

II – Luther

He pulled at his robe carefully, making the last adjustments before he looked into the mirror. The man he saw there still was a stranger to him. He was dressed in fine, dark brocade silk with golden ribbons and buttons. His face was shaved perfectly and his long, dark hair flew down his shoulder in mild waves.

That man still was a stranger to him. This royal image included, Luther was sure he had now explored every step on the ladder of society.

He had started out as “Luther Fiston”. An illegitimate child he had been, but his father had been a respected man of honour and did not flee his responsibility. His mother had been Margarithe Fiston, a beautiful and ambitious woman, who wanted to be a Talamari, but failed the tests. Instead, Dawn, a little bragging girl that had seen 20 springs less than his mother had taken her place among the honourable magicians of Gladstone.

He remembered the day his mother came home from that defeat. She had been screaming and raging like a wild beast and many of the vases in their home had been broken. His father had tried to soothe her, to console her, to stop her.

The first, he had done. His mother had stopped raging. She had stopped yelling and throwing and breaking things. The second, he seemed to have done. Her rage turned into tears, but their flow stopped soon. She agreed with his father that she did not need to be a Talamari. That she was perfect the way she was.

The third could not be done.

His father had married her right after he had come to know that he would have a child. It had been ten years now and yet he did not know the depths of her soul and dark desires. He had only seen the tip of the iceberg.

His mother was still full of wrath, but her feelings were hidden. Yes, she did not need to belong to the Talamari.

She was too good for them. Too powerful.

Her greed still grew inside her and when his father – the last barrier of sanity and authority in their family – died because of soldiers of the king, the disaster was complete.

The social decline happened fast. Much faster than 16-year-old Luther had ever dreamed or feared. Fuelled by rage, his mother turned against the king. She became Scotia. And the darkness spread.

They were soon hated by nearly all of Gladstone. The people on the street denied to speak to him, his girl left him, his childhood friends turned away from him, his teachers excluded him from school and the priests from church. The soldiers of the king kicked and beat him at any chance they got.

What other alternative then, was left for a young man of 16 but to follow the only person who still cared for him, his mother?

He felt safe again in their hiding places and even more in Cimmeria, although his mother did not allow him to explore the castle’s depths. He had a bed, warm food, rooms for his studies and the support of many attendants.

Orcs and shadows and undead creatures.

His mother had acted wise on her part. She had gathered all forces she could. But how could a young man feel comfortable among hordes of stinking, dumb, warmongering Orcs? He hated the way they walked, the way they talked, their smell, their looks, their speech, their attitude, their everything, but his mother needed them and he needed her.

It did take him half a year to find a means of escape from the foul stench of Cimmeria and he only found it by chance. It was the lucky day of a viciously cold week in October, when he stumbled across one of his mother’s labs. It pretty much applied to every cliché about witches

that he had ever heard. Herbs hung from the ceiling in nearly every corner and their smell cleaned the air of all the Orc stench that he despised so much. A warm fire burnt in a niche in the western wall and gave its warmth to the pot above it as well as to the rest of the room. The southern wall right opposite the door was decorated with the heads of numerous dead animals, while the eastern wall was hidden by a huge shelf that held a hundred of vials and dozens of old, dusty books. On the table in the middle of the room, Luther could still see the ingredients of his mother's last magic brewery.

Yes, he was standing inside a witch kitchen and he had to admit that he liked what he saw. And smelled.

He clearly remembered the wrath in his mother's eyes and voice when she found him there. His mother usually did not share her secrets and had he been anything but her own son, he would not have lived to see the next sun rise.

But that way, Luther merely told her that he was sorry and that he had not wanted to snoop. And he asked her to teach him of the herbs and all that stuff.

He also remembered how shivers had run down his spine as his mother had laughed at his simple statements of intimidation. She had always been a strict woman and so he did not feel insulted, but grateful, when she told him that she would see to it and teach him if he desired it that much. She had not killed him. If that was no sign of her love for him, then nothing was.

Luther had soon become adept with most plants and herbs of Gladstone. His mother was proud of him. She was quite confident he would follow in her footsteps. Had she known that he desired anything but that – he could not imagine what the consequences would have been.

With the death of his mother by the hands of that bastard Kieran, everything had changed again. Strict and evil she had been, but also his mother and her death hurt more than he would have thought. And he hated Kieran.

Unfortunately, Luther inherited both the incomplete curse and the hatred of the people of Gladstone. The soldiers found him and Geron ordered he be arrested and locked away, never to see the face of the sun again.

This was the time he first met Dawn. The woman who had defeated his mother in so many ways.

For Luther, it was love on first sight. The soldiers of Gladstone had caught him, kicked him, humiliated him and then they had called her and Geron down to the vaults to judge whether or not he should be hanged immediately.

He had been laying on the cold and wet floor then, his hair tousled and warm habitat to numerous little creatures, his clothes torn, his body covered with dirt, his own blood and numerous wounds. He had looked up from that dusty floor and there she was. A goddess. His goddess.

Her hair was the colour of ripe wheat in late summer, her eyes the colour of clear mountain water right from the spring. Her body was perfection itself and her face did not give away the slightest clue about her age. Had he not been on his knees already, he would have fallen.

For that single, precious moment, Luther's world shrank to her presence. She was there. That was all. Nothing else reached his mind. For one blissful moment, Luther did not hear any of Geron's arrogant chatter. He did not feel pain, he did not feel hunger. He did not notice the rats that crawled over and through his hair.

A few kicks by one of the guards finally brought him back down to Earth. He could not tell them what they wanted to know. He could and would not confess crimes he had not committed. Nevertheless, Geron had already formed his judgement, as had most of the other servants of the king. Among all people of the court he knew, Dawn was the only one with an open mind. The only one who would at least try to understand.

Oh, he had already adored her that day.

And now? The simple look at the mirror made him quirk a brow. He was going to marry her, by the eyes of the Draracle! MARRYING DAWN. His goddess. He had left everything behind. His past in Cimmeria, his past in the vault, his immortality.

He could have stayed a god. The idea was tempting, definitely. Outlive the others, be the most powerful being on this plain of existence, rule over the world... Tempting, indeed. But he had seen what had happened to his mother. How greed had driven her into madness and doom. And what good would power do, if it would force you to battle the one you loved most?

And so, he had chosen a mortal life. Together with a servant of his mother's greatest enemy, under the command of her greatest enemy, on estate of her greatest enemy. The Ancient Gods help him! For the first time since his mother's death, Luther was glad she wasn't around anymore.

He was now free to do all the things she had told him not to. He had joined the Finchs and his knowledge of herbs had sure come in handy. He was about to marry the woman he loved and –

“How long do you want to keep on glaring at that thing? Does it have something that I'm lacking?”

“The mirror should break in awe the moment you look at it.” Luther answered on a giggle, before taking her petite, but strong, hands and kissing them. “How could something as simple as a mirror catch and reflect the complexity of your beauty?”

“Should you ever get bored among the Finchs, get yourself a pseudonym and start writing poetry. You could make a lot of money.”

Hearty laughter filled the air and Luther had to catch his breath for a moment before he looked at his bride-to-be again.

She did not yet wear the dress, but the scent of numerous herbs and oils on her made it perfectly clear to him that she had just been about to change. Experimentally, he grabbed a strand of her blonde locks and twisted it between his fingers, but a short punch to his shoulder ripped him out of dreamy paradise again.

“Just what the heck are you doing with my hair?” Pouting like a little girl, Dawn got her hair free again. She knew that her sometimes child-like spirits were one of the things he found so special and interesting about her. “Don't mess with it, Luther. You can do that after the ceremony, if you're so keen on it, but for now I need it as it is right now.” Now smiling, too, Dawn let her eyes roam her husband-to-be. He was gorgeous. It was the only word she could find for it. Hadn't everybody known that he was the son of Scotia, he would have been considered a normal noble man by anyone in Gladstone.

“King Richard is waiting to speak to you in the garden.” She finally said, with a slight hint of admiration for what he had become in her voice. “You should not have an old man wait.”

Grinning from one ear to the other, Luther left quietly to talk to the greatest enemy of his mother.. This was why he loved Dawn so much.

And Dawn was why he finally loved his life.