningful glance. “You’re new here, let’s not overdo it.” She grabs two glasses and nods towards Lucien. “*He* usually overdoes it.”

“Slander,” Lucien scoffs, leaning on the bar, but he certainly agrees with her choice. Clarice is hard enough to handle without extra emotions rushing through her mind and Principessa

would probably literally kill him if she heard that he let her little brother drink something heavy like passion or pride.

They both crowd against him, almost giddy with excitement to see Aisha work. She is using the contents of several different coloured bottles to mix them their drinks, but by now Lucien knows they are all filled with water. Aisha is probably only putting on this little show for the sake of theatricality, she doesn't need to do this to make her magic work. It suddenly occurs to Lucien that Jeanne probably used a very similar type of magic. Surely faerie magic can't be completely different. He had wondered, that first time he visited the café, whether it was his imagination that made him taste the extra wakefulness in his coffee. Perhaps Jeanne is capable of exactly the same marvels as Aisha is...

"There you go," Aisha says, sliding the two glasses across the counter. "Give that a try." She glances at Lucien. "I expect *you* would like to keep a level head, since you're supposed to be the adult tonight," she says meaningfully.

Lucien rolls his eyes, but he's too busy watching Clarice and Dauphin to give a proper sneering reply. They are both sniffing their glasses, frowning at the lack of any kind of smell.

"You put magic in the water?" Dauphin asks curiously.

"Something like that," Aisha hums. "Go on, try it."

Lucien gestures for them to knock it back like a proper shot and grins at them. "In one go," he says.

They both grin back at him nervously, tilt their glasses back and drain them. For a moment they stand very still and then they both let out a surprised and delighted laugh.

Lucien exchanges an amused look with Aisha. She looks rather smug.

“Oh that’s *awesome*,” Clarice gasps, unable to stand still. “It tastes cool, but it feels hot and I can feel it *everywhere*.”

“Has Principessa been here?” Dauphin asks, starry-eyed and with his pale cheeks positively glowing.

“You bet she has,” Lucien grins. “Come on, that’s enough for now. Want to meet some people?”

“Yes!” Clarice cries. “Yes, we do.”

Still bouncing with the lightness of magic Clarice and Dauphin follow him to one of the couches, where several of Lucien’s acquaintances are lounging about. They are friendly to both the kids and very interested in Clarice’s magic. Lucien glances around for Dante and sees him deep in conversation with the prospective new client. It’s not a relaxed conversation though. Lucien can tell Dante has his guard up, even more so than usual, but no matter how dissatisfied Dante seems with the man’s manners, it doesn’t look like he’s willing to back out of this deal because of it. So Lucien contents himself with keeping only half an eye on whatever is going on in the far corner and keeps the rest of his focus on Clarice and Dauphin.

When someone goes to fetch a round of drinks, he lets them both have lemonade with joy mixed in and for a while he just

sits back and enjoys them going wild. He wonders if the fae have places like this. People do say the faerie courts have all crumbled, but then again, they also say there are no more fae living among humans. Shows what they know. Lucien grins quietly to himself. Jeanne would fit right in here. Or rather, they should feel at home here. They'd still stand out, of course. Jeanne would stand out anywhere.

Lucien glances at the dance floor. Clarice and Dauphin are dancing, their heads close together and their smiles wide.

Never kiss a faerie. That had been a rule worth breaking. Lucien is certain there is a similar one about dancing...

"Having fun pretending to be responsible?" Dante's voice comes from behind him and a moment later he joins him on the couch.

"Up yours," Lucien says. "I haven't had a single proper drink."

"Well, neither have I, I was working," Dante says loftily.

"Mm, how'd that go?"

"Dude's an ass," he sniffs. "You know he introduced himself with his full name?"

Lucien snorts into his glass. "He what?" *No one* does that, it must be a pseudonym.

Dante pulls his face into a sneer and mimics the poshest Parisian accent he can manage: "I assure you, once people

know you did a service for *Emile Dupont* you can expand your little business venture in any way you like.”

“The fuck.” Lucien gives Dante an incredulous frown.

“Yeah, I know,” he grunts. “But he’s willing to triple our usual fee, so.”

Rich bastard. Lucien scans the crowd but the man is nowhere to be seen. “What does he want?”

“Amulet,” Dante mutters. “Protection, won’t be easy to get.”

“Hm,” Lucien nods. You’d think being with mostly non-magic users would be a disadvantage to finding and selling magical artefacts, but it’s actually an advantage. Dante’s power and reputation are necessary, of course, and Clarice’s luck has already come in handy a couple of times. But the fact that they *don’t* have magic means that he and the others are rarely on anybody’s radar. It throws people off, which is very good for business.

Dante watches Clarice and Dauphin dance with an expression that is probably fonder than he’d like to own up to and Lucien thinks of Jeanne again. He glances sideways at Dante.

“I went back to see my new acquaintance the other day,” he says casually.

Dante starts to attention and turns fully towards him immediately. Lucien has to admit he’s going to miss having this to lord over his friend, but Jeanne seemed quite partial to the idea of

meeting his friend and he'd actually really like to see how they get along.

"And?" Dante says when he's found some degree of composure. "Made a better impression this time?"

"Good enough to get them to agree to bring you along next time," Lucien smirks.

Dante's expression stays admirably in check, but his dark eyes are gleaming brightly. "Really."

"Really," Lucien says. He leans back and gives his friend an amused look. "I think they're curious about your sorcery. Said it was rare."

"You told them about my magic?" Dante says indignantly.

"I had to sell you a little, didn't I?" Lucien teases. "I didn't tell them much."

"Hm," Dante grunts. "What do you mean 'rare'?" he asks after a short silence.

Lucien represses a smirk. Dante never could resist a compliment. "Don't really know," he says. "They looked very surprised when I mentioned illusions."

Dante hums thoughtfully and Lucien wonders exactly how difficult he is going to be about all this. Dante has wanted to meet a faerie for at least as long as Lucien has known him and he has a habit of acting out when he's confronted with people that intimidate him. Still, Jeanne can hold their own, they have made



that abundantly clear. At any rate, observing their first meeting will be interesting, and if it goes well he might get another opportunity to hear Jeanne laugh.

He would do an awful lot to hear Jeanne laugh again.

## Chapter 6

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### In Which An Introduction Is Made

Every morning when Jeanne unlocks the doors of the café, they take a moment to inspect and water the potted plants they keep to brighten up their side of the street. This morning there is an unexpected extra charge to water, however. There is a green sprout growing beside the door, in the dirt revealed by a few missing cobblestones.

“Hello,” Jeanne says tenderly, crouching down to examine it. “You’re very brave.” They carefully touch the little leaves, but a sprout is a sprout, they can’t tell what it’s going to be yet. “You’re a little ahead of the seasons,” Jeanne says kindly. “But you’ll have a little help, so maybe you’ll be alright.” Plants always do well around them.

Jeanne gets back up and looks into their café through the glinting window panes. It looks nice and cosy. Like it always does. They love this place.

“Excuse me? Are you open?”

Jeanne turns around and looks up into the face of a tall young man with a head as bald as his smile is wide. “Yes I am!” they chime. “What can I get you?” With a flourish they open the door and follow the new customer inside.

“Oh, I just need something for my lunch,” he says merrily. “I lost mine.”

Jeanne looks at him. They usually don’t actually chat to customers, but... “What do you mean lost?” they ask, frowning slightly.

“Eh,” the customer laughs. “It’s a long story...there was a bird involved.”

“Okay,” Jeanne says, swallowing a laugh. “Are you in a hurry? I only have pastries ready to go. Not really a healthy lunch.”

“No, maybe not,” the man chuckled. “But I’m not at all in a hurry. Life’s too short for hurrying.”

“Then I can make you a sandwich,” Jeanne says happily. “What do you want on it?”

“Surprise me,” the young man says, eyes crinkling pleasantly.

Jeanne breezes into the kitchen. They’re glad they’re getting a fresh batch of bread delivered on Monday, they are almost out. Jeanne does not bake their own bread, it’s one of the few things they don’t make themselves. Bread is inherently the food of humanity and they are not at all convinced they would do a good job.

“Here you go,” they smile when they present the cheerful young man with his sandwiches. They made two, he looks like he could use it.

“Thank you,” he says. “How much do I owe you?”

Despite their best efforts Lucien drifts straight back into Jeanne's mind. The shimmer of gold the customers earn in exchange for the food that Jeanne makes. That is the deal. That is always the deal. Except Lucien changed the deal, *twice*, and suddenly it all seems rather...arbitrary.

"Actually," they say, leaning on the counter. "I'll trade you the sandwiches for the story about what happened to your lunch." They *really* want to know.

"Really?" the young man laughs, rubbing the back of his neck. "That's funny actually, you saying you'll trade me. Because I traded my first lunch."

Jeanne raises their eyebrows. "With whom?"

"A bird," he says sheepishly.

"A bird?" Jeanne echoes. They have to stop themselves from laughing again. Maybe they shouldn't be talking like this, but they're so curious and this customer is so friendly.

"Yeah," he says. "Actually I— Look." He puts his hand in his pocket and takes out a pair of silver earrings.

They catch the light beautifully, shining bright against his brown skin, and Jeanne slips their hands in their apron pocket just in case. The partiality for shiny trinkets is nestled deep in their faerie soul and they are never quite able to repress it.

"I had forgotten these were still in my pocket," the young man explains. "So when I searched for my metro card this morning

they fell out and before I could pick them up a bird snatched one of them.”

The corners of Jeanne’s mouth quiver.

“I went after it of course,” he continues. “But I couldn’t catch it and it wouldn’t let go...so I traded my lunch.”

“You offered a bird your lunch in exchange for an earring?” Jeanne says, delighted.

He grins awkwardly. “Yes. I mean, I am always losing my keys and my wallet and I’m quite used to it by now, but these are my wife’s! But I managed to get it back.”

“That’s a wonderful story,” Jeanne says. “Well worth two sandwiches.”

“Thank you!” he laughs, taking the paper-wrapped package. He glances around the café. “This is a lovely place. When are you open?”

“Mornings and afternoons,” they answer pleasantly. “All days except Sunday.” Sundays do not belong to the fair folk. The passing of centuries has not changed that.

“Good to know!” He smiles. “Thank you again and if I can find this place again I’ll certainly be back!”

“Why wouldn’t you be able to find it again?” Jeanne says amusedly. This isn’t that kind of shop after all.

“Oh, you never know,” the young man hums, moving towards the door. “Have a lovely Saturday.”

“Bonne journée,” Jeanne chimes and they watch him leave with a strange, light feeling in their chest. They chatted to a customer. *Another* customer. But this time they were calm. This time there had been no shortness of breath or thumping hearts it had just been...pleasant. Maybe they’re getting better at it? Perhaps they can be a little more like Noé. He works with humans all the time. Some of them suspect he’s magic, but none of them know what he is. And Jeanne is sure they don’t care to find out, because Noé is a person everybody just trusts. They smile. Yes, why not? Why shouldn’t they talk to people? People *other* than Lucien. He has nothing to do with it. Nothing.

They do wonder when Lucien will come back though, because this time they’re certain he will. If only because he said he’d bring his friend... Jeanne is curious. Curious to see Lucien’s friend and curious to see them together. They know they shouldn’t be looking forward to all this quite so much though, so they try not to. In any case, they will not expect him today. He will certainly not come today. Except he might...

Lucien does not come that day and the Sunday that follows it seems very long and tiresome. Jeanne goes about their business and scolds herself whenever their thoughts drift away. They are not like Noé at all. He would never lose his head over a silky voice and a handsome smirk. To distract themselves they check on the little sprout growing outside regularly. It’s thriving, even more than plants naturally do around them. They wonder what it will grow up to be.

On Monday he does not come.

On Tuesday he does not come.

On Wednesday Jeanne feels a sudden jolt of nerves when the two girls that know Lucien come in. But they do not behave any different towards them. They greet them cheerfully and order scones as usual. Lucien has not betrayed their secret. The glow of happiness that this realisation gives to Jeanne could not have gone unnoticed by the girls, had they not been wrapped up in a particularly animated conversation.

"I covered for him, of course, but Dauphin should know better, running off to go to the club without so much as an alibi."

"You're sweet when you fret about your brother."

"He's a pain in my—"

"You dote on him, Sissi."

"Course I do, doesn't mean he can't be a pain."

"Cream or jam this time?" Jeanne interjects pleasantly.

"Gigi?" Principessa asks.

"Jam please," Gigi replies with a smile.

"Here you go," Jeanne beams. They love it when they learn new nicknames.

"Thank you," Gigi says and the two turn away.

"Oh by the way," Principessa says, turning back. "I always mean to say, I love your braid."

Jeanne flushes with the unexpected compliment. "Thank you!" they say happily.

Principessa flashes them a grin and she and Gigi walk to their usual table.

Jeanne watches them go, cheerfulness bubbling in their insides.

They are still bubbling when the girls leave again, arm in arm and still talking rapidly. They do pause a moment to wish Jeanne a good day however. It *is* a good day and Jeanne is happily rearranging the macarons when the door opens with a flourish. They look up, straight into Lucien's grinning face.

"Have a pastry why don't you?" Jeanne says before he can even say a word. "Anything you want, it's *free*." Lucien laughs and Jeanne gives him a pointed stare. They cannot let Lucien pull that trick a third time. The rule of three is still a thing and they are not risking it.

"I wasn't going to do it again," Lucien grins.

"Hands where I can see them then," Jeanne demands, but their eyes are twinkling. They can't help it. Not while he's grinning at them like that.

"I wish you were the first to demand that of me," Lucien sighs dramatically as he holds up his hands and mockingly wiggles his fingers.

"Good," Jeanne says. Only then do they notice the young man standing a few paces behind Lucien. They glance at him curiously and have just time enough to take in long wavy hair and



a tan olive complexion, before two black eyes meet theirs and their own eyes widen in recognition.



Lucien isn't sure whether Jeanne is nervous or just curious. He figures a quick introduction is probably best. "Jeanne," he says cordially. "This is my friend Dante." He grins. "And Dante, this is the very *talented* café owner, Jeanne."

Dante nods. He is staring at Jeanne and Jeanne is staring silently back at him.

Lucien grimaces. "Don't be rude, man," he says. "At least *try* to make a good impression."

Jeanne's eyes leave Dante's face and they look at Lucien. "Well, at least *he* didn't steal anything, so..."

Lucien clutches at his chest and Dante almost grins.

"So," Jeanne says, straightening up behind the counter. "What can I get you?"

Lucien glances around quickly. There are only three other customers and all of their plates are empty and their drinks at least half-finished. There's a fair chance they'll leave soon.

"What indeed," he says leisurely. "What do you feel like, Dante?"

Dante's face is nearly expressionless. "Do you have tea?" he asks.

"All sorts," Jeanne chimes and they produce a box from under the counter. They glance at Lucien while Dante looks it over.

"Well, if I remember correctly, I can get any pastry I like," he grins.

Jeanne bites their lip slightly, but says nothing.

Lucien leans on the counter. Jeanne doesn't move. He is almost annoyed with the mingled smells of fresh coffee and baked goods in the air. The flowery smell of Jeanne's hair is lodged in his memory, but just out of reach.

"What do you recommend?" he asks.

"Lemon meringue," Jeanne replies and one of their eyebrows quirks archly for a moment. "Since I know how much you like lemon."

"I do," Lucien grins. "So, yes please. And a latte if you wouldn't mind."

"Not at all," Jeanne answers brightly. "If you pay for it."

"Of course," Lucien says innocently.

Dante glances at him and takes a masala chai from the box. "This one please," he says, turning back to Jeanne. "And a brownie."

"It wouldn't be very nice of me to make you pay," Jeanne says kindly.

Dante almost takes a step back and Lucien snickers. His friend is so tense it's hilarious and for absolutely no reason either. Lucien may not have magic, but he's good at reading people and Jeanne clearly wouldn't hurt a fly. Although, Lucien reminds himself, the emphasis in that sentence should be on wouldn't. Lucien is pretty convinced Jeanne could do a lot of damage if they wanted to. Dante probably senses that too, but Lucien really doesn't know why that should put him on edge. Lucien for one is delighted. Flirting with someone as beautiful and sweet as Jeanne is a delight. Flirting with someone as beautiful and sweet as Jeanne with the realisation that it is probably stupid and dangerous to do so is downright exhilarating.

"Don't worry," Jeanne says, pushing a plate with a brownie towards Dante. "It's free. Completely." They smile and turn to cut off a piece of lemon meringue. "Call it a show of solidarity."

"Solidarity?" Dante echoes blankly.

Lucien gives Jeanne a curious look. That was a rather strange thing to say. Jeanne seems to realise this, because they suddenly flush red. They do have a lovely blush. Lucien really wouldn't mind seeing more of it.

"Oh, you know," they say hastily. "A welcome. First-time customer and all that. Here's your tea water. I'll bring you your latte in a minute."

They turn away resolutely and avoid making eye contact. Lucien glances at Dante, who is still frowning. He wishes Dante wasn't so sullen. If he knew he was going to be scowling like a suspicious owl all the time, he wouldn't have brought him. He's

clearly making Jeanne nervous, they are fumbling with the cup and saucer.

"Come on," he says and he drags Dante to a table. "Would you stop staring," he mutters as they sit down. Yes, he does feel a tiny bit hypocritical, but Dante doesn't need to know that.

"I..." Dante shakes his head and tears his eyes away from the counter. "I just can't believe that you can't see it. I mean obviously they look...different."

Understatement of the damn year, Lucien thinks privately, sticking his fork in the meringue.

"But I can't tell they're—" Dante doesn't finish that sentence, because Lucien glares at him. He's keeping his voice down, but the café is so tiny you can never be sure what might be overheard. He lowers his voice a little more. "Maybe they're using something to mask it," he mutters.

"Well once we are alone, you can ask them," Lucien says quietly. Jeanne probably won't mind that, Lucien gets the feeling they secretly rather like being questioned, even if they don't always feel like answering.

He looks up just in time to see them hastily look away. The smirk that appears on his face is mostly involuntary, but he does very little to check it.

## Chapter 7

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### In Which A Legend Is Told

Jeanne has to physically force herself to go bring Lucien his drink and they do their level best to avoid eye contact with both him and Dante, who is still looking at them very strangely. But how were they supposed to guess that he didn't know? Lucien specifically said that his friend had been looking for faeries for a long time and the magic around him was so strong!

Mortified, they try to focus on other things, but not long after one of the other customers leaves and Jeanne realises that soon they'll be left alone together. Sure enough, the couple sitting in the corner follows not long after. As soon as the door closes behind them Lucien turns around in his chair and looks towards the counter.

"Would it be bad etiquette to buy the barista a drink?" he grins.

Jeanne can feel a blush rising to their cheeks again, but they cannot let Lucien fluster them right now. His friend is staring at them again. "No," they answer calmly. "That would be fine. Not sure about the owner though."

Dante snorts and grins slightly.

Jeanne slants their head and looks at him a little more closely. He is using magic. It's hanging around him like a veil. They can *see* it obscuring his face, changing his features ever so slightly.

"Speaking of etiquette," Jeanne says primly, walking around the counter. "I'd prefer it if you didn't do that."

Lucien straightens up in his seat, looking surprised, but Dante looks appropriately guilty. "So you can tell..." he says.

So he was testing them. That's a little insulting. They narrow their eyes at him slightly. "Of course I can."

"I'm guessing this is a magic thing?" Lucien says, looking a little displeased at being left out.

Jeanne pulls a third chair towards their table and sits down. "Yes," they say. "And it's really rather rude."

Dante gives them a pensive look and suddenly holds out his hand. "Dante."

Jeanne takes his hand and shakes it. "Jeanne."

"Dramatic much," Lucien rolls his eyes. "Not like I didn't *just* introduce you two."

"Shut up," Dante grunts and he gives Jeanne another thoughtful look. "What did you mean when you said solidarity?"

Jeanne glances at him. He really doesn't know... "Well, you have sorcery," they say airily, and guessing pride is as good an emotion to distract him with as any they add: "I've never actually met a sorcerer before."

"You haven't?" Lucien says, visibly surprised.

"It's kind of in my best interest to stay away from magically inclined mortals," Jeanne points out.

"Fair enough," Dante nods. He leans back. "But I don't think you're telling the truth."

"Excuse my friend," Lucien says with a grimace. "Illusionists are suspicious by nature."

"Right, illusions..." Jeanne echoes.

Dante raises his eyebrows. "You *just* saw me use my magic."

Yes they did and what they *saw* was him using glamour. Jeanne does not quite know what to say and Dante's eyes narrow.

"What did you think I was using?" he demands to know.

"How should I know?" Jeanne protests. "I told you, I don't know any sorcerers."

His eyes are fixed on them very intently. "Well, you know one now, and he'd like a straight answer."

"I can't bring you anywhere," Lucien sighs in annoyance, leaning back in his chair, but Dante isn't listening and Jeanne feels trapped.

"Why would me having illusionary magic surprise you?" Dante presses.

"It doesn't matter," Jeanne says. They have to think of something to distract him. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to upset you."

"I'm not upset," Dante says indignantly. "But the least you could do is—"

"*Dante*," Lucien groans. "Could you be chill for *one minute*?"

"Why?" Dante snarls. "Since when do *you* care about being polite? If someone lies to me, I'll call them out on it, fae or not."

"I did not lie about anything," Jeanne says, crossing their arms. "Luce said you wanted to meet me. For someone eager to meet a faerie, you're not trying very hard to be agreeable."

"Oh, sorry," Dante bites. "Should I have arrived with a saucer of cream?"

Jeanne's eyes narrow. "That would have been nice. Do you want one yourself?"

Dante blinks. "What?"

"If we're going to be insulting faerie weaknesses, you might as well own up to your own," they snap.

Lucien is looking between them and his friend with complete confusion on his handsome face, but Jeanne doesn't care.

Dante opens his mouth and closes it again. "You...you're saying I'm part faerie?"

"Clearly," Jeanne huffs. "I wasn't going to say anything in company—" they glance at Lucien, "—but since you refuse to be polite, I don't see why I should be."

"Hold up," Lucien says, sitting up. "*Dante* has faerie blood?"



"A fair bit I think," Jeanne says. No going back now. Dante looks completely dumbstruck and Jeanne offers him an amused smile. "Got any great-grandparents that went missing and came back rather suddenly?"

"I..." Dante shakes his head, still stunned.

Suddenly Lucien bursts out laughing. "Holy shit, that's just too good to be true," he snorts. "All your whining about bloody faeries and you *are* one."

Jeanne swallows their laugh. "Well," they say. "At least you had a good reason for your curiosity."

"Damn right I did!" Dante cries, recovering under the sound of Lucien's laughter. He pushes his chair back and looks at Jeanne with a mix of pride and utter frustration on his face. "How could I not know?"

"You're still mortal," Jeanne smiles. "And where would the fair folk be if mortals would know us by sight?"

"Is it obvious?" he asks, trying to ignore Lucien, who is still snickering.

"To me it is," Jeanne says. "What you did just now, I would call that glamour, not an illusion."

"But...I can place illusions on other things and people too," Dante says. "Surely that can't be glamour!"

Jeanne hums. They're impressed. Magic that lasts out of sight of its creator takes a lot of talent. "No," they admit. "Something

like that *would* be an illusion. And a strong one at that." They sit up straight and smile excitedly. "Your sorcery must have latched on to your faerie gifts."

Dante looks smug for a moment, but then his face falls. "If you could tell, would others be able to?"

"Other fae might," Jeanne replies. "But from what I know of sorcerers, they probably wouldn't."

Lucien clicks his tongue amusedly. "What about Cassandra though?"

"Damn," Dante mutters under his breath and something like actual anger flashes in his eyes.

"Who is Cassandra?" Jeanne asks curiously.

"A clairvoyant," Lucien says, leaning towards them a little. "Dante doesn't like her."

Dante makes a grumbling noise. "Second sight is a sneaky gift," he huffs.

"How do you know her?" Jeanne asks, trying to sound nonchalant. They've never had an opportunity to find out about the magical mortals in Paris. They've always kept to themselves so much.

"We all know each other," Dante says. "Sorcerers and sorceresses I mean. Only a matter of time before you run into each other. Especially if you parade around like Cassandra."

"Yeah," Lucien smirks. "Unlike you, of course."

Dante glares.

“Are there many?” Jeanne asks.

Lucien grins at them. “Dante likes to say there aren’t, don’t you Dante?”

“Not with my level of skill,” Dante says confidently. “Cassandra would be close, if she could do active magic, which she can’t.” He smirks. “Must be frustrating, to be able to do nothing but watch.”

“Unless you believe the stories about her unlucky husband,” Lucien grins.

“Rubbish,” Dante scoffs.

“You’re holding out on me,” Jeanne complains. “What are the stories?”

“The guy she lives with,” Dante says. “Some people say she cursed him, but that’s a load of crap. If he’s cursed, she didn’t do it. It’d be more like her to stick with him because someone *else* cursed him. Try and take care of him.” He snorts.

“Hence *happily* cursed husband.” Lucien grins at them. “That’s what people call him.”

That’s a rather pretty epitaph, Jeanne thinks. There’s certainly worse around. “Are there any others?” they ask eagerly. “More sorcerers?”

Lucien's green eyes sparkle at them. "Well...there's the famous Aisha and Mira, of course." He speaks the names with very dramatic emphasis.

"And who," Jeanne says, deciding to take the bait, "are Aisha and Mira?"

Lucien gives them an incredulous grin, but it is clear he is actually delighted. "You've never even heard of them?" he says, lowering his voice.

"I haven't heard of anyone," Jeanne rolls their eyes. "That's why I'm asking."

"They're witches," Dante explains. His voice is filled with a respect Jeanne is sure it does not often display. "Very accomplished ones."

"How do you know?" Jeanne asks, leaning their chin on their hand. "Don't you guys hide your magic as well?"

"They do," Lucien hums. "...but not from everyone."

That sounds interesting. Jeanne glances between Lucien and Dante. "So what are their gifts?"

"They have several," Dante neutrally, but Lucien nods meaningfully towards the display full of pastries.

"Not unlike yours," he confides.

Jeanne does their best to extract more from them, but they get nothing but vague hints and teasing expressions. They get the feeling that if Dante wasn't here, Lucien might have been per-

suaded to tell them, but his friend is clearly better at keeping secrets. He'd have to be, of course. To keep himself safe.

Lucien grins before he takes the last sip of his latte and it's still lingering around his lips when he puts the cup back down. "I guess it's true what they say about faeries liking stories, hm?"

*"I like stories,"* Jeanne says airily. They smile invitingly. "Tell me another one."

"There's not that many real sorcerers in Paris," Dante says. "There are several people running around pretending they have more magic than they really do."

"And a couple that think they don't have any but actually do," Lucien smirks.

Dante smiles.

"Oh?" Jeanne says, raising an eyebrow. "And how would you find out?"

"They usually find us," Lucien grins. "Looking for solutions."

"Magical solutions?" Jeanne asks, intrigued.

"We're specialists," Lucien says lightly. "You need something special...we can get it for you."

Jeanne slants their head and thinks of slender fingers snatching brownies. "I see..." they hum. "Let me guess, especially if the something special doesn't particularly want to be found?"

Lucien inclines his head gracefully.

With great effort Jeanne resists the urge to ask for elaboration. They do not need to hear stories of Lucien sneaking into hidden places looking for long forgotten magic. They really don't. They really, really- "So, no more stories of sorcery to tell?" they hastily cut off their own thoughts.

"Well, there's always the idiot we met the other week," Lucien snorts.

Dante makes a frustrated noise.

"How so?" Jeanne asks.

"Just some tool throwing his name around like it means something," Dante grumbles. "Says he has sorcery, but I don't believe it for a second."

Lucien shakes his head.

"You've met him personally then?" Jeanne asks. No wonder Dante resents the woman with the second sight, Jeanne thinks. He cannot have any of it himself, if he can be uncertain of the presence of magic in someone that claims to have not just magic but actual sorcery.

"He's a client," Lucien says and he doesn't sound happy about it at all.

"What about you?" Dante asks suddenly. "Do you have stories? Are there a lot of faeries in Paris?"

Jeanne keeps their face neutral. "Not really," they say. "We're not very socially minded. Not since we left the courts... And

most of us were never very good at being families.” That was true at least. “It’s one of the things I like about humans,” they smile. “Your families, your communities.” They will not tell them about Noé.

“Don’t you have any stories?” Dante asks, a little disappointed.

“Only old stories,” Jeanne says with a shake of the head, but then they recollect. “Well, there is one story. From a century ago? About a changeling that went against the last French faerie court.”

“We told our stories,” Lucien says meaningfully, leaning back in his chair.

Jeanne smiles. Fair is fair. “He has so many names he might as well not have one,” Jeanne says. “But the name I know him by is Fernand. He was a changeling.”

“A stolen mortal?” Dante asks.

“No,” Jeanne grins. “The faerie child they left behind. One of the very last.” They allow themselves a little glamour to tell the story, just a tad, a good story needs to be done justice.

Neither Lucien nor Dante seem to notice.

“He grew up among mortals,” they say. “But he was so wild and restless everyone knew something wasn’t right. The story goes that when he found out what he was, he went to look for the court that exchange him for his parents’ child.”

“And he found it?” Dante says incredulously.

“Barged straight in,” Jeanne smiles.

“The faerie queen was pleased with him. She told him he could send the mortal back to his family, that he could take his place among her courtiers instead. But Fernand laughed and told her he had not come to stay or to make any kind of exchange. He had come to take his brother and they would leave and go home, together.”

Lucien whistles between his teeth. “Since you’re telling this story I presume he did it.”

“Oh yes,” Jeanne smiles. “They say that after returning home, he travelled the world with his brother for decades. But he was still mortal of course, and Fernand isn’t.”

“So he’s still around,” Dante says.

“He must be,” Jeanne nods. They glance at the window. The light is nowhere near fading yet, but it is getting late.

“I think that’s our cue to leave,” Lucien says, glancing at his watch.

Jeanne gets to their feet and takes the empty cups and plates back to the counter. Doing so immediately puts more distance between them again. Just now they were almost talking like friends, now Jeanne feels herself slip into their professional persona again.

Lucien and Dante pay for their drinks and Jeanne silently puts their money in the till.



“Thank you,” Dante says, rather abruptly. “It was good meeting you.”

“Likewise,” Jeanne says with a smile.

When they walk to the door, they can’t resist walking with them. Under the pretence of locking up behind them, of course. Dante steps outside, but Lucien suddenly holds still. He turns around and Jeanne wishes they hadn’t walked so close behind him.

“I’m sorry about the stealing,” Lucien says.

Jeanne’s face softens. “You already apologised.”

“I mean the second time,” he explains. “If it made you uncomfortable...I shouldn’t have done that.”

“Probably not,” Jeanne smiles. “But no harm done.”

Lucien flashes them a grin and makes the same almost-bowing movement as last time. Then he spins around elegantly and follows his friend.

Jeanne follows, gently pulling the door closed behind them and leans against it, watching them go. This went well, really well. They saw Lucien again, they met his friend and he turned out to be part fae. They did well, despite the excitement. No blushing or babbling and no broken contracts. Maybe they’re getting the hang of this.

Lucien looks back at them just before turning the corner and gives a little flounce of his shoulders.

Jeanne feels a grin tugging at the corners of their mouth. They start to turn away, but just before they step back inside their eye falls on the sprout beside the door. It's not a sprout anymore. It's a sapling that is now growing well past their knee.

"Well..." Jeanne splutters. "That's..." Their face blanches.

Now that the plant is stronger they can feel the magical aura around it. That sprout didn't break through the soil on its own. They *made* it. They must have. They didn't mean to, but they did. Trembling, Jeanne reaches out and lifts a leaf. The shape is almost familiar... Jeanne's face turns from pale to bright red and they abruptly let go of the green twig. They hardly know where to look. Never in their life have they been this mortified. They might as well have a declaration of their infatuation plastered all over their storefront!

Of all the plants from all the corners of the earth, it *had* to be a wisteria.

## Chapter 8

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### In Which A Dance Is Danced

Never before has Jeanne cursed their green thumb, but they do now. Because the wisteria keeps growing. It does not matter that practically all mortals have long left the language of flowers behind. It may be true that nowadays no one would see the veiled welcome to a stranger or even the expression of affections born from only a first meeting in the coiling branches of that plant, but *Jeanne* knows what it means. Just like they know damn well why it keeps on growing.

Insult to injury, whenever Lucien drops by – for increasingly elaborate and sugary drinks – it grows worryingly fast. And Jeanne *does* worry about it. When they remember to at least, which is not that often actually. They do feel guilty about it, but they just can't bring themselves to be indifferent to Lucien. Every time he strolls through the door, their lips smile on their own accord. It's all they can do to keep from laughing out loud at his stories. Because ever since he came by with Dante, Lucien seems to have a new story to tell for every visit.

He talks about his friends a lot. His friends who, apart from Dante of course, all seem to use normal nicknames instead of chosen names. There are stories about Riri, who is apparently eternally lucky and eternally getting into trouble. About Principessa and her brother Dauphin, who Lucien seems to

have known for a very long time. And about Gui, who sounds like a very superstitious, but also a very caring person. Lucien's stories about Dante are the best though, maybe because they usually feature himself most heavily. Jeanne can't even pretend not to look forward to them, so eventually they just give up and ask outright.

Lucien starts making it a habit to lean against the counter instead of taking a seat, pausing his chatting with slight annoyance whenever Jeanne needs to serve a customer. He never tries to steal anything again, but he keeps pretending he will. It feels almost like a private joke and Jeanne has not just gotten used to it, they've grown to love it. Way more than they are willing to admit.



The trick to talking to Jeanne, Lucien has found, is to do it while they can pretend to be doing something else. The perfect conditions are to have at least a few customers chatting loudly in a corner of the café and to let Jeanne be at least nominally employed in cleaning or fixing something. Because that way he can talk to them without them having to obviously fix all their attention on him. It also means he can take them by surprise every now and again and make them blush or laugh. The blushes are a delight, but the laughter is a prize. Lucien is certain Jeanne tries very hard not to laugh out loud. He can't imagine why, but it adds a challenge to an exercise that is already pure indulgent pleasure, so he's not about to complain.

On the whole he's pretty good at picking the right times to visit. Early Wednesday afternoons are off limits, clearly, Princessa and Gigi are both far too observant to have them around while he's... Actually, Lucien isn't quite sure what he's doing. Except having fun, of course, lots of fun. And it's not really in his nature to question his actions when they're pleasant. In any case he's sure it won't be as much fun with people that know him around. Luckily none of Jeanne's other regulars know him. Or so he thought.

One Friday when he arrives, there's a tall blonde standing at the counter and talking to Jeanne that Lucien recognises immediately. Posh and pretty as he is, Jo is not a person that is easy to mistake for another. The café is too small to avoid him and Lucien sure as hell isn't leaving, so he marches up to the counter and tries to look indifferent. Jo is just turning around, carrying a tray with three hot chocolates, and their eyes meet. Lucien has to admit he looks good. Not as good as him of course, but much better than the last time they met. Of course that was in the practically compulsory support group they both begrudgingly attended at the gender clinic. Jo's eyes widen in recognition. He looks about as unpleasantly surprised as Lucien felt just now. They really never got along. There is a second of awkwardness, during which Lucien is very aware of Jeanne's curious look and then Jo nods. Lucien nods back. *Returning* an acknowledgement he can justify. Jo hastily turns around and joins his friends. Lucien doesn't know them, but they're currently doing a bad job of trying to use the same chair.

"Bonjour," Jeanne says amusedly and Lucien turns towards them.

“Salut,” he says. “You’re looking extra lovely today.”

He’s rewarded with a slight blush, but Jeanne retorts by asking innocently: “Friend of yours?”

Lucien glances at Jo, who has wisely sat down with his back to the counter. “Hardly,” he mutters. “Acquaintance.” He looks at Jeanne. “Does that lot come here often?”

“Almost every Friday,” Jeanne says.

“Good to know,” Lucien hums. He wonders if there are more regulars that he unfortunately happens to know. He doesn’t care for Jo. Tiresome rich students with lofty ideas and no interest in magic are not his idea of good company.

“Does that mean you won’t come on Fridays anymore?” Jeanne asks disappointedly. As soon as the words leave their mouth their cheeks flush again and Lucien grins at them widely.

Jo is forgiven for invading his space. That caught look on Jeanne’s face is more than worth it.

“So,” Jeanne says, refusing to acknowledge their own embarrassment. “How do you want your coffee today?”

“Surprise me,” Lucien smiles teasingly, leaning on the counter. “By now you should have a pretty good idea of what I like...”

Nobody ever told him of a rule about not making faeries blush.

Jeanne makes him a caramel latte that somehow makes his fingers tingle and he stays at the counter to drink it until four laughing and chattering women come in. They are regulars that

by now look vaguely familiar even to Lucien and all of them look at him and Jeanne with annoyingly delighted faces.



Lucien teases them on purpose. Jeanne knows this. By now they also know that he doesn't do it to make them uncomfortable. Whenever he says something that might have that effect, his eyes are always fixed on them a little more intently. Especially when the conversation drifts towards the subject of magic.

"You've had those beignets on sale since Monday," Lucien points out one Thursday afternoon.

"Not *those* beignets," Jeanne says proudly. Their pastries never fail to sell.

"It's a fresh batch then?" Lucien asks.

"No," Jeanne says smilingly.

"How do you do that?" he frowns. "That shouldn't be possible."

Jeanne slants their head and gives him a meaningful look.

"You're kidding..." Lucien says, lowering his voice. "You actually enchant your food?"

Jeanne smirks a little, but doesn't answer.

Lucien looks fascinated. "Can you do the same to my fridge at home?" he asks.

The thought of being invited to come back to Lucien's house makes Jeanne's stomach swirl for a moment, but they quickly shake their head. "It's nothing like that," they say. "It's because I made it."

"Pity," Lucien sighs, taking a sip of his mint cappuccino. "There's never any milk at our house."

Jeanne stifles a laugh at his suffering expression. "What do you mean?"

"Exactly what I'm saying," Lucien grimaces. "There's never any usable milk. Unless Riri wants some, of course." He rolls his eyes. "But otherwise the milk lasts a day at most before it goes bad."

Despite their best efforts a snort escapes Jeanne's nose.

Lucien quirks an eyebrow at them. "What?"

Jeanne struggles to keep their voice low. There is a plump woman with two small boys sitting at a table nearby and she's just close enough to overhear. "The milk goes bad?" they whisper, eyes twinkling with amusement. "Does that also happen when your Dante is out of the house?"

The puzzled expression on Lucien's face is glorious to behold, but seeing his lips move in incredulous understanding is even better. "You are not seriously saying—" he begins.

"There's no telling what type of fae he has in him," Jeanne giggles. "But judging from his magic there's a pretty good chance his sorcery is...witchy." Humans call all active magic sor-



cery – which is a gross generalisation – and have a tendency to use ‘sorcerer’ and ‘witch’ interchangeably. *That* is not accurate either. One faerie bloodline is not like the other, it’s the same with mortal magic users.

“That’s just like Dante,” Lucien grumbles. “He doesn’t even like milk.”

“I’m sure he doesn’t do it on purpose,” Jeanne says. “Some magic just happens.” They purposely do not glance towards the door, where the wisteria has started to wind its way past the window and above the door.

“Oh you better believe I’ll report back about this next time,” Lucien vows.

“Please do,” they grin.



It’s been a slow day and Jeanne is taking the opportunity to get a head start with tidying the kitchen. Baking is messy business and not all the magic in the world could change that. Just as they wipe their flour-covered hands on a cloth, they feel someone enter the café. They usually hear the door first, but they’re certain someone just entered.

“I’ll be right with you!” they call out, but there is flour on their arms still and they’re pretty sure there is a smear of cocoa powder somewhere on their face. They hastily clean themselves up, spin round on their heels, and then abruptly start back with a gasp.

Lucien is standing in the kitchen doorway, holding on to the doorpost overhead.

“Hi,” he grins.

“Hi,” Jeanne says, forcing the jitters in their chest down.

“Don’t let me rush you,” Lucien says pleasantly. His grin sparks in his eyes. “You have chocolate near your left ear.”

“Cocoa,” Jeanne corrects mindlessly, but they do nothing to fix it. Instead, they shift their weight uncomfortably from one foot to the other and says: “Are you coming in or not?”

“Oh,” Lucien says, an uncharacteristic flicker of uncertainty dancing across his face. He lets go of the doorpost and lowers his arms, but doesn’t step inside. “I didn’t want to you know...presume.”

“Yes,” Jeanne says tensely. “I appreciate that, but—” Lucien is still not moving and in an impulse they reach out and pull him inside on the sleeve of his jacket. “—you shouldn’t linger in doorways.”

“Okay,” Lucien says, smiling as he follows Jeanne further into the kitchen. “Sorry.” He glances around curiously and Jeanne suddenly feels a little self-conscious.

Instead of showing it, however, they lift their chin challengingly. This is their domain, even more so than the café. This is where they create.

“Now you’re here,” they say brightly. “You can help me clean up.”

Lucien looks down at his dark clothes, glances at the floury counter and grimaces.

Jeanne swallows a laugh and says: “Or I could go make you a hot chocolate with hazelnut and sprinkles.”

“No,” Lucien says, almost defensively. “I’ll help.” He takes off his fine linen jacket and hangs it up on the hook by Jeanne’s spare aprons.

It looks odd among the pastel colours and looking at it makes the jitters in Jeanne’s chest come back. Outside the wisteria is growing more lush and green every day, but they try not to think about that now. “You could help me put these away?” they suggest, nodding at the recently cleaned kitchen utensils.

Lucien nods and puts away whatever Jeanne points at in whatever spot they tell him to. Until he lays eyes on the knife block. “Ceramic knives?” he says curiously, pulling one out. “And here I thought you’d be a traditionalist.”

Jeanne smiles faintly, but doesn’t answer. Even if most knives are made of stainless steel nowadays, steel is still iron at its core and iron... Iron is the nail driven into ancient trees, iron is the horseshoe that rips through green moss, iron is the spade that digs into grassy mounds. Iron is never wielded by faerie hands.

“They come in nice colours,” they say vaguely.

"They do," Lucien chuckles. "They also come in black. I have a similar set."

"You're not a traditionalist?" Jeanne asks, relaxing slightly.

"Oh I am," he smirks. "But sometimes you just need something that doesn't set off a metal detector."

Jeanne is startled into a genuine laugh and Lucien grins. "You're terrible," they laugh. "I can't even tell if you're joking."

Lucien doesn't answer that, instead he leans elegantly against the nearest work surface with a pleased look on his face and asks: "Why don't you laugh more often? You have a lovely laugh, Jeanne."

"Maybe I save it so it doesn't spoil," they evade playfully. It is *so* hard not to be playful... No one but Lucien has ever said their name like that. They turn towards him and smile. There's flour on his sleeve. Almost without meaning to they reach out to brush it off.

There's a burst of noise from the café as the door opens and cheerful voices announce the arrival of customers. Jeanne snatches back their hand with a mix of resentment and relief they've never felt before. "Not everyone is as quiet as you," they say, smiling away their frustration and they hurry out of the kitchen.

Lucien follows them and sits down at a table while they serve the customers. As soon as they've sat down, a new group comes in. Jeanne glances at Lucien, who somehow manages to lounge in one of the rather narrow chairs matching the little tables.

He hasn't got anything to drink or eat and Jeanne gives him an apologetic look. Lucien shakes his head in dismissal and suddenly he grins and gestures towards his left ear. Jeanne frowns slightly and brushes their fingers past their own temple. There's cocoa powder on their hand.



"You would say, wouldn't you," Lucien asks one Monday afternoon, "if you didn't want me to keep coming when you're about to close."

"I would," Jeanne says. "And I don't mind at all." They appreciate the question though. They appreciate a lot of things about him.

Lucien grins and goes back to fiddling with the radio he found tucked away in a corner. It's pretty old and usually not turned on. The acoustics in the café are not great and if there are several people talking already music would make it far too noisy. There is no one else here now though.

"Is it working?" Jeanne asks cheerfully, taking off their apron.

"Mm," Lucien hums. The speakers give a soft crack and music fills the café. "There," he says smugly.

Jeanne smiles. "Strauss?" he asks.

"What?" he demands. "A thief can't have culture?"

"No need to get defensive," Jeanne grins. "I like classical music."

"You know what I like?" Lucien says, stepping towards them. "Dancing."

"Do you," Jeanne hums, leaning against the counter. "Then why don't you dance something?" Lucien always moves so gracefully, seeing him dance must be...something.

With a bright spark of his green eyes Lucien straightens up. Then he bows to Jeanne and holds out his hand.

Jeanne stares at it and then up at Lucien's face. "What are you doing?" they ask.

"I'm not dancing alone," Lucien smirks.

Their eyes widen. He's not seriously asking them to dance? Now? Here? In their own café? They shake their head.

"Come on," he coaxes. "Dance with me."

He's even wearing a white dress shirt today and his shoes look fancier than normal. Did he plan this?

"No," Jeanne insists. Their hands are gripping the counter behind them. They cannot dance with Lucien. They want to. Oh, they *really* want to. But they *can't*. The age of faerie rings might be in the past, but some things will never fade.

"Why not?" Lucien says sulkily.

Jeanne is at a loss for words. He can't be serious. His friend is a sorcerer for goodness' sake. "*Because*," they say.

Lucien's eyes twinkle. "Is it because you can't dance?"

He did *not* just say that. Jeanne's face contorts with indignation and Lucien laughs at them. He *laughs*. "Fine," Jeanne huffs. "Do *you* know how to waltz?"

"Come here and find out," Lucien grins and he extends his hand again.

Jeanne grabs it and their skin feels electric all of a sudden. Lucien moves confidently, but he places his hand too low on their back. Lucien can waltz, but only just. Jeanne lets him lead, they barely dare to move their feet, but Lucien clearly hasn't been taught how to waltz properly. Jeanne shuffles their feet awkwardly in time with Lucien's movements and wonder what they've done to deserve this. This is *torture*. Lucien would be so gorgeous right now if he was actually shown how to move right.

"Would you relax?" Lucien laughs softly, completely misinterpreting Jeanne's stiffness.

"Mmf," Jeanne grumbles. Why does he have to make this so difficult? And why does this have to be such a long piece of music?

"Look at me," Lucien mutters, his mouth suddenly dangerously close to Jeanne's ear. "I've found a faerie that can't dance."

Something deep in Jeanne's chest snaps with a bright spark and the next moment they step out of their shoes. It's done before they think about it and once their bare feet hit the floor there is no longer anything to think about. They drop Lucien's right hand and grab the other, wrapping their now free arm

firmly around his waist. Suddenly Lucien isn't leading anymore and they are both moving very fast. They're whirling, sweeping across the floor. *This* is waltzing. *Now* Lucien is moving beautifully. His eyes are widened in shock and wonder and Jeanne holds him flush against them in their arms. They never want to stop moving ever again. They want to whirl until they could make grass sprout up in the wake of their footsteps, until the music keeps going after the song has ended, until Lucien finally feels what they—

With a nasty clang both of them crash into one of the little tables and the vase with pink tulips standing on top of it tips over. Jeanne lets out a cry of dismay and Lucien swears. They both jump back, but most of the vase's water still ends up spilling on Lucien. The music's still going, but the dance is over.

"I'm not sorry," Jeanne pants, their head still spinning. They really aren't. Because that was gorgeous and they'll never ever be sorry.

"Neither am I," Lucien chuckles. "Damn you *can* dance. Definitely worth ruining a shirt over."

"Oh," Jeanne says, realising Lucien's dress shirt is pretty much soaked. "Um, I am sorry about that. I can— Wait, are you bleeding?!" There's a stab of panic in their mind as they see the red shimmer through the white fabric where it clings to his chest.

"What?" Lucien says distractedly. "No! Look—" He flicks open the top buttons of his shirt, revealing red roses and black thorns tattooed on his skin.



“Oh,” Jeanne sighs, relaxing slightly. “Sorry. I thought...never mind.”

“Don’t worry about it,” Lucien says. Then he makes a disgusted noise and takes his shirt off altogether. “Well,” he mutters. “At least it’s only water.” He carefully drapes the wet shirt over a nearby chair.

“Right,” Jeanne says, collecting herself and they quickly fetch a dish towel from behind the counter.

“Thanks,” Lucien nods and he takes it.

Jeanne tries their best not to, but it’s really hard not to look. A good part of Lucien’s chest is covered in briars and roses, but there’s also two symmetrical scars. It’s not the first thing Jeanne looks at, what with Lucien’s slender waist and near flawless skin, but they do see it. And they know what it means. At least they think they do. The tattoo doesn’t seem to be there to hide the scars, apart from the occasional petal or stalk it does not even cover them. To Jeanne it seems rather a reminder that although every body always has a beauty of its own, it’s possible to craft it towards beauty also. They look away, hoping that their gaze had looked admiring rather than gawking.

Apparently it had, because the smile on Lucien’s lips, that had wavered for a moment, turns into a smirk again. “Well, now you know where I got my chosen name,” he says.

“And here I thought it was just because you’re dramatic,” Jeanne teases, but they keep a close eye on Lucien’s face.

To their relief he gives them an extra dramatic grimace and huffs: "I resent that. How dare you."

Jeanne relaxes a little and suddenly they remember something. "Is that how you know Jo?" they ask cautiously.

"Yeah," Lucien admits, but then his expression tenses slightly. "How do you—"

"He wears buttons," Jeanne explains, a tad hastily. Jeanne doesn't know what Lucien is thinking, but they don't want him to assume that faerie magic could tell them things like that. Even if it could, they'd never invade someone's privacy like that, but the trans flag has pride of place on Jo's backpack. It's kind of hard to miss.

Lucien blows out a noisy breath. "Sounds like something he would do."

Jeanne bites their lip and turns their attention to the soaked shirt hanging over the chair. Lucien is so particular about his clothes too... "I don't have a drier," they say regretfully.

"Can't you magic it dry for me?"

"I— No!" Jeanne sputters, but when they look up they see Lucien is only teasing.

They roll their eyes and smile. After the array of uncomfortable feelings of this afternoon, they feel oddly at ease right now. Besides, Lucien doesn't look awkward and he's the one half-undressed by unfortunate circumstances.

“Come on, I can get you something else to wear.”

They turn towards the kitchen and Lucien follows in silence. The backdoor to the kitchen leads to the stairwell and that leads, among other things, up to Jeanne’s little apartment. It feels very strange to hear a second set of footsteps behind them on the stairs and even stranger to know that they belong to Lucien. It’s also strange to be so silent, so Jeanne says:

“I was so happy this place came with an apartment. I really wanted to live where I work.”

“Convenient,” Lucien agrees.

Jeanne looks back and sees that he’s still holding the dish towel. He also looks...impressive, moving behind them on the dimly lit staircase. They quickly look ahead again. “Is there a reason you chose roses?” they ask.

“Mm,” Lucien hums. “Black and red, blooms and thorns, don’t think I thought about it a lot deeper than that.”

“It suits you.”

“Thanks,” Lucien answers and they can hear the grin in his voice.

Jeanne opens the door to their apartment quickly and steps inside before they can feel self-conscious about it. Lucien follows them inside and looks around curiously.

“Close the door behind you, please.”

“Nice place,” Lucien says, closing the door.

“Thank you,” they smile. “Let me just—”

They dart into their bedroom and quickly look through their closet. Lucien is taller than they are, but not too much, they should have some things that fit him. Still, it’s not easy to find something they feel confident in offering him. Their clothes are nowhere near as fashionable as anything they’ve ever seen him wear. When they’re working, Jeanne tends to wear simple clothes. When they’re not, their taste generally goes towards the flowy and fluttery variety. Not quite Lucien’s style. Finally they grab a long, beige sweater. That will have to do. “Here you go,” they say, turning back into the main room.

Lucien is standing by their bookcase, which has ivy cascading down one side. He turns around. “Merci,” he grins, taking the sweater. He doesn’t put it on though, instead he weighs it in his hands, feeling the fabric. His eyes are twinkling. “Will I be able to leave if I put this on?”

“If you plan on giving it back you will,” Jeanne snorts, pulling a face.

“Oh, I’ll be giving it back,” Lucien says darkly, glancing at the loosely knitted cotton.

“What’s that’s supposed to mean?” Jeanne protests, pretending to be affronted.

“You know what it means,” he says.

“You come into my house, knock over my vases, insult my clothes,” they cry, throwing up their hands. “You’re appalling.”

“Technically you danced me into your vase,” Lucien says with a grin. His eyes meet theirs and his expression grows a little less teasing for a moment. “You’re an amazing dancer.”

“I’m a *faerie*,” Jeanne smiles smugly. “Now come on, we left the music on downstairs.”

Lucien pulls the sweater over his head and Jeanne laughs softly. It looks odd on him, but at least it fits. They go back downstairs, where Lucien collects his shirt and Jeanne turns off the radio.

“Do you want a bag to put it in?” they ask.

“It’ll wrinkle,” Lucien says distastefully.

Jeanne smiles at the thought of Lucien carrying that wet shirt all the way home, however far away that may be, but they shrug. “Suit yourself.”

“I always do,” Lucien smirks and he moves towards the door. “See you later...”

“Thursday?” Jeanne asks, without thinking about it.

He looks back with a grin. “Suits me.”

Jeanne smiles and locks the door behind him. When Lucien is out of sight they go back upstairs, humming to themselves. They feel so light... They should dance more, they hadn’t really danced in ages. Upstairs, in their tiny kitchen, they make themselves a simple dinner and talk to their plants. The softness of early evening wraps around them and they really haven’t felt this

utterly happy in a long time. After dinner they put on some music of their own and stretch out on their bed. It's a bit of a guilty pleasure, but Jeanne loves human music about faeries. They have an entire playlist.

Closing their eyes for a moment, Jeanne lies on their bed, thinking of red roses blooming on pale skin... Their mind is filled with a lovely, soft warmth. Lucien will visit again on Thursday. With a contented sigh they let their mind wander and suddenly the words of one of the songs come trickling through. It's one of the old ones. One of the warning ballads. A warning against everything Jeanne's kind has always been.

Jeanne opens their eyes. All the contentment has drained from their face. Treacherous, cold, deceitful faeries... The songs the humans sing about their kind are split right through the middle. Half of them are about how beautiful the fae folk are, the other half are full of dire warnings. Or perhaps both kinds are meant as a warning, in their own way.

All the warm feelings are gone. Jeanne sits up and they suddenly feel a little unsteady. They *danced* with Lucien. What the hell had they been thinking? Well, they hadn't been thinking, of course, clearly. Nervously Jeanne gets to their feet and looks around the room for something like reassurance. They liked spending time with Lucien. And he wouldn't keep coming back if he didn't like them, right? They were friends. Or at least they'd like to think so. Except...what if— No. Jeanne steadies themselves and takes a deep breath. And another. And ano—

A sweet smell fills Jeanne's nose. For a moment it's kind and calming and then it makes their stomach churn. Eyes wide they dart to the window and look out. Down below, coiling above the café window, the wisteria has burst into bloom. The blue tinged purple flowers hang in thick, gorgeous clusters, but they make Jeanne sick. They didn't mean to do that. So how can they be sure they didn't do anything else? What if Lucien only likes them because they made him? What if they're not making friends, but doing the exact same thing they have been trying to avoid from the first moment they met him?

Jeanne stands very still for a second and then they grab their coat and run out the door.

They need to see Noé.

## Chapter 9

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### In Which Counsel Is Given

Lucien makes his way home with almost complete inattention to his surroundings. In his head the music is still playing. Whenever there is no one near enough to hear, he softly sings parts of the melody. Passing by a trellis garden he steals a rose that catches his eye, but half a street later he places it on a random windowsill and leaves it there. Jeanne's sweater, shapeless as it is, smells like wildflowers. It smells like them. The rose cannot compare. Lucien grins. He can still feel Jeanne's hand on his back, their breath against his cheek. He swings the wet shirt, two fingers hooked behind the collar. This is definitely worth repeating. Next time he'll check for stray vases beforehand though.

Most of the people on the metro that have the gall to stare at him receive a contemptuous glare, but he's honestly not even trying that hard. Not even his own annoyance can bring him down from this high. Lucien is still mostly lost in pleasant thoughts when he enters the house, but he does see someone that looks suspiciously like Dauphin flee into Clarice's room as soon as he walks into the hallway. Half a beat later Clarice darts out of the living room, looking rather sheepish. Lucien represses a smirk and gives a commanding movement with his head towards the door.



"I didn't see anything," he says.

Clarice flashes him a wide grin and swings into her room, slamming the door behind her to the sound of nervous giggles.

Lucien rolls his eyes. Dauphin and Clarice are clever enough not to do anything too stupid, it's probably fine. He trots up the stairs to the laundry room.

The door to Dante's room opens and he looks out. "Is Gui home yet?" he asks.

"Don't know," Lucien says. "Just got home myself."

Dante opens his mouth to reply, but seems to forget what he was going to say halfway to forming the words. He frowns. "What the hell are you wearing?"

Lucien glances down. The beige looks terrible with his complexion. "It's Jeanne's," he explains. "I needed something to wear, so—"

Dante stares at him with shocked eyes.

Lucien grimaces. "I spilled water on my shirt. It wasn't anything like *that*." He scoffs. "I wish."

Dante, who seemed to relax a little during the first sentence, tenses up again at the last. "What do you mean you wish?" he almost snaps.

"What do you think I mean?" Lucien grouches back, stepping into the laundry room and gathering other whites that need to be washed. To his annoyance Dante follows him, still with that

tense expression on his face. "They're nice," he says defensively. "And pretty. And fun to flirt with."

"And a faerie," Dante cut in tensely.

"So?" Lucien shrugs.

His friend looks incredulous. "So...*don't* flirt with faeries!"

"I don't see why not," Lucien scoffs. "They don't seem to mind. Although I'm not sure they really do that sort of stuff themselves," he muses. "They fluster so easily..." Involuntarily a faint smirk twitches onto his lips.

Dante stares at him in dismay.

"*What?*" Lucien bites.

"You go over there a lot," he says, slowly.

Lucien slams the door of the washing machine. "So, what's it to you?"

"That depends on why you go, doesn't it?" Dante snaps.

What a stupid question. "Because I feel like it."

"*Why* do you feel like it?" Dante presses. He is standing on the threshold, effectively blocking the way.

"You have met Jeanne, right?" Lucien says sarcastically. Like they're not the most amazing person to be around. Seriously, *what* is Dante's problem?

"Yeah," Dante scowls, "and I'm not running over there twice a week."

"Obviously I have better taste than you," Lucien snarks.

Dante tensely pushes his hair out of his face and folds his hands behind his neck. "Luce, they're a *faerie*." His dark eyes fix on Lucien urgently. "How do you know they haven't glamourised you?"

Lucien stares back at him. He can't be serious. "I've known them for *months*," he says indignantly. Lucien glares. "We're...friends." He pointedly turns away from Dante and selects a program on the washing machine. He's the only one that knows how to use it properly.

"Friends," Dante repeats. It sounds hollow. "And that's why you have to go back there every week. You're sure about that?"

Lucien turns around and looks at him. Dante's face is full of suspicion, but there's also a lot of concern. "I go back there because I *want* to," he says. "You're not seriously suggesting Jeanne is using magic to control me?"

"They might," Dante says tensely.

"They wouldn't," Lucien says firmly. "I'd know."

"No, you *wouldn't* know," Dante contradicts. "I probably wouldn't even know."

"Oh, you're being humble now?" Lucien snarks. "You must be serious then."

"Luce—" Dante hisses.

"Look, Jeanne isn't trying anything," Lucien says impatiently. "They hardly even flirt back." That came out remarkably bitter.

"They don't have to flirt back, they're a faerie," Dante snaps in frustration. "You're in there every week, eating their food, listening to them talk."

"So are dozens of other people," Lucien retorts.

"No they're not," Dante points out. "Not like you are."

Lucien gives an angry shrug with his shoulders. "I'm done talking about this." He pushes past Dante and steps into the hallway.

"How did you spill water on your shirt?" Dante demands to know, following him immediately.

"Knocked over a vase," Lucien replies with as much indifference as he can muster.

"*How?*" Dante repeats.

"Danced into a table," he says defiantly.

"You agreed to *dance* with them?" Dante cries. "Are you *insane?*"

"I asked them to dance, Dante," Lucien snaps. "Jeanne never initiates anything." There's that bitterness again. "I may not know magic, but I know people."

Dante doesn't look the least bit convinced. His hands are fidgeting oddly.

Lucien softens just a little, he's hardly ever seen his friend this anxious. "I can look out for myself, Dante," he says. "Jeanne wouldn't put a spell on me. You should have seen their face when I accused them of that the first time."

"Well..." Dante mutters.

Lucien lets out a curt laugh. "And as for trying to charm or control me, I don't think they're terribly interested. If they were they might have kissed me back by now."

Dante chokes on thin air.



Technically Noé does not live and work on the same address. The rooms behind his shop are where he has his leather workshop and his apartment is two blocks away. He often stays so late to finish his projects, however, that he frequently ends up sleeping there. When Jeanne visits Noé they go by the workshop first and only if they do not feel his presence there do they go to his actual home address. Tonight is no different and sure enough, Noé is still at work in the back.

"Jeanne?" he asks, surprised, when they're almost at the door to the workshop.

"Yeah, it's me," they answer and they step inside.

Noé gets up from his ancient sewing machine and gives them a smile that momentarily makes Jeanne forget about the weight pressing on their shoulders.

“Why don’t I come see you more often,” they mutter, hurrying over to him for a hug.

“Why don’t I come see *you* more often,” Noé retorts, hugging them tight. When he lets go and looks into Jeanne’s face, his smile falters. “Hey, is something wrong?”

“I...” Jeanne steps back and bites their lip. The pressing weight is back. “I might have done something bad.”

“Okay,” Noé says, calmly but with obvious concern. “Do you want to talk about it now or over tea?”

“Tea sounds great,” Jeanne says, trying not to let their smile wobble too much. They trail behind Noé and fidget around while he makes a pot of strong black tea. He takes it with sugar and even though he’s more than willing to keep a variety of herbal teas for Jeanne, he has never liked a single one of them himself. So Jeanne just drinks with him instead.

“So, what happened?” Noé ask when they’ve both sat down with a cup cradled in their hands.

Jeanne doesn’t make eye contact, but stares at their cup instead. If they say it out loud, it might actually be real. They *don’t* want this to be real. “I...” They close their eyes. “That customer that found out I’m fae, the one that gave me his name...he did come back. A couple times.”

Noé doesn't answer, but when Jeanne looks up he is looking back at them expectantly.

"Um...it was a chosen name by the way," they mutter. "You were right...he's friends with a sorcerer. He brought him to the shop after a while, he's actually got some faerie blood as well..."

"So you made friends?" Noé asks. His expression is soft. "Jeanne, that's a *good* thing."

"Yes..." Jeanne squeaks. "Except..." They trail off.

Noé puts his cup down and leans forward, frowning slightly. "Jeanne, I'm...I'm sorry if I was overly concerned when you called me about him discovering you. I didn't mean—" He sighs. "You're young, 'discovered' meant something different not too long ago." His expression softens into a smile. "If he came back and you met a friend of his and you're having a good time, I'm *happy* for you. You keep to yourself too much. You deserve friends, Jeanne." He grimaces. "Friends that aren't working all the time and forget to text you back until three days later."

"You are the *best* friend, Noé," Jeanne says and they mean it with all their soul. "But...Noé I'm worried I might have... I've never been friends with a mortal before."

"It's not that different," he smiles, picking up his mug again. "I wouldn't worry about it."

Jeanne shuts their mouth, but their eyes must betray something, because Noé's expression changes.

"Unless something else happened?" he says cautiously.

"I don't know," Jeanne whispers. Their stomach is all twisted up in knots, but even now thinking about Lucien makes them feel better. How is that even possible? They have to force the next sentence past their lips. "Noé, what if he only likes me because I want him to like me?"

"Don't do that to yourself," Noé says immediately. "You—"

"What if it's the glamour?" Jeanne interrupts him. "I never meant to use magic on him, but what if I did? By accident?" Their voice has become high and frantic and they have to make a real effort to sit still.

"Magic like that doesn't just happen by accident," Noé says reassuringly. "You would know if you had done something."

Jeanne swallows. That's what they thought, but there is a damn cascade of blue flowers draped around their shop windows testifying to the contrary.

"Unless he's suddenly acting differently than before," Noé says, trying to look Jeanne in their eyes while they are still doing their best to avoid his gaze. "I really don't think you have to worry about it."

Jeanne considers this. Lucien doesn't act differently, not really. But Jeanne has no way of knowing how he acted before he met them. Maybe Dante would have noticed if he was acting uncharacteristically...

"Why are you so anxious?" Noé asks gently.



“Because I don’t know if I did something!” Jeanne says miserably. “And what if I *did*. How do I fix it?” They put their tea, which they haven’t taken a single sip from, aside for fear of spilling it. “I never used to worry about my magic...but...I bake health and happiness into the pastries...and sometimes I stir some goodness into the drinks.” They glance up at Noé.

“Jeanne,” Noé says smilingly. “I sew good luck into every stitch of my bags.”

“You do?” Jeanne says, taken by surprise.

“Yes,” Noé laughs. “We’re fae, it’s what we do. And our magic isn’t dangerous if we don’t want it to be.”

That might be true for Noé’s magic... “You don’t use glamour though...” they mutter.

“Neither do you,” Noé says seriously. “Not really.”

“I told him a story,” Jeanne mumbles. “Him and his friend.”

“Stories don’t count,” Noé says forgivingly. “Stories deserve a little glamour.”

No matter how warm and reassuring Noé is Jeanne can’t get their heart to stop jittering. “He makes me laugh...” they mutter. “I can’t always *not* laugh.”

“Jeanne—” Noé begins, but Jeanne can’t bear his trying to calm them down while he doesn’t even know what’s really going on and they blurt out:

"I wanted him to come back so badly! And then he did and I wanted him to keep coming back and he's *so* beautiful and he tells the most amazing stories and he makes me feel so light-headed sometimes and he looks so happy every time I laugh and he wanted to dance with me and I didn't say no and it was *so* lovely and I'm not sorry but...but he kissed me that day that we met."

As soon as they say that they wish they hadn't. Noé is sitting very still, the knuckles of his right hand pressed against his lips.

"I didn't kiss back," Jeanne whispers guiltily. "I think..."

Noé's grey eyes meet theirs, but he still doesn't say anything.

"I really didn't mean to do anything, but what if I did? Noé, I care about him."

"I can see that," Noé says, lowering his hand. "And I still don't think you did anything wrong." His face is full of kindness.

"But what if—"

"But if it will make you feel better, I can come by the café when he's there and check," Noé interrupts.

Jeanne brightens up. Noé will be able to see if there is any kind of glamour hanging around Lucien.

"I don't suppose he has set days he stops by?" Noé hums and for a confused moment Jeanne thinks they hear a repressed laugh in his voice.

“No,” they say. “But—” They cut themselves off abruptly. If Noé comes to the café, he will see the wisteria. He will see what Lucien’s mere presence made them do. They would die of embarrassment. Their cheeks are almost glowing at the mere thought. “I...um...I could suggest he comes here?” they say, trying to sound composed. “I mean, if he sees us together he might guess something’s off. Not that I told him about you!” they add hastily.

Noé smiles. “I wouldn’t have minded much if you had,” he says. “But sure. If you think that’s better.”

Jeanne breathes a sigh of relief. “Okay.”

“You have to promise me something though,” Noé says seriously.

“Yeah?” Jeanne says, biting their lip.

“Try not to freak yourself out any more than you already have. Even if you did something, you couldn’t have done any actual harm. That you would absolutely have noticed.”

Jeanne takes a steadying breath. “Right, yes, okay.” They give Noé a nervous look. “And if I did do something. Do you think we can fix it?”

“If it has anything to do with magic, we can fix it,” Noé says reassuringly. There seems to be an amused quirk in the corner of his mouth again, but before Jeanne can be sure of its being there he says: “Now, while I’ve got you here. I need your opinion on some imitation leather.”

Jeanne lights up. "Are you finally going to stop using real leather?" they gasp. They've been pestering Noé about that for ages.

"I'm *considering* it," Noé grimaces. "But this bicast stuff just doesn't feel right."

"Let me have a look then," Jeanne says enthusiastically. "I'll help you decide."

"I'm sure you'll be completely impartial," Noé grins.



In their household of four Dante is usually not the one giving lectures. Lucien knows how to shut up or distract Guillaume, he doesn't know how to deal with Dante. And he will *not* shut up. He has followed Lucien up to his room and by now looks about ready to start throwing things. Ironical, because Lucien is about ready to throw him out of his room.

"Oh, piss off, Dante!" he bursts out. "Jeanne would no more lay a spell on me than you would."

"Well I'm bloody considering it!" Dante yells. "And has it crossed your stubborn mind they might have done it by accident?"

"Don't insult them like that," Lucien growls. "They *wouldn't*. If you'd bothered to get to know them, you would know that."

"Are you hearing yourself?!" Dante almost screams, but suddenly the door opens.

They must have made a lot of noise not to hear Guillaume come upstairs. "What's going on?" he asks.

Lucien's eyes snap at Dante, but he immediately turns to Guillaume and says:

"Luce is being a damn moron, that's what's going on."

"*Dante*," Lucien growls in a low voice. Guillaume is superstitious enough as it is.

Dante seems to make an effort to calm down a little. He's usually very careful about not upsetting Guillaume, but it's not enough to make him drop it. "I think," he says in a forcefully calm voice, "that Lucien's faerie friend might have *accidentally* glamourised them."

Lucien feels a hot flash of anger. "Do *not* call them that," he barks.

The look he fixes Dante with is particularly vicious and his friend changes colour for a moment. Neither of them has told any of the others about Jeanne's suspicions about Dante's family and although Lucien would never breathe as much as a word in front of Guillaume, he is burning with the urge to remind Dante what a hypocrite he's being.

Dante shuts his mouth and swallows.

"Is that possible?" Guillaume asks, brow furrowing anxiously.

"No," Lucien says flatly. "It's not."

There is a tense silence. Guillaume is shuffling his large feet uncomfortably and Dante is staring silently at a random spot on the wall. Lucien breathes in slowly. He's still angry. Really angry.

"Luce," Guillaume begins slowly. "I know it's no damn use telling you what I think about all this."

Lucien glares at him, but Guillaume looks back at him undisturbed.

"But if even Dante is worried about you..." He doesn't finish the sentence. He doesn't have to.

Dante refuses to look at either of them.

Lucien glances between his friends. They no longer count the times they've gotten each other out of trouble. It's been years since they felt the need to. Being there when it's needed is part of their many silent understandings. They just know they've got each other's backs.

There is no way in hell Jeanne did anything to him. He knows that. He can *feel* that...but his friends can't.

"Okay," he relents. "If you're that worried, check whatever you like."

Dante turns towards him, taken by surprise. "Really?"

Guillaume exhales and leans back against the doorpost.

"Sure," Lucien shrugs. "It won't matter, because *nothing's wrong with me*. But whatever."

“So,” Guillaume says nervously. “Is there a reliable way to detect faerie magic?”

“That’s another thing,” Dante sighs. “I don’t know...” He grimaces. “I can usually detect other people’s illusions, but that’s it. And I’m not sure faerie glamour technically is an illusion.” He makes a disgruntled noise in the back of his throat. “Cassandra would be able to see.” It’s spoken with distaste, but also a vague semblance of respect.

“Then ask her,” Guillaume says firmly.

Dante grumbles something and glances at Lucien.

“Sure, why the hell not,” he says sarcastically. Still, he’d rather get this over with now. This crap needs to be put a stop to as soon as possible. “If she agrees to see me, I’ll go.”

“No backing out last minute?” Dante asks suspiciously.

“Cross my heart,” Lucien says, and then he lets his face relax into his most obnoxious grin. “I’ll cooperate with anything that means you having to grovel to Cassandra.”

The relieved look on Dante’s face makes way for one of disgust so fast that Lucien laughs hard enough to make Guillaume join in.



Jeanne sleeps over at Noé’s that night, which is probably the only reason he actually goes home this time. They’ll have to get up early to be in time to open the café, but they really don’t

feel like being alone right now. While Noé is with them, it is very hard to be anxious. Most of all they hold on to his belief that even if they did use magic on Lucien, it couldn't have been harmful. As long as they didn't harm him everything will be fine.

They lie stretched out on his sofa, wrapped in an old quilt, while Noé rummages around the room getting ready for bed himself. He's humming absentmindedly and for a moment Jeanne's mind drifts away on the melody. In an instant they are dancing again, wrapping their arms around Lucien to pull him in as close as they can.

"Jeanne?"

"Yeah?" they start up from their tangled thoughts. Their cheeks are burning.

"Only saying goodnight," Noé smiles.

"Right," Jeanne smiles awkwardly. "Goodnight."

"Sweet dreams," Noé hums and he softly closes his bedroom door behind him.

Jeanne sinks deeper into their pillows and stares at the ceiling. Sweet dreams... They know what they'll be dreaming of. A swirl of anxiety and a burst of giddy happiness clash in their insides and twist into a knot of contradictions. Breathing deeply they try to calm themselves. If Noé isn't worried...they shouldn't be worried. Noé likes humans. Noé makes friends with humans. Noé says it's fine to be close to humans. Jitters dance through



their chest and Jeanne pulls the pillow over their face. They aren't Noé. And Noé isn't in love.

They've thought it before they can stop themselves and they are too late to catch it. The escaped thought runs rampant through their mind and the knot of contradictions twists into an incomprehensible mess. Because Jeanne has never been in love before and they don't know why or how or when this happened, but they suddenly know with startling certainty that they are utterly and completely in love with Lucien.

## Chapter 10

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### In Which A Truth Is Spoken

It's Thursday, Dante is out doing whatever he does when he disappears and everyone else is recovering from the rather stressful activities of last night. In short, the house is uncharacteristically quiet. Lucien grabs his keys and glances in the mirror in the hallway. He looks tired too. Being up all night getting rained on for an assignment will do that to you.

"Where are you going?" Guillaume's voice suddenly sounds behind him.

Damn, Lucien thought he was still asleep. He does look like he just woke up. "Just going out for some fresh air and exercise, *mom*," he snarks. "I promise I'll be home in time for dinner."

Guillaume gives him a weary look. "Are you going back to that café?" he asks.

"Yes," Lucien replies defiantly. "Not that it's any of your business."

"Luce, don't," Guillaume says heavily. "You told Dante—"

"Dante can shove it," Lucien says. It's been two days and all he's done is whine about how asking Cassandra for a favour is humiliating.

“Suit yourself then,” Guillaume shrugs, with sudden and extremely uncharacteristic indifference. “I’m too tired to stop your overdressed ass anyway.”

Lucien glares at him. “I promised Jeanne I’d be there Thursday,” he snaps. “I’m not going to break a promise because you guys are being ridiculous.” He puts his keys in his pockets and feels something cold brush against his fingers. What the— He takes his keys out again and digs into his pocket. He stares at the iron nails in his hand. “What the hell is this?” he demands.

Guillaume looks awfully guilty all of a sudden.

“Gui,” Lucien growls. “You did *not* try to slip iron into my pockets.”

He crosses his arms defensively.

“Bloody hell, Gui!” Lucien snaps. “What do you think my keys are made of?” He has no idea if this faeries can’t touch iron stuff is true, but even if it isn’t, Jeanne only has to see him carrying crap like this and they’ll think that he doesn’t trust them.

“Steel,” Guillaume answers defiantly. His shoulders are hunched, but the frown on his face has something determined.

“That’s still iron, isn’t it,” Lucien bites. Suddenly he remembers Jeanne’s ceramic knives and an actual flash of anxiety passes through him. “Gui, I swear, if you hid anything else in my clothes and you don’t tell me now—”

They stare at each other. Guillaume flinches. He rarely has to stand up to Lucien directly and Dante isn't here to back him up. "I put a coin under the sole of your left shoe," he mutters.

Lucien swears and takes off his shoe. "When Dante finally gets over himself and I've seen Cassandra," he growls. "You are coming with me to meet Jeanne." Without waiting for an answer he angrily tosses the coin to Guillaume, who only just manages to catch it. "I'm going out," Lucien says, but he turns back to look at him. "And you better check your shoes every day for the coming month, because I *will* get you back for this."

He slams the door, but not before he's seen the look of relief on Guillaume's face. If he *hadn't* threatened revenge, that would have been a sign he was actually going to hold this against him and he's not *that* pissed. Not now there was no actual harm done. Guillaume is an idiot sometimes, but he means well.

By the time he arrives at the café, Lucien is all grins and cheerful anticipation again, but to his surprise Jeanne looks rather out of spirits. There's something nervous about the way they glance up when he enters.

"Hey," he says, walking up to the counter.

"Hi," Jeanne mutters, not sounding like their usual cheerful self at all.

Lucien swallows the concerned "what's wrong" stirring inside him and leans on the counter. "Am I safe from snooty blonde students today?" he asks in a stage whisper.

A smile flickers across Jeanne's face. "He's not snooty," they say. "But I think so, yes." Their eyes meet his and their uneasy expression gives way to one of slight concern.

Lucien grimaces. "Not looking my best, aren't I?" he sighs. "Let's just say last night didn't exactly go as planned."

"I didn't sleep a lot myself," Jeanne confesses.

"Oh?" Lucien hums. "Were you also getting wet through just so a rich idiot can have a silly little amulet?"

Jeanne's cheeks dimple. "No," they chuckle.

Lucien grins. "Good, cause I wouldn't recommend it."

Jeanne shakes their head laughingly. They look better than they did a moment ago already. "Shall I make you a hot chocolate?" he asks. "They're great against tiredness."

"Please," Lucien sighs. "One with the hazelnut stuff?"

"Of course," Jeanne grins.

He glances around. There aren't any other customers. "Have one yourself too?" he tries.

Jeanne hums and grabs another cup. "Yeah...I think I will," they say.

A little while later they're both sitting at one of the tiny tables with a cup of hot chocolate. Lucien makes a story of the events of last night in an attempt to make Jeanne laugh again. Since Jeanne does laugh and even allows themselves to keep laughing,

Lucien is more than a little resentful when a couple of new customers come in. They only want things to go though and as soon as they're gone Jeanne joins him again.

"Hey," they say suddenly. "Last time you said your friend Guillaume has a birthday coming up, right?"

"Yeah," Lucien hums. They all like to make a big deal of Guillaume's birthdays since he's the oldest and they get to pretend he's becoming an old man. He's turning twenty-six this year, so that's practically ancient.

"Are you still looking for a present?" Jeanne asks, slanting their head.

"Yes," he says. "Why, you have suggestion?"

"Well," they say, suddenly looking a little uncertain. "You said he likes handcrafted things, right? I have a friend that makes really nice attaché bags and book bags and stuff. All hand-stitched leather. If that's something he'd like?"

"He would actually," Lucien says, interested. "Do they have a website?"

"No," Jeanne says. "But I think I have a—" They pull a phone from their pocket and scroll through the pictures.

Lucien doesn't know why he's surprised, but he has never seen Jeanne with a phone before.

"This is one of his," they say, holding the phone out to him.

Lucien whistles admiringly between his teeth. That is gorgeous and looks completely handcrafted. Guillaume would love something like that. And come to think of it– “That’s awesome,” he grins. “Could you send that to me? And the address of the shop?”

“Yeah!” Jeanne beams and then their face flushes with confusion. “Um...maybe you could...send it to yourself?”

“Sure,” Lucien nods. “Or I could just put my number in your phone.”

“Or...that, yeah,” Jeanne says, suddenly very interested in their empty cup.

With a grin on his face Lucien adds himself to Jeanne’s contacts and hands the phone back.

“He has a small shop not too far from here,” they say, typing out the address with cheeks that are still a shade pinker than usual. “He’s usually open pretty late.”

“Will he give me a good deal if I tell him you sent me?” Lucien asks teasingly, taking out his own phone to save Jeanne’s number.

“Maybe,” Jeanne smiles. They put their phone away and sit back. “You never said...did you guys get what you came for, last night?”

Lucien looks at them with a mock indignant expression. “I am *hurt*, Jeanne. I didn’t get rained on for hours to go home empty-handed.”

Jeanne bites their lip, eyes twinkling. "Oh excuse me, didn't mean to offend," they grin. "So what was it?"

Having Jeanne's curiosity is a treat. Lucien folds his hands behind his head and leans back. "Now you're asking for trade secrets," he tuts.

"Just tell me what kind of amulet," Jeanne coaxes. "Was it something powerful? Something rare?"

"If me and my colleagues get involved it's usually both," Lucien hums.

Jeanne makes a noise in the back of their throat. "Curiosity killed the cat," they chide.

"You look the picture of health to me," he teases. Maybe he's enjoying this a little too much. If Dante knew how much fun this was, he wouldn't question his wanting to come back.

Jeanne huffs at him and pulls their lips into a pout.

"Tell you what," he grins. "I'll give you three guesses."

"Is that a challenge?" Jeanne says, eyes lighting up.

"Me, challenge a faerie?" Lucien says, innocently raising his eyebrows. "I wouldn't dream of it."



Jeanne manages not to tell Lucien outright to go visit Noé's shop immediately. Right now they're pretty sure Lucien hasn't picked up on any ulterior motives, but if they get any more



obvious he might. It's hard enough to act normal as it is. It was bad enough before, but now they actually understand what that fluttering around their heart means it's even more difficult to ignore it. They are extremely uncomfortable tricking him like this, but they can apologise for that later. Preferably when they've found out they have nothing *else* to apologise for.

They can't resist sending Noé a text though, telling him that Lucien *might* come by today and that they really want to know if he does.

\*You'll be the first to know if he stops by,\* Noé sends back in a surprisingly fast response.

Jeanne replies with a flurry of affectionate emoji's and decides to start experimenting with baked chocolate mousse to distract herself. It doesn't do a lot by way of distracting them, but they have never made anything richer and more chocolatey. Sadly, there is no message from Noé. Jeanne has too much chocolate in them to be really despondent, but they are definitely not up to sitting still for an entire evening together. So they carefully shut all the windows of their little apartment and sing to themselves while rearranging their furniture. No one hears a thing and it makes Jeanne feel a lot better.



Lucien has an excellent sense of direction and he has lived in Paris all his life, but it actually takes him some effort to find the address Jeanne sent him. It doesn't help that they didn't give him a name for the shop. But when he finds it, it seems that it doesn't have a name. There is no name on the door or above the

window, there is only the display of bags in the window and a small plaque that says: 'Leather Work'.

He steps inside and looks around. The shop is small and very tidy. Lucien looks at the bags on display with genuine respect. The picture Jeanne sent him wasn't an exception. They are all expertly made. Most of them a little plain for *his* particular taste, but—

"Bonjour Monsieur, can I help you with something or are you just looking?"

Lucien turns around. A short young man with dark red hair and rolled-up sleeves is suddenly standing behind him, smiling slightly and looking at him with very attentive eyes.

"Looking for a present, actually," he replies. "My friend Jeanne recommended your shop."

"Your friend Jeanne," the shopkeeper repeats with a smile. "Then you must be Luce."

"That's right," he nods. He's trying to guess the other man's age, but while he's usually pretty good at that, he's drawing a blank right now.

"Nice to meet you, Luce, I'm Noé." He looks at the messenger bag Lucien was just inspecting. "Is that the sort of thing you're looking for?"

"Something a little bigger I think," Lucien says. Guillaume is so broad and tall most bags look comically small in his hands.

Noé nods thoughtfully. “And would your friend prefer a backpack or a shoulder bag?”

“I’m not sure,” Lucien replies. “Shoulder bag, probably.” He glances at Noé, who looks back with an odd sort of smile playing around his mouth. Lucien frowns slightly. This guy looks utterly trustworthy in every single way. If that isn’t suspicious, Lucien doesn’t know what is.

“So, shoulder bags,” Noé says, walking over to a display rack. “I have some nice ones among my larger creations.”

Lucien looks at Noé’s suggestions carefully. Some of them have hidden pockets, he can appreciate that.

“I like this one,” he says, taking up a brown bag that is reassuringly heavy and sturdily made. “How much is it?”

“Expensive,” Noé says cheerfully. “But I might be able to make it a little less so for you.” Lucien is absolutely certain he looks him up and down before adding: “Since Jeanne likes you so much.”

Even though he tries his level best not to, Lucien can feel himself grinning.

“They talk about you a lot,” Noé hums, taking the bag out of his hands.

“Do they really?” Lucien smirks. He imagines Jeanne wandering through this shop, looking at everything admiringly and chattering about him. It’s a very attractive picture.

“Yes they do.” Noé walks to the counter in the back of the room. “And they don’t usually talk about anyone a lot.”

“Oh?” Lucien says, following him. That surprises him actually. It’s obvious how much Jeanne likes people and they’re always so cheerful. If Noé is an old friend, which he seems to be, Lucien would expect Jeanne to talk his ear off about all their regulars.

“Hm,” Noé nods. “They don’t make friends easily. Jeanne is so shy, not a lot of people feel inspired to talk to them I guess.”

“Then they’re idiots,” Lucien blurts out.

Noé places the bag on the counter and glances at him. “I agree.” He smiles. “But then again, even if they do talk to them, Jeanne usually just listens, it’s rather hard to get them to actually respond.”

Lucien looks thoughtfully at the packing paper Noé is unrolling. That doesn’t sound like Jeanne at all. Not like the Jeanne who told him off for thieving when they just met and not like the Jeanne he knows now, who can talk about music and poetry until they are so full with it their words almost start blurring together in their excitement. “Can’t imagine why,” he mutters.

“They probably think they don’t have anything interesting to say,” Noé says, lovingly wrapping the bag.

“They can’t really think that,” Lucien disagrees. “Jeanne’s shy when they talk about themselves, but not when they talk about the things they love. I’ve never heard them apologise for anything they liked.” He shuts up when he sees Noé repress a grin.

He feels a little caught, but it's kind of nice to be able to talk about Jeanne with someone that knows them.

"Was that a reference to them talking about music or flowers?" Noé asks cheerfully.

Again Lucien is surprised. He feels slightly unbalanced and he's beginning to suspect that Noé is not quite human. "I don't think Jeanne has ever talked about flowers," he says guardedly.

"Really?" Noé says, looking surprised in turn.

Lucien leans on the counter and asks: "Do they ever leave their café at all?"

"Not as much as they should," Noé says, sounding very much like an older brother all of a sudden. "Why, did they decline an invitation of yours?"

"No," Lucien says, drawing back a little. He has never invited them to go do anything. He's been thinking about it more and more lately, but he's not at all sure if Jeanne would want him to.

Noé gives him another appraising look, but he doesn't say anything, instead ringing up the bag on the cash register and handing the package over to Lucien with a smile.

"Thanks," Lucien says. He really has never met anyone that manages to mix behaving so suspiciously with such an aura of trustworthiness. "You and Jeanne are just friends?" he says, looking Noé directly in the eye. "...not family?"

“Just friends,” Noé smiles, the amusement *very* clear in his expression. “Why?”

“No reason,” Lucien mutters and he hands over exactly what he owes Noé for the bag.

“Thank you kindly,” Noé nods. “And I hope your friend likes it.”

“I know he will,” Lucien says and that is as much a compliment to his own judgement as to Noé’s handiwork.

“Very good,” Noé hums. “Are you going to see Jeanne on your way back?”

Lucien raises his chin defiantly. “I might.” That was definitely his plan. Jeanne’s café is practically on the way home and he didn’t come here at this specific time early in the afternoon by accident.

“Excellent,” Noé smiles. “Tell them I said ‘hi’ then.”

Lucien makes a noncommittal noise and after a last look at Noé – who apparently never stops smiling – he leaves the store. He glances back at the door of the shop and the tiny display window. It looks a lot smaller from the outside. Lucien sniffs. He is not convinced about Noé and Jeanne not being family. Not at all. He looks at the neatly wrapped package and grins. That was a waste. He’s certain Jeanne will want to see what he chose. At least this will give them plenty to talk about. Cheerfully he turns around and starts walking. It’s half past two, perfect.

The fact that his ringtone actually startles him is a testament to how preoccupied he is. Lucien answers it with an audible annoyance. "Yeah?"

"Where are you?" It's Dante and he actually sounds equally annoyed, which is rather rude, considering he's the one calling.

"Out buying a present for Gui," Lucien answers, but he keeps on walking.

"Cassandra agreed to meet us," Dante says tensely. "Can you come now?"

Lucien scowls at the world in general. That means missing an opportunity to see Jeanne. But he also really wants to get this over with. Jeanne doesn't deserve to be suspected like this any longer, even if they're not aware of it. "Fine," he sighs. "Where is it?"

Dante gives him the address. "Meet you at the nearest metro station?" he asks.

"Sure," Lucien agrees.

"See you there then."

"See you." Lucien puts his phone away and turns around, walking regrettably in the opposite direction to Jeanne's café.



Dante is leaning against a low wall outside the station when Lucien steps into the sunshine again.

"What's that then?" Dante asks by way of greeting, nodding at the package.

"Gui's present," Lucien says. "I'll show you later."

"Hm," Dante hums.

They start walking and it's painfully obvious how tense Dante is. Lucien doesn't feel completely at ease himself, but he's not afraid of what Cassandra will find. There is nothing *to* find.

"Gui and I delivered that damn amulet to Dupont by the way, this morning," Dante says, rather suddenly. "He's even more tiring when he's pleased."

Lucien makes a sound of both agreement and disgust. "Did he pay up, though?"

"Sure did. Charged him a quarter extra too."

"Good," he snorts.

Dante leads the way and Lucien follows him, barely paying enough attention to be able to find the way back himself should he ever want to go here again.

"You went back to the café yesterday," Dante says flatly, breaking the brief silence between them.

"Gui told you," Lucien grumbles.

Dante looks nettled. "Of course he did."

"Is that why we suddenly have an appointment with the formidable Cassandra?" Lucien says snarkily.



Dante makes a frustrated sound at the back of his throat. "I'm only trying to help, stubborn jerk."

"I know," Lucien says, not looking at him. "And I appreciate it, stuck-up ass."

Dante grunts, but he doesn't argue. Instead they walk side by side in silence until they turn into the street where they need to be.

Lucien glances around. Nothing but residential houses. "She didn't give you her actual home address, did she?" Lucien says incredulously.

"Can't have," Dante says tensely.

They reach the house and look at the row of bells. The inscription beside the first floor apartment reads: 'Cassandra & Félix'.

"That's her alright," Dante mutters, pressing the button.

There's a buzz and the old intercom creaks as a male voice says: "Cassandra's clients?"

"Yeah," Dante says.

"Be right there!"

The intercom goes silent.

"This *is* her actual house," Dante says, looking at Lucien in dismay.

"Well," Lucien hums. "She's a clairvoyant, probably knows it will do her no harm to invite us."

Dante pulls a face that no doubt means that he thinks it's offensive that anyone could be sure he can be trusted.

The door opens and they are greeted by a tall young man with an almost offensively friendly smile. "Hi!" he says. "I'm Félix, come on in."

Lucien smirks at Dante's expression, but they both mutter something indistinct in reply and follow Félix inside. This can only be the happily cursed husband. Lucien has only seen Cassandra twice, very briefly, but he has never seen her partner. This guy fits the descriptions though.

"You have sorcery too, right?" Félix says, looking back at Dante as he leads them through a corridor that is made extremely narrow because of the bicycle leaning against the wall.

"Yes..." Dante grits.

"Cool!" Félix says happily.

Dante throws Lucien a despairing look and Lucien shrugs.

"Cassandra, my love," Félix singsongs as he throws open the door to a nicely decorated sitting room. "Your colleague and his friend are here."

Lucien can almost hear Dante hiss at the word colleague and he tries very hard not to snort.

A door on the other end of the room opens and Cassandra comes in, looking every inch the sorceress.

“Dante, Luce, welcome,” she says, moving towards them. “Would you like a drink? Tea, coffee, lemonade?”

“Let’s just get this over with,” Dante says stiffly.

Lucien clenches his teeth. His thoughts exactly.

Cassandra smiles. “As you wish,” she says amusedly. “If you could wait in the kitchen...” She gestures to the door she just came out of.

“No,” Dante says bluntly.

Cassandra narrows her eyes.

“I’m not leaving him alone with you,” Dante says warningly.

Lucien rolls his eyes. Cassandra has a way better reputation than either of them.

“What exactly are you afraid of?” Cassandra demands to know. “I cannot do active magic. *I am able to do nothing but watch.*”

Dante grimaces and scowls at her smile.

“But I don’t work with an audience,” she says firmly.

Lucien couldn’t agree more, actually. “What about him?” he says, gesturing to the couch, where her husband has sat down, seemingly enjoying the scene.

“Good point,” Cassandra nods. “Félix, if you could keep Dante company while I do a reading for Luce, that would be very helpful.

"Of course," Félix says, getting to his feet. "Are you sure you don't want a drink?" he adds kindly.

Dante looks from him to Cassandra to Lucien with an expression of great discomfort. Lucien meets his gaze with as decided an expression as he can.

"Fine," Dante grumbles. He looks at Félix with a half-hearted attempt at friendliness. "I'll take tea if you're making some."

"Sure thing," Félix says and he cheerfully holds the door open for Dante.

Lucien watches them go with a slight frown. That much genuine cheerfulness is unnerving. Maybe he *is* cursed.

"Well," Cassandra says behind him. "That was easier than I had expected it to be."

Lucien turns around to look at her. He hadn't noticed before that she isn't nearly as tall as she comes across. More personality than actual height he guesses. That and long flowy dresses. Cassandra walks over to a bookcase which is indeed mostly filled with books, except for the top shelf, on which no less than five crystal balls are displayed. Lucien stares at them.

Cassandra sees him staring and sighs. "Every single birthday." She rolls her eyes. "Félix thinks he's funny." She sounds exasperated, but the tender look in her eyes betrays her.

Lucien hums in place of an answer.

"Do you want to begin right away, or do you have questions?" she asks, taking a wooden box off a shelf.

"Do *you* have questions?" he asks in return.

"Not really," she shrugs. "Dante told me that he's afraid you've been glamourised by a faerie you've been spending time with."

"Sounds about right," Lucien grunts. "Except he left out the part where he's being paranoid for no reason."

"No," Cassandra smiles. "He told me that's what you think about it." She sits down in a brightly coloured armchair, placing the box on the coffee table in front of her. "Shall we begin then?"

Lucien takes a seat on the couch. "Go ahead," he says. He doesn't really know what to expect, but Cassandra is right, she does no active magic. All she can do is watch.

Silently Cassandra takes out a small brass bowl, a packet of matches and a few dried sprigs.

"What is that?" Lucien asks, more curious than suspicious. Dante doesn't use herbs.

"Lemongrass," she says. "Just a little help."

She strikes a match and lets the dried herb smoulder in the little bowl. There is only a faint wisp of smoke and Lucien does not perceive any difference in the atmosphere whatsoever. Cassandra closes her eyes and takes off her glasses. She takes a couple of deep breaths and opens them slowly, looking right at Lucien.

He looks back at her, surprised to see how large her eyes are. He had thought her glasses made them seem larger, now he thinks it must have been the reverse. Cassandra doesn't speak, so Lucien is silent too. Her eyes wander over him searchingly. Sometimes she seems to stare right through him, other times her eyes meet his with startling clarity. Slowly Lucien begins to feel like he is being tied down. Like he can't move under her stare, or *shouldn't* move, for fear of revealing even more.

"This is uncomfortable for you," Cassandra mutters, but her voice sounds very distant. "I'm sorry."

He doesn't answer, but he is beginning to understand why Dante speaks ill of clairvoyants. He feels like a sheet of wax paper in front of a flame, the light behind it revealing every blemish.

Cassandra takes in a deep breath and the feeling fades.

Lucien shrugs his shoulders and leans back in his seat. If it's at all possible, he never ever wants to go through that again.

"That was perhaps a little rigorous," Cassandra says, sitting back and swinging one leg over the other. "But I wanted to be sure. How are you feeling?"

"Fine," Lucien grunts. "Just tell me."

Cassandra puts her glasses back on and gives him a serious look. "There is no faerie glamour on you."

No matter how sure Lucien was, he still feels relieved. A tension in his back he did not realise had a hold on him lets go and he nods. "Good," he says curtly.

"Faerie magic can be hard to detect," Cassandra says. "But I am certain. There is nothing."

"Now if we can only make Dante believe it," Lucien huffs. He allows himself a smirk. He was right. Jeanne didn't do anything. Just like he knew they wouldn't have.

Cassandra is still looking at him, but the serious look on her face is fading. The corners of her mouth twitch. "Yes," she hums. "He is being rather uptight about this whole thing, isn't he? Ironic, considering."

Lucien grins. "So you know too."

Cassandra grins back at the understanding on his face. "Oh yes, I've known since the first time I met him. Even hinted that I knew something a couple of times. But he's never asked me to tell him, stubborn."

He snorts. That sounds exactly like Dante. Suddenly he remembers his reaction after him bringing up Cassandra when Jeanne told them about his faerie heritage and laughs out loud.

"So I take it your faerie friend told him," Cassandra says amusedly.

"Yeah," Lucien nods. "Completely took him by surprise."

"I would have liked to see that," she sighs wistfully.

"Well," Lucien smirks. "It seems I've survived all the faerie influences around me, since I'm completely free of any magic."

Cassandra's eyes light up and she waves a warning finger at him. "I didn't say that," she says.

Lucien frowns at her. "Didn't say what?" he asks.

"You are free from faerie magic," she says smilingly. "But you are suffering from something else."

Lucien freezes. "What?" he says, his voice level.

"There are many kinds of magic," she says. Her voice is solemn, but her eyes are sparkling playfully. "I know the stories people tell about me. 'Happily cursed husband'. People say I cursed Félix to keep him with me."

"Dante says people give you too much credit," Lucien hums, eyeing her suspiciously.

Cassandra laughs. "Ah yes, he really doesn't like me, does he? Well, it's not true." She shakes her head. "We're not married."

Lucien glares at her.

"*Yet*," she adds with a wink. "And besides, I didn't just curse him. We cursed each other." She smiles at Lucien's bewildered expression. "Both of us suffer under the same magic. The very same magic I see in you."

Lucien stares at her. He's inclined to think she's lying, because she is clearly enjoying this way too much. "What the hell are you talking about," he snaps.



"A very serious affliction," she says, in a not at all serious tone. "Do you know that glamour dazzles the mind? What you have can do the same..."

"Do you think this is funny?" Lucien demands.

"I do actually," Cassandra says, leaning forward in her chair. "You really don't know what I'm talking about?"

"No," he says pointedly. "So either tell me, or drop it."

"*Love*, Lucien," she says. "I'm saying you're in love."

Lucien starts at the use of his full name and his mind grinds to a panicked halt.

Cassandra smiles at him, almost sympathetically, but not quite. Her amusement is mixing with a touch of incredulity.

"I don't—" he starts, trying to compose himself. "That's not—"

She looks at him silently, one eyebrow slightly raised. Once again the feeling of her magic creeps up on him. It is nowhere near as strong or invasive as it was before, but it is still a very unpleasant sensation to have her looking at him like she can see all his thoughts written on his face. And his thoughts are...not in his favour at the moment. They wander and he remembers the way Jeanne's eyes sparkle when they can't hold back their laughter. The expression of pride and contentment on their face when they glance through their café. He can see that one strand of hair that always escapes from their braid. Their sunflower-yellow apron, tied with a bow in their waist. He can *feel* the tingle of his skin as Jeanne touches his arm. The swirl in

his stomach when they pulled him into a waltz. The softness of their loosely knitted sweater. Their sweater that smells like them. Like wildflowers, fresh pastries, secret smiles and flushed cheeks.

Lucien blinks.

Cassandra's lips are trembling with a laugh she can barely restrain.

"Shit..." Lucien mutters.

"I'm afraid so," she smiles. This time her smile is genuine.

Lucien rubs his palm against his forehead. This is entirely too much information to process right now. He looks up at Cassandra resentfully. "Why would you do that?" he complains. "Why would you just tell me that?"

"Because," she says, getting to her feet, "Since we're dealing with an actual faerie, being in love with them without realising it might be very risky." She grins. "And because I like gloating, but mostly the first one."

Lucien grimaces. "Well," he grumbles. "You better tell Dante I'm free of any *actual* magic, because he probably won't believe me if I tell him."

"Sure thing," she answers cheerfully. "And I'll keep the rest between us, shall I?"

Lucien glares.

She laughs and beckons him to follow her. She shows him into the kitchen, where Dante is sitting at a well-worn wooden table with Félix, looking extremely sullen. Especially compared to Félix, who is chatting to him so cheerfully that Lucien wonders if he might not actually be doing this on purpose. Judging from the last sentence Lucien manages to catch, he's telling a story about a bird that stole a sandwich. When he and Cassandra enter, however, Félix looks up.

"There she is," he says, smiling up at Cassandra and the spark of adoration in his eyes makes Lucien think there might be something to this whole curse of love thing. "Had a good séance?"

"It's not a séance if it deals with the living, darling," Cassandra says in a fond tone of voice that suggests they have had this discussion at least a million times before.

"But it *sounds* good," he points out.

She smiles and rolls her eyes.

"Well?" Dante asks impatiently.

"Luce was right," Cassandra says. "There is no glamour on him."

Dante lets out a breath.

"No magic of any kind in fact," she assures him, but her eyes twinkle at Lucien as she says it.

"Right," Dante says gravely, getting to his feet. He looks Cassandra in the eye and says, in a stern tone of voice that Lucien

barely ever hears from him: "Thank you, Cassandra, I owe you."

"My pleasure," she nods. "And yes, you do." She grins at Félix, who grins back at her like this is an old joke.

"I'm sure I'll hear from you whenever you want to make use of that," Dante says darkly. "Now, we won't bother you any longer."

Cassandra walks them to the door and as Lucien squeezes past her in the narrow hallway he mutters: "Thank you."

"Good luck..." she says quietly.

Lucien nearly groans out loud. *Good luck*. What on earth is he supposed to do now? Lucien fidgets with Guillaume's package as he and Dante walk down the street. He could kick himself. He hasn't been in love since... Since... Has he ever been in love? Really in love? Somehow he doubts it. If this is being in love, what he feels when he thinks of Jeanne, then he's never been in love before. Maybe he would have recognised it if he had.

"So..." Dante suddenly breaks the silence. "No spells, no glamour, no magic."

"You heard the clairvoyant," Lucien says flatly.

"I didn't want there to be something wrong, you know," Dante says, glancing at him. "I like them. Jeanne, I mean."

Lucien bites his lip. "You do?"

“Yeah,” Dante says, staring ahead again. “I’d like to get to know them better, but...” He lets his voice trail off. “I just needed to know,” he starts up again. “That this was really all...okay.”

Lucien grimaces. Right now it doesn’t really feel like everything is all okay. Suddenly the idea of him shamelessly flirting with Jeanne and Jeanne barely responding is highly uncomfortable. Except...did they barely respond? All the flushed cheeks, the long talks, the shy laughter, the dancing... Could he actually have a chance with them? He shakes his head. “Well,” he says, in an attempt to give Dante some sort of answer. “Now you know.”

“Yeah,” his friend hums. “And that being the case, *please* just ask them out. Because if you’re not under some sort of spell, you’ve got it worse than Clarice.”

There is a moment of absolute silence before Lucien swears out loud and Dante snorts with laughter.



Jeanne is trying not to be too impatient. Of course Lucien has things to do that might delay him going to Noé’s shop. Still, they are really hoping he will go tonight or tomorrow because the waiting is agony.

Their phone buzzes on the counter and they nearly jump out of their skin. With a jolt of nerves they remember that Lucien has their number now. It could be him. They grab their phone. It isn’t. It’s a text from Noé:

\*Everything alright?\*

\*Yes, why wouldn't it be?\* they send back. That might not be the whole truth, but it's close enough.

\*Closed the café for today?\*

\*I'm about to.\* Jeanne frowns at their phone. What is this about?

\*Alright, just checking up on you.\*

\*Okay?\* they send back, a little confused. \**You* alright?\*

\*Never better.\*

Jeanne gets the café ready for closing, still with a faint frown on their face. Maybe Noé is wondering why Lucien hasn't come by yet too? There is a knock on the recently locked door and they spin around. The leap that their heart makes betrays that they think it might be Lucien, but it's Noé. Jeanne smiles all the same and hurries to the door to unlock it.

"I'm *fine*, Noé," they say, letting him in. "Really. You didn't need to come to check up on me in person."

"I wanted to," Noé says warmly. "And I have something to tell you."

"What?" Jeanne smiles.

"Lucien came by the shop today."

Jeanne's smile vanishes in a flurry of nerves. They can feel themselves grow pale. "And?" they ask shakily.

“And he’s fine,” Noé says. “You didn’t weave a spell. You didn’t put glamour on him. Nothing.”

Jeanne is still staring at Noé. They heard him, but they don’t quite dare believe him yet.

“You didn’t do anything, Jeanne,” Noé says, looking them straight in the eye. “Everything is fine.”

“Oh,” Jeanne sighs. Their shoulders sag and the relief washing over them makes them lightheaded for a moment. “Oh I’m glad.” They sink down on the nearest chair and run their hand through their hair, getting stuck on the tie of their ponytail halfway through and thoroughly messing up their hair in the process.

Noé sits down next to them and pats their arm affectionately.

“Oh Noé, I’m so relieved,” Jeanne says, voice still shaking. They fix their eyes on him anxiously. “And you’re sure?”

“Absolutely,” he says firmly.

A smile trembles onto Jeanne’s lips and they allow themselves a small burst of happiness. They didn’t do anything. Lucien is fine. They didn’t make him come back, they didn’t make him like them. Everything he did, he did of his own free will. Jeanne takes in a deep breath and their smile grows steadier. Lucien comes here every week, because he wants to. Lucien tells them stories, because he wants to. Lucien listens to them ramble on, because he wants to. He makes them laugh and teases and danced with them, *because he wants to*.

“So,” Noé says, forcing Jeanne to call a halt to their increasingly joyous thoughts. “Do you feel better now?”

“Yes,” Jeanne says, eyes shining. “Yes I do. Oh, *thank* you.”

Noé’s warmth is all sincerity. “Any time, Jeanne.”

Jeanne breathes a happy sigh and, because their feelings must go somewhere, they fling themselves forward and hug Noé. He laughs and hugs them back, firmly and warmly. When Jeanne lets go and lets themselves fall back into their seat, he smiles at them.

“And,” he hums, leaning his hand on his chin. “Do you maybe have something to tell me?”

Jeanne suddenly sits very still. “No...?” they try.

The corners of Noé’s mouth tremble and his grey eyes sparkle. “Jeanne, there’s a full-grown wisteria blooming in front of your café.”

Their cheeks burn with mortification. For the life of them they don’t know how, but they had actually forgotten about the wisteria for a moment.

Noé’s laugh rings out through the empty café, filling it with warmth and Jeanne smiles in spite of herself. “It is just like you Jeanne,” Noé says kindly. “To shy away from getting to know anybody too well and then to fall head over heels in love, barely twenty-one years old.”

Jeanne huffs quietly.



Noé looks at them and something more of seriousness comes into his expression. "I think you should talk to Luce about it," he says.

Jeanne's eyes widen. "I can't," they protest.

"You have to," Noé says seriously. "Or at least, you have to if you want to keep seeing him as you do now. You were too harsh on yourself by far, but you were right to be cautious, Jeanne. Love can be a wild thing."

"I didn't know I was in love before..." Jeanne mutters.

Noé smiles. "When did you realise?"

"The night I spent at your place," they mumble, not making eye contact.

Noé nods. "You have known him for a while now," he says. "And all the different kinds of love are very blurry, even though people like to pretend they are not. You don't have to tell him everything. If you need more time, give yourself more time. But I think you should at least tell him something of how much you care for him."

Jeanne glances at him nervously. If they tell Lucien there is no knowing what he will say.

"At this moment you can tell him you know for a fact that you love him, free of glamour or spells," Noé says. "That is worth a lot."

“Yes,” Jeanne says softly. They can see that, but that doesn’t make the idea of telling him any less terrifying.

“And,” Noé says with a slight smile, “has it occurred to you that he might feel something similar?”

Jeanne’s heart skips a beat. “I...” they stammer. “I’m not sure if... You think he might?”

Noé face is almost neutral, but not quite. “There’s only one way to find out,” he says.

# Chapter 11

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## In Which A Confession Is Made

Saturday is normally one of Jeanne's favourite days. Since they're closed on Sundays everyone that wants some of their pastries for the weekend comes in on Saturday, filling the place with a happy mix of regulars and people who come in from the street after a morning of shopping. But today Jeanne is not pleased with the constant stream of customers. They aren't happy to see any of them, even though they have committed no sin worse than that of not being Lucien.

Jeanne knows it's silly. Lucien visited two days ago, so they really have no right to expect him, but that's exactly why today is so tedious. There's virtually no chance of seeing Lucien and Jeanne's head is too full of him to think of anyone else. They mess up coffee orders and ask several customers the same question twice. Even their apologies sound distant, because their mind is preoccupied with trying to find the words to tell Lucien...

They're not even sure what they want to tell him. Where should they even start? 'I want to dance with you again?' 'I want to kiss you back?' 'You made me grow a wisteria?' 'I was afraid I made you like me because of how much I like you, so I tricked you into going to see my friend who is also a faerie by

the way and luckily he says I didn't do anything so I just wanted to tell you that and also I'm in love with you.'

Jeanne lets out a sigh behind the coffee machine. This is a mess. They are a mess.



Lucien has spent all Saturday morning and now most of the afternoon in his room, dividing his time pretty equally between denying his feelings, resenting his feelings and wondering if telling Jeanne is a good idea. Not that he has to wonder. He knows it's not a good idea. It's a terrible idea. But the alternative – not saying anything and carrying on as before – that somehow sounds even worse. Because that means having to go back and look into Jeanne's big brown eyes and somehow *not* letting on that there is literally not another person in the world he wants to be close to as much as them.

Lucien runs a hand through his hair and groans. He can't stroll back into that café like nothing has changed. He doesn't want to be just another customer. He doesn't want to have to wait until Jeanne is done being nice to other people before he can talk to them. Lucien lets out a disgusted sound. He's being *ridiculous*.

Angrily he pulls out his phone. He is *not* going to do this. He's not going to make this some big, complicated, dramatic thing. He types out a text and hits send before he can even start to second-guess himself.



When their phone lights up Jeanne expects it to be Noé. It is a genuine shock to see the name “Luce” on the screen and they don’t dare to read the message in the café, where the customers might see their reaction. They flee to the kitchen and read it there, cheeks burning up almost instantly, because it says:

\*Hey. No café on Sunday right? Shall I come bother you on your day off?\*

Jeanne’s entire stomach seems to be filled with bubbles of joy and anxiety. The idea of Lucien coming over when there are no other people around is sending nervous jitters through their whole being, but it would be best to talk to him in private... They take a deep breath and send back:

\*Yes! That sounds fun ☺ \*

Lucien responds immediately. \*Around 2?\*

\*Perfect\* Jeanne replies, biting their lip and smiling at the same time.

\*Cool. See you then.\*

They panic for a moment, not knowing whether that merits another response or not. Eventually they send one last happy emoji and hurry back to the café, where three people are waiting at the counter. They all order black coffee with their cake and when they leave one of them remarks laughingly:

“That was a strong brew you made us.”

Jeanne glances at the fresh pot of coffee they made. "I hope it wasn't too much," they say awkwardly.

All three of them shake their head pleasantly and leave, but when Jeanne goes to check the coffee they resolutely pour the rest down the sink. Even their magic is nervous. They're lucky these customers didn't taste the difference between caffeine and anxiety.

Jeanne takes a deep, steadying breath and calms down just a bit. Tomorrow two o'clock isn't far away and tomorrow at two o'clock there will be an end to their fretting one way or the other.



To wake up softly and sweetly on Sunday mornings is one of the luxuries of Jeanne's life. This morning they wake up tangled in their sheets and blushing like a rose. They take a moment to hide their face in their pillow until they're ready to be awake. (And also until they've stopped blushing.)

Finally Jeanne gets out of bed, with an uncertain smile on their face. Is it bad manners to dream of someone before knowing whether they also dream of you? With a sudden determination they throw open the doors to their closet and start to get dressed. They are nervous, but that dream has left them too happy to be genuinely anxious. Lucien is coming over for an actual visit today. A planned one. With a set time and everything. That is different, that is new, and they are *so* looking forward to it.

Jeanne chooses a flowy dress with blue flowers and throws on their favourite knitted cardigan. They wonder if they should prepare something for today. Maybe Lucien has something specific in mind himself? Jeanne softly chews their lip in thought and glances around their room. They should tidy. It makes sense for them to hang out here instead of at the café, right? A jitter of nerves sends them into a flurry of folding clothes and clearing away books. They know they're being daft. Lucien has already seen their place and it was quite messy then, but if they do tell him today and if he... They want the place to look nice.

When the electronic bell buzzes loudly in the stairwell some time later, Jeanne nearly jumps out of their skin. Wildly they glance around. Well, the apartment looks very nice now. They must have gotten a little carried away.

They glance at the clock. Half past one. Lucien is early. They fly down the stairs, two steps at the time and do their best not to actually run through the café on the way to the door. When they reach it, however, their face falls. It's not Lucien at the door. It's a stranger.

Disappointed as they are, Jeanne puts on a polite face before opening the door with a gentle: "I'm sorry, Sir, the café is closed on Sundays."

The man, who manages to look entitled without having even spoken a word, ignores this information completely. "Are you the owner?" he demands.

Jeanne's hand tightens slightly around the doorknob. "Yes," they say, eyes narrowing slightly. There's something off about him, but they don't quite know what.

The man gives them an appraising look. "And this is Le Conte de Café?"

"That is what it says above the door," Jeanne says stiffly. To be fair, part of the golden letters are at the moment obscured by blooming wisteria, but this man's demeanour is given them no reason to be pleasant.

"Then I'm at the right place," the man says. "I need you to cater a get together I am hosting for some colleagues."

Jeanne stares into the stranger's arrogant face. They can feel it now. There is something of magic about him. But it's not his own, it's borrowed power. They can nearly smell it. Old, tired magic captured in something old and tarnished. Whatever protection that might lend him in the world of mortals, it means next to nothing to them.

"I'm sorry," they say. Their lips are smiling, but their voice is cool. "I don't do catering."

The man scoffs and takes a step forward. "Let's discuss that inside, shall we."

"No," Jeanne says and the gentle wind rustling the wisteria holds its breath. Jeanne's eyes are dark and their feet are planted firmly on the ground. This man is *not* coming in their shop. Not by the sneering of his lips, not by the stolen magic clinging



to his skin. Not now, not ever. If he won't leave by himself, they will *make him leave*.



Lucien turns the corner with determined strides. He looks more confident than he feels, but he's used to having to puff himself up and for now it will have to do. The fact that Jeanne wanted to have him over on Sunday is already encouraging. There's no need to go around making big confessions right off the bat. Just spending some time with them alone should be enough for now. He'll try to convince himself it's enough anyway, before he does something stupid.

Suddenly Lucien slows his step. The café just came in view and something is not right. An expensively dressed man is standing on the doorstep and Jeanne is standing in the doorway. Jeanne, who has muttered at him several times when he lingered in doorways, who does not even like to leave doors ajar, is standing in the open doorway to their café. Except, Lucien sees now, they are not lingering. They are actively blocking the way.

The man makes a movement towards Jeanne and Lucien's eyes narrow. That was not a relaxed movement, that was a forceful one. He's still walking, but he sticks close to the side of the street, out of immediate sight. He's close enough now to hear that the man is raising his voice at Jeanne. Something in the way he holds himself feels familiar, but Lucien can't quite place it. Grimly he clenches his teeth and weighs his options. If that guy as much as lays a finger on Jeanne Lucien will personally

ensure he will regret it *severely*. It would probably be better to lure him away from the store though...

Lucien glances around. Soon he'll be close enough to be noticed. He'll have to decide whether he's going to be aggressive or distracting. He can hear Jeanne's voice now, tense but restrained;

"I think you should leave."

"And I think you should hold your tongue," the man snarls.

Lucien clenches his fists. Aggressive it is.

"I don't think you realise how lucky you are I even took notice of your dinky little café," the man continues. "I move in the *best* circles of Paris."

"Then you won't have any problem finding someone else to cater your party," Jeanne replies coolly.

There is a chill in the air that makes Lucien hesitate. That didn't sound quite like Jeanne...

"You watch your tone," the man spits. "Do you have *any* idea who I am? I am maître Dupont! If I say you'll cater for me, you will cater for me."

Lucien freezes to his spot in shock. The faint recognition clicks into place with a crash of discomfort. It's their client. The posh waste of space that sent them to retrieve that stupid amulet. It's the same haughty air. The same name. Except, that *has* to be a bluff. That can't be a true name. Only one type of person

uses their true name as a threat: someone with magic on their side strong enough not to be afraid to throw it around. Even then it's a foolish power play to make. But Lucien recognises Dupont's tone of voice. It says: '*I am stronger than you*'. It says: '*I am worth more than you*'. It says: '*My name will beat yours, I do not need to fear you, so you will fear me*'. And something in the air is making Lucien's body tense up. He knows what magic feels like and he feels it now. He can't tell where it's coming from, but if that overdressed fop is a sorcerer, he will be no help to Jeanne. They should never have sold him that amulet. They *all* disliked him on sight, that should have been enough of a tip-off. But he had seemed such a bag of air, no real threat to him. Yet here he is, threatening Jeanne.

Lucien can just see their face, pale and with their eyes looking very large and very dark. For a moment they stare in silence and then suddenly they speak.

"Maître Dupont," they echo and their voice makes the hairs on the back of Lucien's neck stand on end. "That is who you are?"

"Yes," the man smirks. "So you better—"

"That is *everything* you are..." Jeanne says and whatever the man was going to say, the words die on his lips. Jeanne is still standing in the doorway, but they are no longer holding on to the door. Their hands are moving, almost clutching together in front of their chest but not quite. "Or—" they say, eyes darkening further still. "—close enough anyway."

Lucien feels rooted to his spot and the arrogant lawyer seems to be suffering from the same. He is staring at Jeanne like he's

seeing them for the first time. Lucien cannot look directly into Jeanne's face from this position, but he's mesmerised all the same. It's still Jeanne, but nothing like the Jeanne that blushes behind the counter serving coffee. That power he just felt... It wasn't Dupont.

"Do you like dancing?" Jeanne's voice suddenly rings out.

The man shakes his head and shrugs his shoulders like he's trying to dispel an unpleasant thought. "Wh-what?" he stammers. His brashness and arrogance are sliding off him. His fancy clothes seem ill-fitted all of a sudden and Lucien recognises actual fear in the sudden cowering of his back.

"Do. You. Like. Dancing?" they repeat. The syllables form a demanding rhythm and their voice sounds like a song. A sharp, snide song.

The man stares into Jeanne's eyes and his shoulders sag in the strangest way.

When Jeanne speaks again Lucien does not recognise their voice. It twists and turns like a melody without end or beginning. It's beautiful. It's otherworldly. It's terrifying.

"*Dance*, maître Dupont," they command and the man trembles to hear his own name. "Dance until you have forgotten my face. Dance until you have forgotten this place. Dance *away* from me and mine and do not...come...back."

Lucien can hear his own heart beating to the rhythm of Jeanne's words. He stares, wide-eyed, as the man turns around helplessly and starts to move away. He's not quite dancing, but

neither is he walking. His arms and legs move like they're being pulled, forced into a pace he can't control. With stiff, pitiful movements Dupont skips down the street, towards the nearest corner, but Lucien does not watch him go.

He turns back to stare at Jeanne, who is still standing in the doorway, hands now planted on their hips. They stand there, on the steps of their own café, with a wild look on their face that Lucien has never seen before and suddenly he understands. Everything people say about faeries is true. That jerk just gave Jeanne his last name and Jeanne took *control* of him without any effort at all. He glances back at Dupont and just for a moment Lucien feels the weight of all his previous actions weighing on his mind. He gave Jeanne his name just to see the surprise on their face. He dared them to dance with him just to be able to hold them. He kissed them without proper permission just because he wanted to. He feels the danger of all of this, for as long as it takes him to look back at Jeanne. As soon as he does, a smile twitches onto his lips and stays there, because Jeanne has never looked more beautiful to him.

A gust of wind tugs on their long dress and even that mismatched cardigan can't ruin it. They look absolutely gorgeous standing there with fire in their eyes, surrounded by the cascades of deep blue flowers that Lucien has never really paid attention to before. There is still a little of the power lingering around them, Lucien can feel it tingle on his skin and it's making his heart beat faster. His feet remember how to move again and he runs up to Jeanne with a grin so wide it makes his eyes light up.

“That—” he says with delighted emphasis. “—was *awesome*.”



Jeanne nearly jumps. They turn to the side with a start and look straight into Lucien’s face.

“You’re here!” they squeak. A moment ago they felt nothing but grim determination, but now they are horrified. “I didn’t hurt him!” they say hastily, glancing anxiously at the corner of the street where Dupont has limped out of sight. “He wouldn’t leave, I asked him nicely first! All I did was send him away. I could have done wo— I mean, he tried to *threaten* me.” They stop talking. First of all because they do not think they are explaining this very well and secondly because Lucien doesn’t look in the least bit afraid or even disapproving.

“Why are you apologising?” he grins. “That jerk deserved everything he got.” Suddenly Lucien smiles darkly and Jeanne has to hug their waist to stop the fluttering.

A sudden shadow passes over his face. “Maybe I should apologise, actually,” he mutters.

Jeanne blinks at him. “Why?” He has nothing to do with—

“That amulet I told you about, that we were getting for a client who...” He grimaces. “Who liked to throw his name around.”

Comprehension jitters through them like a chill. “*Oh*.” So that was what they had felt, the amulet.

“We shouldn’t have done business with him,” Lucien says gravely. “Not with someone like that.” He looks genuinely remorseful. “I’ll talk to the guys about it.”

Jeanne looks up at him uncertainly. It’s hardly his fault that one of their clients turned out to be a jerk. “Well,” they mutter, glancing towards the empty street corner again. “I don’t think he’ll be contacting you again any time soon.” They flash him an awkward smile. “Sorry about that.”

Lucien snorts with utter indifference. “As far as I’m concerned you were being nice.”

Jeanne has to disagree there. They had not been nice, but they *had* been rather merciful. “I just wouldn’t want you to think I’d ever hurt someone,” they mutter.

Lucien gives them an amused look. “I know that,” he says. “You’re a much better person than I am.” He looks back at the street corner and glares for a moment. “I would have broken his nose for a start.”

Now Jeanne can’t help feeling amused. “You think a broken nose is worse than getting— than what I did?”

“Probably hurts more,” Lucien shrugs. He slants his head thoughtfully. “Or does it hurt?”

He looks so utterly unconcerned that Jeanne allows herself one not-so-sweet smile. “I don’t know,” they say. “No one has ever done it to me.”

Lucien laughs out loud and Jeanne grins, suddenly realising they have never heard him laugh like that before. Lucien laughs a lot, but it's usually soft, more like a chuckle. Not like this. They love this. Not that they don't love his chuckles. They love all of him.

"Jeanne?"

Jeanne blinks and colours a little. "Yes?" they ask, sounding a lot calmer than they feel.

"Can I come in?"

"Eh, yes," Jeanne mutters. They had not realised they were still blocking the way to the shop. Carefully, they take a step back, allowing the doorway to be a passage once more. They are grateful Lucien waits a moment before he steps inside, it seems like he understands they were not just standing there.

"In any case," Lucien says conversationally, following Jeanne into the café. "Breaking his nose would have stained his shirt."

Jeanne quirks an eyebrow. "I can't tell whether that would be an incentive for you or a reason not to do it."

"I'm not going to feel bad about staining someone *else's* last year's Saint Laurent," Lucien snorts.

This time Jeanne laughs out loud.

Lucien watches them with satisfaction on his face and when they snort and bite their lip to stop, he says: "You really do have a beautiful laugh."



Jeanne feels flames on their cheeks and glowing in their chest, but the look on Lucien's face makes them remember that they need to talk. "Thank you," they mumble, looking away. "Um..." This is a perfect opportunity. They should just start talking. If only they knew how to explain all this.

"What is it?" Lucien asks.

Jeanne folds their hands behind their back. They don't want to fidget with their hands. "I don't...generally...laugh a lot," they begin slowly.

Lucien is looking at them attentively. "I've noticed," he says, the beginnings of a smirk in one corner of his mouth. "Pity..."

"There's a reason I don't," Jeanne says. They are trying to plant their feet firmly on the wooden floorboards, but they do not feel very grounded. Quite the opposite. "It's *not* because I'm shy. Well, maybe I am, but not as shy as No   thinks I am."

Lucien smiles, but he has clearly caught on that they have something important to say and instead of replying he waits.

Jeanne is grateful, but they also wish that they didn't have to speak to explain these things. "The thing about being fae," they say bravely. "Is that it's...difficult to be around humans sometimes." To their dismay Lucien's face falls slightly and hastily they blurt out: "And I wish it wasn't, because I really like being around you!" They feel a blush taking over their entire face, but it's worth it, because Lucien looks relieved.

He clears his throat. "Right," he hums, looking away for a moment. When he looks back the expression on his face is a little cautious. "What exactly is difficult about it?"

Jeanne takes a deep breath. "It's difficult because I don't just use magic, parts of me *are* magic. Laughing, singing, telling stories—" They colour a little deeper. "—dancing... There is magic in all of that. There is glamour in that and you—" Jeanne gives Lucien a helpless smile. "It's really hard not to be myself around you."

"And that is bad?" Lucien asks softly. His face is oddly neutral.

"No," Jeanne sighs. "But it would be if my glamour...if I actually..." Just get it over with. "I thought I might have accidentally glamourised you. Because I like you. And I would never ever want to do something like that, so I had to find out if I did or not and...I didn't. I didn't do anything to you. I promise." There. They said it.

Lucien is...not surprised. Jeanne cannot quite read his expression, but it's not surprised or shocked or angry or any of the emotions they might have expected. He looks uncertain more than anything. "Why did you think you might have glamourised me?" he asks after a short silence.

Jeanne clenches their hands behind their back. They refuse to tell him about the wisteria. Not now. That is too much to ask of them. "After we danced..." they mutter, casting down their eyes. "I suddenly thought, what if something happened when I—" They think of the moment they stepped out of their shoes and pulled Lucien closer and shut their mouth.

“Okay,” Lucien says and his voice sounds odd.

Jeanne glances up at them, but his face is still calm. He’s smiling a little actually.

“So...no glamour,” he says.

“No glamour,” Jeanne repeats, with a deep breath. “Nothing that affected you at least. I *promise*.”

Lucien smiles a little wider. “Does that mean we can dance again?”

Jeanne let’s go of a little of the tension in their shoulders and lets their arms fall down their sides. “Maybe...”

“I’d like to dance with you again,” Lucien grins.

Jeanne fixes him with a look and throws up their hands. “You don’t care about this either?” they cry. Confusion and relief are tying for their strongest emotion at the moment and they let out a nervous laugh. “I tell you I might have glamourised you while dancing and you just want to do it again. You’re incorrigible.”

“It’s one of my best qualities,” Lucien smirks. His look softens a little. “But I’m sorry you were worried.”

Jeanne nods. They are still a little worried, because even though this *was* technically the worst part they have more to confess and they really don’t know how.

“Just out of curiosity,” Lucien interrupts their nerves. “How did you check that I was free of glamour?”

Right, they should really tell him about that too. Jeanne gives him an apologetic look. "Um...my friend Noé checked for me."

Lucien's eyes widen. "So he *is* fae," he says triumphantly. "I *knew* there was something about him."

Jeanne hides their relief by laughing. "Yes," they say and then, cautiously: "Did you like him?"

Lucien pulls a face. "I did and I kind of resent it."

This time Jeanne's laugh is genuine. "Yeah, Noé gets that a lot."

"Wait a minute," Lucien says. He narrows his eyes at Jeanne, but they can see the amused twinkles in the dark green. "Did you send me to his shop just so he could see me in person?"

"I had to!" Jeanne protests. They don't even feel anxious about it now, the look in Lucien's eyes is nearly making them giddy.

"You *lied* to me," Lucien says and he manages to sound indignant despite his delighted face.

"Technically I didn't lie," Jeanne points out. "Noé says you found a present for Gui."

"No, this definitely counts as lying," Lucien shakes his head. "And I didn't even notice!" He slants his head. "Did you use your magic for that?"

Jeanne wrinkles their nose in amusement. "No," they say. "Do you think I'd need magic to fool you?"

"Ouch," Lucien groans.

Jeanne laughs and he gives them a pleased look.

“Does this mean you can laugh now?” he asks.

“I guess so?” Jeanne says happily. “Maybe I was being overcautious.”

“Well, then I call this a great development,” Lucien says decidedly.

Jeanne smilingly shakes their head. Well, this has gone a million times better than they had expected. They look around the empty café and then back at Lucien. “So...what do you want to do?”

Lucien shrugs. “I don’t mind,” he says. “It’s your day off.”

Jeanne hesitates. They feel a little lightheaded and they’re suddenly convinced that that isn’t only because of Lucien. “I think I’ve kind of forgotten to have lunch?” they say, slightly embarrassed. “Maybe we could make some food first and then decide what we want to do?”

“The day I turn down your food is the day they really have to check me for spells,” Lucien grins.

“Good to know,” Jeanne says with a smile and they lead the way to the kitchen.

## Chapter 12

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### In Which A Kiss Is Returned

Lucien wanders idly through the kitchen while Jeanne makes sandwiches. He'd offer to help, but up until now he's been too lazy to learn how to cook and Jeanne is so skilful he'd definitely just slow them down. Lucien is relieved that they look a lot less jittery than they did just now. He wonders exactly how scared they have been. He also wonders what it had been they were most afraid of, that they had glamourised him, or that he might be angry. Should he tell them about Cassandra? He still hasn't made his mind up about that. On the one hand, he doesn't want to offend them, but if Jeanne had been scared herself... No, better let the mood lighten now. They can have that conversation another time. Well, there is something he wants to ask now.

"Jeanne?" he hums.

"Yes?" they say, carefully slicing avocado.

"What would you say to me bringing my friends round here sometime? All my housemates, I mean."

Jeanne lowers their knife and smiles at him. "I'd like that," they say. "Really."

Lucien grins. "Good, I'll drag them along one of these days."

The smile on Jeanne's face flickers, but then they ask with an awkward smile: "You mean that figuratively, right?"

"Yes," Lucien smirks. "I couldn't drag Gui anywhere."

Jeanne smiles and goes back to slicing. "If they don't want to come they don't have to though," they say cautiously.

Well, so much for lightening the mood. "Dante will definitely want to come," Lucien says, trying to sound as casual as possible. Let's not make a big deal about this too. "Riri is always up for anything and Gui will probably come if Dante asks him to."

The avocado is done, but Jeanne does not look away from the cutting board. "Gui wouldn't be afraid of me, would he?" they ask quietly.

"No," Lucien says firmly and Jeanne glances up at him. "He won't be," Lucien adds. He has hinted to Jeanne before that Gi is just a tad paranoid sometimes. "Not once he's met you." Which is exactly why he should.

"Well," Jeanne says, smile a little wider and a little warmer. "I'd love to meet them all."

Lucien nods and goes back to peeking in cupboards and drawers.

"What are you looking for?" Jeanne giggles after a while.

"Oh, I don't know," Lucien hums. He's just keeping busy. If he doesn't, he might just stare at Jeanne the whole time. They look really good in that dress. "Stuff to steal?"

Jeanne snorts. "There's an almond cake on the top shelf there. You can steal that."

Lucien grabs the cake off the indicated shelf and puts it down on the counter. It looks delicious.

"It needs a dusting of sugar still," Jeanne tells him and they point at another cupboard.

Lucien pulls it open and glances at the labels. He grabs the powdered sugar and turns the lid. "This, right?" he says, turning it over above the cake.

"No!" Jeanne's hand shoots out, but it's too late. There's a big puff of sugary white dust and Lucien holds his breath and squints his eyes shut. The sugar settles like snow.

"The distributor cap on that one is broken," Jeanne says helpfully, trying not to laugh.

"Well," Lucien says slowly, putting the sugar down. There is sugar everywhere. Mostly in a big heap on the cake, but all over the counter and him too. Damn, and he wore a nice dark shirt too.

"I didn't even mean that sugar," Jeanne says, voice trembling with repressed laughter. They come with a dry kitchen towel to dust him off.

Lucien sighs dramatically and bows his head so they can try to get the sugar out of his hair. It seems ruining shirts is just something that happens around Jeanne. And they're laughing now, so it's kind of worth it.



Very carefully Jeanne swats at Lucien's hair with the towel. They giggle when he snorts at the small cloud of sugar and he looks up to scowl at them a little. He hadn't quite expected their face to be this close. He can see every long lash framing their brown eyes, every freckle on their fair skin. Lucien stares. If he leans forward just a little, their lips would be touching... Jeanne looks back at him, eyes wide for a moment and then they draw back. Lucien's hand moves forward to stop them before he realises it. He manages to change it into a grab for the towel just in time.

"Oh," Jeanne mumbles when his hand brushes against their fingers and they let go of the towel. "...sorry."

Lucien represses a grimace. Why is he making this so damn awkward? It was going so well. His heart is beating so loudly he's sure he can hear it rather than feel it.

Jeanne has turned away from him, shuffling their feet.

Lucien searches for something to say, preferably something clever and tension breaking, but suddenly Jeanne spins around to face him and blurts out:

"There was another thing I wanted to talk about!"

He blinks, slightly startled by the almost frantic look on their face. "Okay, shoot," he says.

"It wasn't just the dancing I was worried about," Jeanne gulps, looking like they have half a mind to just run out of the door.

Lucien is at a loss. Jeanne looks *scared*. What did he do?

"I'm not dangerous!" Jeanne says frantically. "I've got my magic under control! Usually. Normally. It's just that—"

They are turning redder by the second and suddenly a thought slips into Lucien's mind that is just a little too good to be true. Jeanne is still talking, though, and with every word that thought becomes a little less unbelievable.

"Emotions and magic can get jumbled up and when you first walked into the café you were already...well...you," Jeanne stammers. "But then I got to know you and—" They swallow. "I think I'm in— I mean...I have feelings for you?"

Lucien wants to answer something. If only to dispel the anxious look on their face, but he can't speak right now. His body is catching up with his ears and his heart is picking up speed like mad. Jeanne has feelings for him. Jeanne nearly admitted to being in *love* with him. Jeanne, actually in love with him. And they are looking at him like he might *disapprove*.

"I know this is probably weird," they mutter. "And I'm sorry for telling you like this, but I had to. Because I *am* fae and you should know." They cast down their eyes. "Of course I won't expect you to—"

"Will you go out with me?" Lucien interrupts. He's finally regained control over his muscles again, well apart from the grin that's spreading across his face. He couldn't get rid of that if he tried.

"What?" Jeanne stammers, eyes darting to his.

“Go out with me,” Lucien repeats, throwing the dish towel aside. “Dinner, candles, a movie. Whatever you want. Every night if you want.” He has never been the type of person to doubt himself, but he is self-aware enough to know that this should not have happened to him. He should not be standing in front of someone like Jeanne convincing *them* that he might be interested in them.

Jeanne stares at him, understanding slowly dawning on their gorgeous face and he grins at them. “You like me back?” they whisper.

“That a slight understatement, but yes, I do,” Lucien says seriously. He wants to reach out for them. Grab their hands, stroke their hair, but he doesn’t feel like he can do that. Not yet.

“I–” Jeanne begins, bewildered.

“You haven’t said yes yet,” Lucien reminds them.

“*Yes*,” they cry. “Yes I’ll go out with you!”

Lucien feels something explode in his chest and he’s so happy he doesn’t know what to do with himself. He runs a hand through his hair and grimaces involuntarily when he feels the sugar between his fingers.

Jeanne laughs, half-nervous, half-delighted. “But...would you really want to?” they say hesitantly, reining in the excitement that was dancing in their eyes a moment ago. “I mean...what if I...” They shut their mouth, looking unhappy.

Lucien looks at Jeanne's worried face and feels uncertain. Surely they don't need to be quite so anxious? They already know they didn't do anything wrong. If he's being honest, the idea of them being unable to control their magic around him because of how much they like him is insanely flattering. He opens his mouth to joke about having his ego stroked, but suddenly he remembers something. Another jokey remark gone wrong.

One time, when Clarice had just moved in with him and the rest of the guys, she had completely lost it over an offhand remark from Guillaume. Clarice had let slip she was going out with some girl, gushing her little heart out. Guillaume told her to have fun, and then, without thinking twice he had teased: "Maybe you'll get lucky."

None of them had even had time to laugh. Clarice had flown at him like a furious cat. She had been so angry it took both Dante and Lucien to drag her away from Guillaume. They barely even managed to calm her down, but then Dante guessed that Clarice thought Guillaume meant the *magic* kind of luck. Guillaume was been horrified, but it took two apologies to get Clarice to believe he didn't mean it like that. Finally she had muttered something about never ever wanting her luck to have anything to do with how people treated her. And even after that it took a lot of jokes and thinly veiled assurances before she pulled herself properly together again.

It must be like that for Jeanne, Lucien realises. Having the fear that people like you because they can't help it, instead of because they want to. "Hey," he says softly and this time he reaches out for their hand. "I should tell you. Dante was afraid you

might have glamourised me. I got angry with him for not trusting you."

"Oh," Jeanne says, eyes widening. "Oh, I'm sorry for that! He was only looking out for you."

"I know," Lucien says, waving the hand that isn't gently squeezing Jeanne's fingers. "He's a sap. Point is that he took me to see a clairvoyant. She told me there wasn't any glamour on me. I'm sure she'll help us again if you're ever worried. So we'll have help on both sides, if you think it's necessary."

Jeanne looks relieved, but not much. They look down at the hand Lucien is holding.

Lucien lowers his voice a little. "What are you afraid of?" he asks. He needs to know what to say or do to turn that anxiety into excitement again. For the first time in his life Lucien wishes he had the kind of magic that makes other people feel what you feel. He's never seen much use for those softer types of magic but right now...

"I don't even know exactly," Jeanne laughs awkwardly.

Lucien pulls gently on their hand and they step a little closer. What can he say to convince Jeanne they caught their eye before they had even spoken a word? If he had met them in a bar or club, he would have asked them out in a heartbeat. He's kind of glad he didn't though. Because he would have asked them out for the wrong reasons, or at least not for all the right reasons. "For what it's worth," he says. "I probably would have asked you out ages ago if I had thought you'd say yes."



Jeanne blinks in astonishment. They're not convinced they heard that right. If they're completely honest, they have yet to come to terms with most of the content of this conversation. Still, one thing at the time. "Why did you think I wouldn't?" they ask, wide-eyed.

Lucien glances away for a moment and plays a little with their fingers. Their hands are *so* soft. "I kind of didn't think you were interested in...all that," he mutters. He looks at them searchingly. "I thought faeries – or you – might not..."

"Oh," Jeanne blushes and Lucien thankfully breaks off the sentence. "No, I do," Jeanne says embarrassedly. "At least, I think I do? I've never—" They let out a nervous laugh. "This is new." Awkward as this makes them feel though, it also makes them feel better. They think of every single time Lucien made them blush. All the teasing jokes and compliments. They smile at him

Lucien is looking at them with delight, but suddenly his face changes. "Wait..." he says. "Never? You mean... You mean that time I kissed you, that was your first kiss?" He sounds genuinely shocked.

Jeanne really wishes they would stop blushing, if only for a second. "Eh, yes," they say.

"I'm...sorry?" Lucien says, looking slightly bewildered.

His face is such a picture of contradictions that a laugh sparks inside Jeanne and they let it ring out freely. "You don't look very sorry," they say. Happiness is starting to bubble inside of them, brighter and brighter.

"Well, no," Lucien admits. "That's because I'm not, but I would be if I was a less selfish person. A kiss is one thing, but a *first* kiss really isn't something you should, you know."

"Steal?" Jeanne smiles.

He runs his hand through his hair and grins, partly pleased and partly embarrassed.

Jeanne looks at him. At the mix of emotions on his face, the shine to his eyes, all the features they have admired from the start and grown to love over time. They remember that face moving swiftly towards them when they did not know it so well. They remember those curved lips pressing against their own. A kiss traded and a first kiss stolen. "I know how you could make it up to me..." they say quietly.

"How?" Lucien asks, eyes fixing on them.

"Give me my second one?"

The expression on Lucien's face softens to an amused delight. He reaches out and gently places a hand against Jeanne's cheek. His fingertips come to rest just below their ear and Jeanne feels their skin almost hum. They move towards each other ever so slightly.

“Um, wait,” Jeanne mutters. The happiness is doing its level best to replace the anxiousness, but it hasn’t quite succeeded yet.

Lucien draws back a little. “Yeah?”

Jeanne glances around. “I...I don’t want us to...” This is so complicated. They want this. All of this. But they want it to be right. And good. And...equal. In an impulse they turn around, towards the counter they were just leaning against. Lucien retracts his hand and they are infinitely sorry for it, but they don’t change their mind now. With their index finger they write two words into the sugar dusted across the counter: JEHAN FLEURON.

Lucien stares at the name written on the counter. “Why...?” he begins, sounding truly baffled.

“It is not a trade,” Jeanne says hastily. Their brown eyes turned towards him with nearly anxious sincerity. “It’s freely given. Because I don’t ever want you to think that I could... That you wouldn’t be able to—” They stop talking and give him a pleading look. They can’t say it out loud, but they need Lucien to understand that they can be trusted. And that he can keep their name as a token of faith.

Lucien silently looks from the name to Jeanne and back again. “Jehan Fleuron,” he says slowly and Jeanne feels their skin tingle. They have not heard that name spoken in—

With a sudden movement and a cloud of sugar Lucien wipes the letters away. His eyes fix on Jeanne with a dark brightness



they have never seen before and he asks urgently: "Can I kiss you now?"

"Yes," they breathe and a moment later Lucien's mouth is on theirs. Without even thinking about it Jeanne throws their arms around his neck and leans into him. A warm, buzzing, glorious happiness is washing over them like liquid sunshine and they are blissfully free of any fear of their own glamour. Whatever this is, they are creating it together.

Lucien pulls them a little closer, one hand at their face, the other resting on their waist. Suddenly his lips smile against theirs and he pulls away.

"What?" Jeanne asks laughingly, a slight hitch in their breath.

"Your name is Jehan and you chose the name Jeanne?" Lucien asks. He looks as amused as he looks happy. Both a great deal.

"It's a good chosen name," Jeanne protests. "Who is ever going to guess my given name is so close to it?"

"Fair enough," Lucien grins.

Jeanne looks up at him and there is so much happiness inside them they're sure that if they don't do something about it they might make summer arrive early in the whole of Paris.

"So..." Lucien says, dark lights dancing in his eyes. "Did I give you back your kiss? Is that how it works?"

Jeanne laughs, softly, and shakes their head. "No..." they say, looking into his eyes. "No it doesn't..."

Carefully, very carefully, they slide their arms down from around Lucien's neck and place their hands at either side of his face.



Kissing Jeanne almost pales in comparison to being kissed by them. Their hands gently move from his cheek to the back of his neck and back again, fingers tracing lines that aren't there and Lucien can't think anymore. His mind is full with the softness of Jeanne's lips that press first against his cheeks, then the corners of his mouth, finally his lips. He doesn't even realise he's opened his eyes until he sees Jeanne's brown eyes looking back at him. They look *happy*. He smiles.

"What?" Jeanne asks. Their voice sounds open and unrestrained and there's a melodic quality to it that Lucien is sure he's heard before, but never quite like this.

"You," he replies. "Just you..." He grins. "And the fact that there's sugar on you too, now."

"Where?" Jeanne laughs, looking down at their clothes.

"Here," Lucien grins and he kisses the cheek that his hand left a smudge of white powder on.

Jeanne laughs again and before Lucien can do it, they slant their head and kiss him on his open mouth. Lucien leans them back against the counter and almost lets out a sigh as he feels Jeanne's hand slide into his hair. Jeanne tastes like spilled sugar

and sunlight dancing in copper curls. Like honey made from the wildflower smell clinging to their hair.

They break apart and Jeanne's lips are so red Lucien presses another short, peck of a kiss on them just because he can't help himself.

Jeanne beams at him and suddenly they flush and a merry laugh rolls off their lips and fills the whole kitchen.

Lucien can feel it echo in his insides and because there's no reason not to, he laughs with them. "What was that for?" he asks, grinning.

"Well..." Jeanne says, eyes shining with an embarrassed sort of joy. "You know that wisteria outside the café?"

"Yeah?" Lucien says, slightly puzzled. It's very hard to miss.

"That...kind of started growing after I met you," Jeanne says, lips trembling with a smile.

Lucien draws up his eyebrows. It's not very surprising that Jeanne can make plants grow faster than they usually would, I mean they are a- He looks at the expression on their face and opens his mouth.

"I *didn't* grow it on purpose," Jeanne says deliberately. "And I laughed just now because I really hope it isn't currently growing out of control winding around the entire building."

Lucien looks at them with unrestrained delight. "You *accidentally* covered your café in flowers because of *me*," he says.

Jeanne huffs through their smile.

"Amazing," Lucien declares. "And I haven't even paid proper attention to it! Let's go look at my tree." He turns resolutely towards the kitchen door.

"No..." Jeanne groans laughingly and they catch him by the hand and pull him back.

Lucien very willingly lets himself be pulled back against them and grins down at Jeanne. "Is this going to be a thing?" he teases. "Will there be roses bursting into bloom if I take you out?"

"Stop it..." they whine. "It's embarrassing."

It's the cutest thing he has ever heard. "Okay," he grins. "But only if you can think of something better to do."

Later Lucien will pretend not to remember what they did then, just so Jeanne will tell him about it. Because what they do is very little and all of it perfect.

First they shake the sugar out of their hair and clothes. (Lucien carefully hangs Jeanne's mismatched cardigan on a hook with the aprons instead of giving it back to them and luckily they don't seem to miss it.) They eat their sandwiches, that were thankfully spared by the sugar rain. They salvage the poor almond cake and pretend to clean the kitchen, while getting hardly anything done. Because every opportunity Lucien gets to touch Jeanne, even if it's just in passing, he takes. Not only because he has been wanting to touch them for so long and he finally knows he can, but also because every time he does it there is a small burst of happiness in Jeanne's countenance.

With every kiss, every squeeze, every careful touch of Jeanne's hair, that spark grows a little brighter. Until they are all aglow and Jeanne's hands are on him as much as his are on them.

Neither of them is aware of the time until hours later, when Jeanne is sitting on Lucien's lap on a kitchen chair. It's almost six already. At least that's what his watch tells them.

"I hadn't realised..." Jeanne says laughingly, happiness all diffused on their glowing face.

Lucien grins. "I'm a known thief," he murmurs, pressing a kiss against their temple. "And I'll be stealing a lot more of your time from now on." There is easiness between them now. Lucien can feel it in the warmth as he pulls Jeanne closer and he is damn near drunk on it.

Jeanne lets out a soft, pearly laugh. "You keep saying you're the thief," they say, leaning their forehead against Lucien's with a smile that he would willingly look at for the rest of his days. "But I'm the one that stole away the most beautiful, charming, wonderful mortal there ever was."

"Is that so?" Lucien smirks, but he protests only to see the mischievous glint in Jeanne's eyes spark a little brighter. He can't deny he's been stolen and he has no wish to deny it. He'll be Jeanne's as long as they want him.

Jeanne's expression softens again and they sigh happily. The way they are sitting on Lucien's lap makes it seem like they belong there and like no other seat will suit them now they've

found this spot. They glance at his watch again and murmur: "Will...will your friends be worried if you're not home soon?"

Lucien laughs. "No," he says amusedly. "I was planning on being here a while actually."

Jeanne flushes happily and to Lucien's delight and further amusement they ask: "Do you want to stay for dinner?"

"Dinner sounds good," he smiles. He knows Jeanne isn't quite the innocent creature they seem to be, really Lucien has known that from the start, but he'd almost forget it. With them making a proposition as innocent as that with their cheeks burning so red.

But Jeanne's eyes are twinkling with a hidden joy that is almost suggestive. "That means staying after sundown," they say quietly.

Lucien hadn't realised that. He grins. "It does... Does that mean I get to find out what's so special about faeries in the dark?"

The smile on Jeanne's face now perfectly matches the look in their eyes. "Nothing much," they say sweetly. "Not in Paris at least. There is no real dark of night in the city."

"Hmm," Lucien hums. "Pity." He gives them a thoughtful look. "I get the feeling you want me to ask what Paris *does* have..."

Jeanne smiles a little wider and Lucien just manages to keep his grin in check. Jeanne is flirting with him. They're doing it sitting on his lap and with their lips already plump from kissing him, but they *are* flirting.

"Tell me," he smiles. "What *is* real in Paris, if not the dark of night?"

Jeanne's eyes are large and dark. "The gloaming," they whisper.

Lucien slants his head. He's never seen anything particularly special about the grey twilight falling over the city. He prefers the Parisian brand of night, full of lively lights that make the shadows darker. But whatever Jeanne is thinking of, if it makes their eyes shine like that he wants to see it. "Show me then," he coaxes.

"Oh I will," Jeanne says, their playfulness shifting more towards their usual cheerfulness. "But let's make dinner while we wait." They hop off Lucien's lap and hold out their hand to him.

"I hope you mean you'll make dinner while I keep my hands thoroughly to myself this time," Lucien grimaces, getting to his feet also. He takes their hand and grins. "Well...I'll keep my hands off the *cooking*." To his intense gratification, Jeanne still flushes scarlet.

Even so, they're not tongue-tied. "I'll give better instructions this time," they snort. "Come on."

They move from the café's kitchen up to the tiny one in Jeanne's apartment. Their place is just like Lucien remembers it, apart from it being considerably tidier than last time. It does look a little different though. The many plants look even greener than they did last time, something about the air feels almost soft. Or maybe that's just how he feels around Jeanne. Jeanne, who is happily digging kitchen utensils out of a drawer.

"Are you going to help or not?" they joke.

"Be careful what you wish for," Lucien grins, walking over to give them a hand.

"That's my line," Jeanne chuckles.

They cook together. Lucien chops vegetables while Jeanne mixes together what they say will be a quiche.

"Have I ever told you you're beautiful?" Lucien says, when Jeanne slides it into the oven. His tone isn't teasing or provoking. It's an honest question. He's thought it a million times, but maybe he's never said it. He should have. And he will. So many times more. It's not the most important thing about Jeanne, not even close, but stars above is it true.

Jeanne shakes their head, almost shy.

"You are," he says sincerely.

Jeanne looks at him with a smile that might mean a million different things. "We should open the windows," they say suddenly and they quietly move past Lucien into the living room, where they throw open the windows.

Lucien follows, slightly bemused. "Why is that s—"

He stops. The sun has gone down. In the tiny kitchen the lights were on. In the rest of the apartment they are not. Jeanne is standing by the open window, a sweet smell drifting past them that Lucien can't quite place. With a movement so graceful it should be the start of a dance Jeanne turns to face him and



for a moment Lucien's mind goes quiet. He has been wrong all his life. Twilight in Paris isn't grey. It's every colour of the day, draped in the fast approaching shadows of the night. But the shadows dare not touch Jeanne. Their vibrant being refuses to be muted and they *shimmer*. Lucien stares at them and he understands. If he had not been in love with Jeanne already, he would have been utterly lost now.

Slowly his ability to form words returns to him. He swallows. "What did you call this again?" he asks.

Jeanne smiles. Their smile hangs tangible in the air and this time Lucien is sure he feels the atmosphere change. "The gloaming," they say.

"Gloaming," he repeats.



The feeling of letting their magic surround them freely with someone watching is as new to Jeanne as the feelings called forth by Lucien's admiring eyes. They do not take their own eyes off him and the look on his face is only part of the reason. Because Lucien is clad in shadows now. He almost looks like a shadow himself when he walks towards them on soundless feet. He can walk so very stealthily. A thief's feet, Jeanne thinks adoringly. And then Lucien's slender fingers are tangling into their hair and they give up thinking for a while. They slowly wrap their arms around Lucien's neck and raise their face to his. He presses an almost dreamy kiss on their lips and Jeanne lengthens it by leaning into him just enough to make Lucien move one hand to the small of their back to steady them.

Jeanne sways, gently guiding Lucien to follow them with nothing more than the movement itself and Lucien follows. The gloaming has a song, deep and distant. Jeanne has danced to it countless times, but never like this. As they move they think Lucien must hear the melody too, because his body moves just right. Or perhaps that is because they are moving as one. This is not a dance like the last time – and not just because Jeanne is still wearing their shoes – but it is beautiful. Jeanne can feel it fill them up inside and they hold on to Lucien a little tighter. There is *such* love swirling inside of them and they want to tell Lucien. They have told him so many things today, but not that. Not yet. And oh how they want to. But words feel heavy. Too heavy for a moment like this. Too heavy for Jeanne to give to Lucien who is quick to laugh and to joke and who might not want to hear them. Not now. Not yet. So they just dance.

Around them the Parisian night sets in in full and Jeanne has to admit, night looks good on Lucien. Even with the spell of dusk fading they stay right where they are, swaying in place, wrapped in each other's arms. Just when Jeanne rests their head against Lucien's shoulder there is an unceremonious ring from the kitchen and they both laugh.

Jeanne tries to let go of Lucien, but he only pulls them closer.

"The quiche is done," they remind him.

"Fine," Lucien sighs. "But I'm only letting you go because I'm hungry."

Jeanne darts into the kitchen and quickly grabs two plates.

“Jeanne, your candles are not magic, are they?” Lucien calls from the living room.

“No?” they call back, turning off the oven. “Not on their own anyway. Why?”

There’s no answer, but when Jeanne returns with two plates of quiche and a handful of cutlery, the windows are partially closed and Lucien has lit every candle he could find. They must have taken some finding too, because Jeanne delights in hiding their candles in little glasses and lanterns scattered across their shelves and furniture. There are quite a few of them and together they light the room up beautifully.

“I think I said something about dinner and candles,” Lucien grins, putting his lighter back in his pocket.

“You did,” Jeanne grins and this time it feels like they have to physically swallow the words jumping to their lips.

They hand Lucien his plate and he takes it with an appreciative nod, sitting down on a chair Jeanne once rescued from being thrown away. He looks up at them with a strange, half-repressed smile.

“What? Jeanne asks gently, sitting down as well.

“Nothing,” Lucien hums. He leans back in his chair and says: “Next time you must tell me what you’re cooking, I’ll bring wine to match.”

“I don’t really know anything about wine,” Jeanne smiles.

Lucien lets out an exaggerated gasp. "That is absolutely unacceptable."

"You can teach me," Jeanne says laughingly. "I'm a fast learner." They quickly lean forward, coming out of their seat and press a kiss on the corner of Lucien's mouth. "See?"

To their utter delight they actually see the slightest hint of colour on Lucien's cheeks.

"Do you want me to give your cooking the attention it deserves?" Lucien says slowly. "Because if I have to choose between eating and holding you..."

Jeanne grins. Giddiness bubbling inside their chest. "You can do both," they say and they pick up their plate and get to their feet. "Come on!"

Lucien follows him, also carrying his plate and they change from the chairs to the bed. Sitting on the mattress with their legs drawn up they can lean against each other while holding their plates on their laps. Near perfect eating arrangements Jeanne thinks. Besides, this quiche won't crumb, they baked it themselves.

"Better?" Jeanne asks.

"Hmm," Lucien hums, stealing a bit off their plate despite having more than enough left on his own.

When the plates are empty they are moved to the floor and Jeanne moves into Lucien's arms.

“Is there a time limit to how long I can stay?” he asks, sighing a little as Jeanne puts their head against his chest.

“What do you mean?” Jeanne mutters.

“I don’t know,” Lucien says vaguely. “Stroke of midnight?”

Jeanne smiles against his shirt. “You can stay as long as you like, Lucien,” they say softly. “And you can leave whenever you want.” They pull away a little to smile at him and then let their gaze drop again. Around the collar of Lucien’s shirt they can just see the hint of red and black betraying the roses blooming on his chest.

Lucien’s hand lifts to their face and gently presses against their neck and cheek. Jeanne feels his breath against their ear on the other side and expects a kiss. Instead, Lucien’s lips move, almost touching their ear, breathing rather than speaking his words.

“I’ll never want to leave you Jeanne Fleuron.”

Jeanne lifts up their eyes, looking straight into Lucien’s. The green looks quiet and dark. “I like that...” they say softly. “Jeanne Fleuron...” No one’s ever called them that. Names... names are a strange thing.

Lucien smiles. “I’ve done my level best never to have to leave you,” he reminds them. “I broke every single faerie rule. Well, apart from the name one. Technically.”

“You did though,” they grin dreamily.

“What do you mean?” Lucien asks, stretching his feet out comfortably.

“You *did* tell me your true name,” Jeanne says and their mind glows golden with the truth of it. “Right the first time we met. Not your given name perhaps, but your true name even so.”

Lucien’s hand idly plays with a strand of their hair. The smile on his face has turned into a grin. “Yeah,” he says. “I did.”

Jeanne laughs. At the world in general, from pure happiness.

Various expressions are flickering past Lucien’s beautiful face and Jeanne looks at them without a single care in the world. The gentle flames and the green plants breathe with them in the cosy room and the air carries just a hint of the scent of wisteria.

“Jeanne?” Lucien breaks the warm silence.

“Yes?” they say softly. Lucien touches their face and they properly meet his eyes again.

He looks at them with that delicate half-smile from before. “What’s the price for loving a faerie?”

The world is all vibrant colours and light. Jeanne glows at its centre and Lucien is the most gorgeous, shining darkness that they have ever known. They smile, gazing up into Lucien’s eyes and this time the words aren’t heavy at all:

“That they love you back.”

## Chapter 13

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### In Which An Epilogue Is Given

It is a wonderful sunny Monday, warm light is streaming in through every window. The café is pleasantly busy and while they serve their customers Jeanne looks back at the previous week with unrestrained delight. It has been filled with new and wonderful things. And not just the kisses and late night walks and talks with Lucien, although there has been an awful lot of that.

There were other things too. Like getting to tell an overjoyed Noé about everything. And being texted out of the blue by Dante with a veiled compliment that could possibly also be construed as a threat, before being asked rather shy questions about having faerie blood. And properly meeting Lucien's friend Principessa, who came into the café accompanied by her younger brother this time instead of her girlfriend. Something which Lucien assured them was a great show of trust.

The younger brother's name, or rather nickname, is Dauphin. Jeanne knows this now because they *asked*. Something they never would have done before. But the world seems simpler now. Staying quiet and hidden suddenly doesn't seem all that important anymore. Maybe it's not so bad to be known. To be valued for what they are.

Jeanne smiles at herself, the world, and everyone in it from behind the counter. They feel so light that they occasionally feel the urge to check whether their feet are actually touching the ground. That isn't strictly necessary though and they know it. Their magic has settled around this new glow of happiness and it isn't acting up anymore. Jeanne did have a stern conversation with the wisteria yesterday, which has nearly reached the roof of the building by now. It's stopped growing since and seems content the way it is. Jeanne can relate.

The door to the café opens and in another display of breaking routine the Friday regulars come in. Their animated conversation fills the little café with excitement and Jeanne's spirits rise even higher.

"What a nice surprise to see you again so soon!" they exclaim.

All three of them reply with a blur of friendly comments that eventually give rise to Jo remarking almost apologetically:

"I've just realised I do not even know what you like to be called."

Jeanne smiles. That is true. They know all their names, but they don't know theirs. "You can call me Jeanne," they say cheerfully. "And what will it be today?"

After some compliments on the suitability of what they assume is their nickname they all order elaborate coffees and Jeanne assures them they will bring them over as soon as they're done.

"No need for that," Alex offers readily. "It's clearly busy today, I'll wait and carry them."



He nods to the others to go and Jeanne is too touched to protest.

The other two pick a table and sit down and Jeanne happily starts preparing their drinks, sprinkling them all liberally with all the good their magic is humming with today. While they work they occasionally glance at Alex, who is leaning on the counter and has opened his book.

Jeanne has seen him with it often enough. It's called "Between Lore and Logic" and it has all the tell-tale signs of an occult textbook. It looks like a very grand and serious book and it is probably not much used to being lugged about and read on coffee shop counters.

"What are you reading about?" Jeanne asks nonchalantly, placing the finished drinks on a tray.

"Oh," Alex smiles. "Faeries actually." He smiles apologetically, probably remembering their last exchange on the subject.

"That's so interesting," Jeanne says brightly, doing their best to dispel the uneasiness.

"Well, I think so," Alex smiles. "It's a very old book though. A lot of the information must be outdated."

Jeanne glances at the page. There are illustrations. "May I see?" they ask curiously. Just like they like their songs, the human stories and pictures of faeries always amuse them.

"Of course," Alex says and he turns the book, clearly pleased they are showing an interest.

With a smile dancing around their lips Jeanne inspects the drawing. It's meant to be a troop of faeries dancing. They're beautiful, but their faces are on the mean side. All of them have long hair and thin faces, and all of them have big, pointy ears. The thought of creatures like that living in Paris, making coffee, is preposterous. It almost makes them laugh. The merriment bubbles inside them and, strangely and wonderfully enough, Jeanne doesn't feel the need to hold their tongue. They swallow the laugh, but not the words.

"Would you look at that," they say pleasantly. "They do always exaggerate our ears."

"Yes, I do wonder about that," Alex says earnestly. "If all fae had pointy ears, they would be easier to s—" He trails off and his eyes dart from the book to Jeanne's face. "Wh-what did you say?"

Jeanne smiles. "That they always exaggerate the ears," they repeat innocently.

"Right..." Alex mutters. "Yeah..."

"Alex, what's keeping you?" Nico calls out from the table. "Do you need help carrying?"

"What?" he says distractedly. "No, I—" His eyes dart to Jeanne again.

Nico comes bounding up to the counter. "That smells *divine*," he gushes.

“Why thank you!” Jeanne beams at him. “They’re made with a lot of love.”

“I’ll say,” Nico says earnestly. “You make the *best* drinks and pastries. No joke.” His eyes fly over the assorted goods. “I said I wouldn’t, but could I have a piece of baked chocolate mousse anyway?”

“Of course,” Jeanne smiles. “These are also made with love.”

“Isn’t everything?” Nico grins.

“Oh no,” Jeanne replies cheerfully. “Most of the pastries are made with happiness.”

Nico laughs, but Alex is still clutching his book and his face is full of confused curiosity that he’s trying very hard to hide. Between them they pick up the cups and the added charge of Nico’s plate and turn away from the counter.

“Enjoy!” Jeanne chimes.

Alex looks back at them wide-eyed and Jeanne winks. He gives them a smile that is trembling with uncertainty, but that clearly has the beginnings of excitement buried beneath it.

Jeanne turns away with a smile of their own. Their insides are swirling with unconcerned joy and they bask in their own bravery. Their smile widens. Alex will come back to talk to them, they are sure of that. Perhaps he deserves to find out... Perhaps he will be a new friend. They glance around at all the little tables. Maybe some day their café will be filled with people they can call their friends.

"*You* are looking positively impish."

Delightedly Jeanne spins around to see Lucien approaching the counter. He is clad in black that looks impossibly soft to the touch and is wearing his most handsome smirk.

"And you," Jeanne says lovingly, "look like an angel freshly fallen."

"I would never have expected your kind to believe in angels," Lucien teases, lowering his voice a little.

"I never used to, no," Jeanne smiles and they press a quick, but teasing kiss on Lucien's cheeks. From the corner of their eye Jeanne sees the woman called Manou nudge her friends and over the clutter of cups at the other table they're sure they can hear a smothered: "*Finally*."

When they pull away they are keenly aware of Jo's slightly startled eyes, fixed on them with strong surprise. They pretend not to see. Lucien, however, turns his head and smirks very deliberately in his direction. Jo clears his throat and struggles to jump back into the conversation he was having with Nico. On the other side of the table Alex is clearly still very distracted and trying not to look at the counter too often.

"What are you smiling at?" Lucien asks, looking smugly delighted himself.

"Oh, nothing at all," Jeanne says, smile teetering on the edge of a grin.

Lucien leans leisurely on the counter and Jeanne is pretty sure that at least one customer that was about to ask for a refill, has now suddenly decided to be in a little less of a hurry.

“Gui agreed to come over later in the week if you like,” Lucien says. “Riri and Dante too, of course.”

“Oh that’s great,” Jeanne says eagerly. They so want to get to know all of Lucien’s friends. “Do they know what day?”

“Kind of depends on you,” Lucien smiles.

“Thursday afternoon?” Jeanne suggests. “It’s usually pretty quiet then.” They blush in happy expectation. Hopefully Gui and Riri will like them, although they suspect Lucien won’t leave them much choice.

“I also thought...” Lucien beings slowly, gently calling their attention back to him. “That maybe we could go out this Sunday.”

Out... There are nerves low in Jeanne’s stomach, but the happy bravery hasn’t faded yet. They would *love* to go out with Lucien. “Out where?” they ask curiously.

“Wherever you want really,” Lucien says, clearly pleased that they are inclined to agree to his plan. “But maybe...you’d like to see a little of the occult side of Paris? The human side I mean...” He grins and lowers his voice a little more. “There’s a club I think you might like...”

“One of the hidden places in Paris?” Jeanne asks quietly, their eyes twinkling as they remember the first time Lucien ever leaned across their counter.

“Exactly,” he grins.

Jeanne thinks of exploring the city with Lucien by their side and smiles. They do not know the hidden places of Paris, but they’re certain they have as many secrets to show Lucien as he does. “I would love that,” they say happily.

“Good,” Lucien hums, his own happiness swirling almost tangibly around him. He gives one sly glance around the café. No one is watching them now. His green eyes spark in a way that is by now wonderfully familiar to Jeanne. They know what is coming and they do absolutely nothing to stop it. Lucien’s hand reaches out across the counter, fingers quickly curling around the front of Jeanne’s apron and he pulls them into a kiss. Jeanne kisses back and even though they break apart again almost instantly they both feel the warmth of it lingering on their lips.

No one saw and yet, suddenly everyone in the café is smiling.

Jeanne’s smile is the widest of all. They are positively shining. “Well,” they say with eyes as dark as they are bright. “Apart from *that*—” For a moment their gaze lingers on Lucien’s smirking lips. “—what else are you here for today? Coffee, or a faerie cake?”

### About the author

This book was brought to you by a Dutch storyteller who guards her name well, but goes by Laura Simons.

Coffee and Faerie Cakes is her first book, but she has a podcast called Patchwork Fairy Tales full of original, inclusive fairy tales, that can be found on most podcasting apps and on the website [patchworkfairytales.wordpress.com](http://patchworkfairytales.wordpress.com).

Laura's main reason for writing is because it makes her happy, her main reason for publishing is to make others happy. So if you have thoughts she out to hear, you can find her on Tumblr as "laurasimonsdaughter" on her podcast website, or you can email her at [laurasimons.author@gmail.com](mailto:laurasimons.author@gmail.com)!

