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# Legacy

# The Reunion

*“Consider this not farewell, little brother, but rather, I’ll see you around.”*

—Joaquin Landcross

# Exchange

*Within one of many of Earth's realms, Spring, 1639*

The sun kissed Temenitis's naked body as she stretched it across the rock by the pond. She had adjusted herself comfortably over the stone after her cool swim. Gooseflesh rippled over her whole body, and just as the warmth of sunlight was seeping through her skin like rain through soil, a soft voice said to her, "You are perfection."

When Temenitis rolled her head to one side, she saw a man staring at her. At first glance, his feminine face made her believe the stranger was a woman dressed as a man. Yet, after admiring him briefly, Temenitis found he was a handsome-looking young thing with the scent of age and impishness about him. A Trickster god, she surmised.

"I know," Temenitis told him matter-of-factly. "I am a nymph, after all."

"No," he argued while approaching. "You're far more than that. You have ambition."

She knitted her eyebrows together and sat up. The Trickster had magnificent features, she thought. Never in all her years had she seen such a creature as he. To tease him, Temenitis turned completely around. He stopped and unlatched his gaze from her face to look at her down there. He stared hungrily while licking his lips.

Temenitis set her elbows upon her knees and rested a chin on her open palm. "Ambition? Explain that?"

His attention didn't waver from her exposed womanhood. "I can sense it. You want more. Want to *be* more." His eyes finally flicked up to meet hers. They were brimming with lust and wisdom. "And I feel your willpower. You will do what it takes to accomplish any goal you set before yourself. That alone intrigues me."

Temenitis didn't know about that, for she never had a goal she wanted to achieve before.

"Does it?" she challenged, opening her legs wide. "Or does this?"

His breath deepened. "Naturally, I want that, my dear lady."

The Trickster approached again, but Temenitis remained in place, observing him. A pull, gentle at first, but gradually strengthening as he drew closer, tugged at her loins. Was he doing this? No, this sudden longing felt much bigger than the Trickster, larger than the world and all the realms attached to it, even. But what was the cause? What grand audience was intently watching them as they interacted with one another?

She leaned back, propping herself up on her hands, wanting to show herself entirely. As it is with all nymphs, she possessed a flawless body. Every curve, every shape of her form, was a masterpiece.

When he came close, she pressed her foot against his chest. He halted and breathed in a long breath.

"You haven't mated with anyone before," he stated.

“No,” she answered truthfully and without shame. “I never met anyone worthy enough to lie with.”

“I doubt it not. You are a rare treasure who should be valued and worshiped.”

“Oh, you do know how to craft your words well in order to get what you want, Trickster. You have a scent, too. You’re in heat. I can smell it potently.”

The corner of his mouth rose. A twinkle in his eye sparkled like a diamond gleaming in the light when he touched her foot and began rubbing it carefully. Her own heat rose to the surface. He may have captured her interests, but she would not allow it to get the better of her.

His nose pointed between her legs, smiling as if he was sniffing a flower. His eyelids fluttered as he said, “I want to offer you a gift.”

“Do you?” she asked as he slid his hand languidly over her firm calf. “What sort of gift?”

“A Cambion demon.”

“A demon? What would I ever do with such a thing?”

“Anything you wish. Thooranu is a slave, you see.”

She mused at the idea of owning a demon. At the very least, it would provide her with some form of entertainment. There wasn’t much to do as a nymph. All of them, including her halfwit sisters, were content with their simple existence, but not Temenitis. She wanted so much more. The Trickster hadn’t missed his mark where that was concerned. But what would she have to give for this gift? She had only one guess.

“How has this demon become a servant?” she inquired curiously.

His hand slid over her leg and reached her inner thigh. Temenitis didn’t stop him. In fact, she removed her foot so he could dance his fingertips lightly over the short pubic hairs. Never had she let anyone touch her this way before. The Trickster had certainly brought out this playful side of her. She knew he wanted to do more with those curious fingers of his, but she wouldn’t allow it—not yet, anyway.

He continued his gentle touching as he explained, “I tricked him. Now Thooranu is under contract, which expires with each passing year unless someone fills in his or her name. Whosoever’s signature is on the deed is the owner of him.”

“Did you capture this demon yourself so as to woo me, Trickster?” she demanded, slowly sweeping her hand delicately over her breasts.

Her heart thumped greatly beneath her fingertips. This was indeed the single most thrilling moment of her entire life.

“Actually, I spotted you as I was passing through this realm. I have had several offers for my demon.”

For a moment, she believed he was lying. A ruse to trick her. Nymphs had the talent to sense perfidious, even if the person worked well to hide it. To her amazement, the Trickster spoke with honesty.

“And you would give up these other offers so as to give the demon to a nymph in exchange for sex?”

“Not just any nymph. *You!* You’ve truly captivated me.” He began stroking her thigh roughly, but with care. “I sense it. We’re meant to be together. Do you not recognize it, as well?”

Temenitis did. Her suspicion of a deeper purpose behind this “chance” encounter intensified with each passing moment. The fact that the Trickster sensed it only confirmed her belief that there was something more at work here.

“The contract expires on the morrow,” the Trickster explained, reaching into his pocket. He brought out a timepiece and held it by its chain. “At 1:26, according to this watch, my name will vanish from the deed. If you wish to replace it, then meet me at the meadow near the falls.”

*The Field of Uncertainty.*

Temenitis knew the place from where she had listened to the Teller of Forgotten Tales spin a yarn not too long ago.

“All right,” she said, but not agreeing completely to meet him.

He placed the watch in her palm. The cover was a web of bronze with stained glass set between the vacant spaces. She clicked it open and saw a peculiar sight lay beneath. An hour hand and a minute hand ticked in a circle as normal, while a second pair of hour and minute hands remained still. The secondary hour hand rested over the number one, while the second minute hand was stationed only three ticks down from twenty. On the outer edge of the clock face, each month of the year was written.

“It’s custom-made,” he explained, “and of my own design.” He backed away, sliding his fingertips across her leg as he did. “Until tomorrow, milady.”

He vanished in a blink. When he was gone, and she was safely alone, Temenitis dove back into the pool to cool herself.

\* \* \*

The following day, Temenitis crossed the meadow, wondering if she really wanted to go through with this. It wasn’t that she really cared if she gave up her virginity, but the feeling of being nudged along, someone trying to push Temenitis to mate, frightened her a little. If only she knew what was behind it. In the end, Temenitis decided that instead of trying to figure it out, she would just go to the Trickster. After all, it would be a new experience, and she’d get a prize demon when it was over.

As she neared the falls, she spied a round cottage. A simple thatched cottage with walls made of stone and a red brick chimney sprouting from the side. No doubt, the Trickster put the house there. Inside, it smelled tremendously of chamomile flowers. The entire place was covered with them. White flowers littered the floor and were stuffed in vases. Petals were sprinkled like snowflakes over the bed in the back.

And standing by a table in the center of the single-room cottage, was the Trickster. With him was a young-looking man who stood on the other side of the table. He wore

simple clothing, his pretty face was smooth, and he had a slender build. The demon, she presumed.

The Trickster wore an outfit of many shades of red. He took off his feathered hat and placed it to his chest. "You came."

"I did." Temenitis approached, her salmon-colored lace gown drifting gently behind her as she walked.

She glanced at the pocket watch in her hand. The moveable second hand ticked toward the still hand, and the hour hands were joined. A half minute remained. "Just in time, I see."

She set the bronze watch down beside a quill and a single sheet of paper lying upon the table. The name "Jack Pack" was scrawled in next to the demon's mark.

"So, are you agreeing to do this, then?" the Trickster asked eagerly.

She studied the imprisoned creature who kept his gaze to the floor. She had never cared for the likes of demons. She viewed them as foul and disgusting things that only wanted to destroy, to fuck, or do both. Yet, she sensed something more in Thooranu. Perhaps he wasn't just some lump of mindless flesh. Maybe this demon had many dimensions—credited to his human side, no doubt. He could actually be intelligent enough to amuse her for a time.

"I do," she answered Jack Pack. "I accept your gift, and in return, I shall bed down with you."

His breath fell heavily, and it excited her.

Jack Pack's signature began vanishing from the contract. Temenitis picked up the quill and signed behind each fading letter. Once his name had completely faded, and hers had fully replaced it, Thooranu took in a breath.

"Finally," he growled, moving towards Jack Pack.

"Stop, demon," Temenitis commanded.

The demon did so, instantly. With teeth clenched, he looked upon his new master.

"You shall not harm him while you belong to me," she ordered with a firm tone she had never used before. It made her feel powerful, and she liked it. "Do you understand?"

The demon stepped away from Jack Pack with head hung low. "Yes, mistress."

Temenitis couldn't have anticipated it before but having a demon as a personal slave *was* truly a gift. The superior feeling of being able to command a being with such power made her giddy. She walked around the table to stand before the Trickster.

"Let's see how gifted you are, Jack Pack."

She slipped the sleeves of her gown off her shoulders and allowed it to fall completely off her body. Jack Pack feasted his gaze upon her.

"You grant me permission, then?" he asked anxiously.

Temenitis nodded. "Yes."

Her feet left the floor when Jack Pack lifted her into his arms. As he began carrying her away, he stopped short and turned to the demon still standing in his place by the table.

"Should you not tell him to leave?" he asked her.

Temenitis eyed her new salve and shook her head. “No. He shall stay, and he will *watch*.”

Obeying her command, the demon raised his chin and fastened his eyes on them. Jack Pack proceeded to whisk her to the bed, where he claimed his prize.

# Chapter One

## To London

*London, Spring, 1843*

Hundreds of buyers and sellers packed Spitalfields Market. Customers and vendors alike worked to elevate their voices over the loud auctioneers. Some auctioneers were extremely audible as they spoke into their mechanical speaking trumpets. Animal dung and meats left out in the sun too long tainted April's sweet air.

The bustling marketplace was the perfect hunting grounds for Jasper. His wife, Nona, and their companion, a young black woman named Taisia Kuzentsov, had arrived in London that very morning. The journey from Newcastle had been exhausting. Traveling without the rest of the nomadic clan had proven more daunting than expected. Halfway through the trip, food had become scarce. They had sold trinkets and told fortunes, but it wasn't enough to pay for meals.

The sight of fresh fish sitting on slow melting ice, as well the thick cuts of beef and lamb, made Jasper's stomach growl

"We should go to the lawyer," Nona urged.

"The market will close at noon," he argued.

His wife looked at him scornfully. "This is not what we came here for."

He should have listened.

"Perhaps we could sell the horse," Taisia suggested in her Russian accent.

She held the reins to their only transport, an old mare on her last legs. The mangy animal looked half dead just standing there.

*That nag isn't worth piss.* Jasper thought grimly. *No one would buy or barter for her.*

He didn't see the marketplace as an obstacle, merely a short stop to gaining easy money. He eyed a dark-skinned Persian man in decent clothing who was buying cuts of meat and a pound of cheese. Jasper studied his target and his leather coin purse. After the man placed the purse in his right pocket, he grabbed his sack of goods and left.

"Wait here," he told both women.

"Jasper, no," Nona whispered.

He ignored her and pressed on. He snaked his way between the people, doing his best not to be distracted by the sights and smells of the food surrounding him. The act of pocket-picking was far less dangerous than stealing from vendors directly. Constables were everywhere, keeping watch.

The target headed for a horse. Jasper assumed the mount belonged to him. He needed to act quickly.

It had been ages since he'd done this, yet his hand slipped into the man's pocket like it was a comfortable old glove. He grabbed the purse and slid it out flawlessly. Once the coin purse was his, Jasper spun on his heel and went in the opposite direction.

"Hold it right there," someone laden with a thick foreign accent commanded from behind.

Jasper stopped cold. A voice inside his mind told him those four words were meant for him. He craned his neck, only to find the person he had just robbed pointing a pistol at him.

"I saw you eyeing me, thief. You're not as clever as you think."

"Neither are you, *monsieur*," Nona said, coming up behind the Persian. "Lower your gun."

Jasper couldn't see it, but he knew she was holding her knife against the man's spine, the same blade she used for skinning prey. For a moment, Jasper believed they'd make it out of this. Then the Persian jerked his elbow back, hitting her in the stomach. He quickly turned and shoved her hard to the ground. He moved with such speed and precision that, in the blink of an eye, Jasper's wife was down.

"Nona!" Jasper yelled.

He almost ran to her, except the revolver was trained on him.

"Don't," the foreigner warned.

Nona clutched her belly. To Jasper's dismay, Taisia appeared and took her into her arms.

"Nona," she asked. "Are you all right?"

"Guards!" the dark-skinned man yelled. "Thieves!"

Taisia grabbed Nona's knife and leaped to her feet. "Bastard!"

She charged and sliced at him. He jumped back from the swooshing dagger, barely avoiding having it slice open his belly. He could have shot her, but he threw a tight fist instead. She ducked and went at him again. He cried out when she carved the blade across his arm. He caught her wrist as she made another attempt to cut him and struck her across the cheek with his gun. Jasper rushed at him, but the Persian was quicker. He swung the weapon, striking Jasper across the face with it. By then, guards had arrived and surrounded the group with their rifles aimed at the threesome.

"Arrest them!" the Persian shouted. "Do it before I shoot them dead!"

The constables grabbed Jasper, his wife, and Taisia, who was yelling angrily in Russian.

"Did these people attempt to steal from you, Lieutenant?" a constable asked.

Jasper was stunned. "Lieutenant?" he repeated and then swallowed thickly.

"Yes," he confirmed vehemently. "I am Lieutenant Darius Javan. I come to the market every Saturday. These officers know me here."

As the officers hauled the prisoners off, the lieutenant ordered, "Hold up."

Lieutenant Javan approached Jasper. He yanked down his unbuttoned shirt lapel and read off the tattoos imprinted above his breast.

“Joaquin, August 4, 1810. Pierce, June 18, 1817.” He eyed Jasper. “Landcross, is it?” Jasper gave no answer.

The lieutenant snorted. “It appears we have caught the father of a pair of famous outlaws.”

“Do you know what has happened to them?” Nona asked while being held by the constables.

The lieutenant grinned at her. “And you must be the mother.”

Jasper cringed.

Lieutenant Javan could’ve been cruel and given her no reply, yet he displayed the same courtesy, and answered, “Word drifts through once in a while, but nothing recent.” To the constables, he ordered, “Take them to Newgate.”

Jasper forgot his hunger pangs as his stomach shriveled up with utter dread. He had made a critical error, one that would cost his family everything.

\* \* \*

*One month later . . .*

Pierce Landcross rode silently with manacles clamped to his wrists. The shackles secured his biceps with a chain that stretched across his back and kept his arms hugged tightly against his sides. It almost surprised him they hadn’t chained him to his blasted horse.

Since his capture in France, Pierce hadn’t said much. Not that the soldiers were striking up conversations with him, anyway. Usually, Pierce was a chatterbox. The weight of despair he felt, however, when he thought about how close he’d come to freedom had killed all his liveliness. He had nearly made it to Chief Sea Wind’s ship, the *Ekta*. That vessel was supposed to sail him off to the Hawaiian Islands, where Pierce had planned to start anew. Instead, he had missed the ship and watched as she sailed away just before Lieutenant Darius Javan and his troops found him.

His sorrow had accompanied him from Le Havre and over the English Channel, where a nasty spring storm had forced their ferryboat to make port in Dover. The rains had stopped the following day, although the winds continued. Instead of waiting for the choppy sea to calm, Darius decided to press on to London on horseback.

Pierce admired the countryside. Despite his bad luck here, he had to admit England was a beautiful old country. The lush green scenery offered a pleasant distraction. He would let himself become lost in it until a guard or two glared at him, breaking his trance.

Darius eventually came up alongside him. “You’re not an easy man to catch, Mr. Landcross.”

“Is that so?” Pierce grumbled.

“It is. I can actually understand how you’ve remained alive all these years.”

“Fortunate, I s’pose.”

“Fortunate? Perhaps. As I mentioned before, you were not an easy catch. Your parents, however . . .”

From under the brim of his black hat, Pierce raised his sights to meet the man’s gaze. The lieutenant was smirking, blatantly waiting to see his expression.

“Pardon?” Pierce asked at length.

The Persian snorted. “I was at the market last month when your father picked my pocket. Your mother foolishly attempted to save him, which only resulted in getting herself arrested, as well.”

Pierce absolutely couldn’t believe it.

“You’re lying,” he managed to say in the midst of his shock.

Predicting this response, Darius set his sights forward, still holding his blasted smirk. “Your father is five-eight, black hair, brown eyes, and very lanky. He has tattoos of your and your brother’s names. Your mother is a young-looking Frenchwoman with dark hair.” He returned his focus on Pierce. “You have her green eyes.”

Pierce slumped and nearly slid right off his damn mount. His breath fell heavy and his heart quickened in its beats. His next question hurt him to ask. “Are they dead?”

Darius’s grin vanished. He almost seemed surprised Pierce expressed such concern.

“No. They’re in Newgate, awaiting trial.”

Pierce sucked in a breath, allowing air to flow back into his lungs. He breathed in deeply and sighed out with relief. What blasted luck the Landcross family had!

In a tone drenched with desperation, he asked, “Can you help them? Set them free?”

The lieutenant again snorted. “No, Mr. Landcross. Once they are tried, they shall serve out their sentence. They did attack an officer of the law, and that, alone, will earn them a lengthy sentence, if not death.”

His answer did anything but offer surprise.

“Picked your pocket, you say? Damn,” Pierce muttered to himself. To Darius, he asked, “So they have been imprisoned in that shithole for the past month without any funds?”

Darius only looked at him, and Pierce grimaced. How things operated inside Newgate Prison was common knowledge, for it had been that way for centuries. Several years ago, London reckoned it was time to reform the prison, which only consisted of remodeling the interior with new cellblocks and in-stalling some up-to-date technologies, yet the unfair practices remained more or less the same. The prison guards worked for little or no wages, so the guards taxed prisoners or their loved ones for whatever they could weasel out of them in exchange for meals, water, and even a place to sleep. If there was nothing with which to pay for these necessities, sex was also an option, resulting in countless childbirths behind the prison walls.

“The loot you found on me,” Pierce said.

“What about it?” the lieutenant demanded.

“Will you pay the sheriff with it for their food and clean water?”

Darius considered him.

“You want to give it to your parents, leaving yourself penniless?”

Pierce tilted his head sideways and arched an eyebrow. “Were you planning on using the money for *my* benefit?”

The lieutenant’s smirk returned. “Perhaps. If you begged.”

Pierce huffed vexingly. “I see.”

“In truth,” the lieutenant went on, “I’ve been paying for them all along.

Pierce leaned forward with a wide expression. “Come again?”

“I knew they wouldn’t survive a week in the state they were in, so I’ve made sure they were well-fed until their sentencing. When the Leeds Prison in West Yorkshire is complete, I may have them transferred.”

Pierce didn’t appreciate what he was saying.

“Do you get your jollies from tormenting the unfortunate? Why are you lying to me, Darius?”

“That’s *Lieutenant* Javan to you,” he retorted. “And I’m quite serious.”

Pierce considered him.

Darius had the physical qualities of a true soldier. He stood six feet tall and was built like a gladiator. His rich umber skin was darker than any bark on the trees surrounding them. It was uncertain when he had immigrated to Britain, but his British brogue skimmed the surface of his Middle Eastern accent. Darius struck Pierce as the firm but fair sort. Even after Pierce had escaped him twice, extending his exhaustive manhunt, the lieutenant treated him with humanity. Pierce was fed, not left too uncomfortable, and granted modest privacy when he needed to use the lavatory. Considering how things could have been in this situation, Pierce found comfort in those small blessings.

When looking into the Persian’s ochre eyes, he saw no fraud in them.

Pierce finally blinked. “Why would you do that?”

“Believe it or not, I pitied them. They ought to be punished for their crime, but I also understand why they tried robbing me. Hunger can push people to their limits.”

“So you’ll keep paying their way, then?”

Darius thought that amusing, and it showed in his returning smile.

“Not now since you have kindly offered to give your own money.”

Pierce half-grimaced and narrowed his eyes. “You’re too kind.”

The lieutenant turned away. “I do believe I am.”

\* \* \*

They traveled a few more hours before night caught up to them. They decided to make camp on the edge of the forest beside the road. Darius had sent a pair of guards off to hunt for dinner while the rest set up the encampment. They tied Pierce to a tree trunk. When the soldiers returned with the hares they’d killed, they cooked rabbit stew. Pierce was given a bowl. He had no idea what they had done to the stew, but it tasted the same as sewage water.

While he ate, Pierce sized up the troops. If he did manage to escape his chains and make a break for it, it would only take minutes for them to catch up. Accepting the situation was a bitter poison to drink. He'd always hoped that when he died, it would happen either in the blink of an eye or he would drift away peacefully in his old age, perhaps beside someone he loved. Not this prolonged death that had already dragged on for days. A trial lay ahead. Fuckin' hell, he just knew it'd be a highly publicized spectacle, to boot. Pierce also didn't fancy the idea of having an audience watch him hang. His charade of a trial would lead to that, and hanging wasn't an experience he cared to relive, either. When execution day came, perhaps the quick drop and sudden stop would snap his neck, ending him on the spot.

After forcing down the horrible stew, Pierce sat quietly, looking at his shackled hands. Eventually, all but a single watchman went to sleep.

Pierce shifted in his bonds. The tight line tied over his torso irritated the wounds he had received from the beating he took from Ivor Norwich only days ago. His ribs ached, although the pain had become more of a numbing annoyance now. The pain prevented him from falling asleep for any length of time, as did the fire, which was being kept burning by the watchman. Pierce sat too far off to enjoy the warmth, yet close enough to be bothered by its light, forcing him to lower the brim of his hat over his eyes. He wished he could at least lie down.

A rustle in the darkness beyond the firelight snatched Pierce from his delicate slumber. With a snort, he snapped his head up. The soldier warming his hands by the fire perked up and touched the butt of his pistol. Pierce shook his head at him. By a slim chance, it was human—a robber or a bounty hunter wanting to collect on Pierce's head—and they'd be completely daft to try taking on a band of highly trained British soldiers.

*It's only an animal, wanker.*

Pierce found the soldier's suspicion slightly amusing until he disappeared. Not only vanished, but also snatched away into the dark as if he were an insect on a frog's tongue. Pierce blinked, believing he was hallucinating, but the lad remained missing.

"Bloody hell," Pierce whispered.

Darius, lying asleep nearby, let out a loud snort and sat up. He searched for his absent man. Another rustle got the lieutenant quickly to his feet, holding tight to his pistol. The missing soldier drew instant suspicion, for Darius had given orders for none to leave the campsite, not even to take a piss. His eyes darted everywhere until he pinned them on Pierce.

"Where is he?"

Pierce hadn't the foggiest notion on how to answer, and so only shrugged.

Sensing something amiss, the lieutenant said to his troop, "Look alive, men."

They began rising like Lazarus. Most groaned and were on the verge of complaining before their leader ordered, "Come now. Get up!"

Every soldier jolted to life. They got to their feet, and a moment later, an object appeared in a blur, scooping up another person. His wide, shocked face was the last thing everyone saw.

“Llandudno!” shouted a guard who had stood abreast to his taken comrade. He twisted his body around and fired into the woods.

“Hold fire!” Darius ordered just before someone else was snatched away.

“What the devil!” a soldier exclaimed.

The troops began to buckle. Even Darius strained to maintain his warrior demeanor as he worked to grasp what was happening. A man’s hollering got everyone aiming pistols in a single direction.

“Help me!” the voice cried.

Someone else shouted from a different area in the woods, “Lieutenant! Help!”

“You, men,” Darius instructed to some of his soldiers, “go over there.” He looked to a handful more. “You four, come with me. The rest of you: stay with the prisoner.”

The troops scattered into action and vanished. The others posted at the camp stood with backs against each other, keeping a panoramic view of their surroundings. Without drawing attention, Pierce tried squeezing free from the manacle. He didn’t fancy the idea of being bound to a tree while people were picked off one by one by an unknown assailant.

“Where are you, Llandudno?” a soldier asked in the dark.

“Up here.”

“There he is, sir,” another guard exclaimed. “He’s bloody well hanging upside down in that tree!”

Amusing, yet when gunshots split the air on the other end of the campsite, followed by shouting, it drove fear into him. Pierce couldn’t say whether the men were being slaughtered or not. On the opposite side, the soldiers’ footsteps crunched toward camp. Then someone again shouted, and a firework show lit up the forest. Their cries prompted the others at the camp into action. They split up and charged into the woods. With them gone, Pierce vigorously strained to slip free. As he struggled, something dropped right between his legs. He leaned forward as far as he could and spied the keys.

“What the fu . . . ?” he started to say as he looked up.

The firelight couldn’t reach high enough to illuminate anything above. No matter. He reached out for the keys. Although his arms were over the rope, getting the keys proved difficult.

More shouting from the guards ensued, their voices echoing like frightened creatures emerging from hell itself. It certainly sped Pierce up into freeing himself. He pushed against his restraints, scratching at the ground until he hooked his finger into the iron ring.

“Brilliant!”

He dragged the set of keys to him and began unlocking his chains. Once all the irons were unclamped, he lifted the rope up to where he could wiggle himself out from under it. He clambered to his feet and dashed over to the horses hitched near the road. He was

about to mount up when he was suddenly grabbed and flung around. It happened so fast, his brain kept twirling seconds after he stopped. When his vision settled, he saw none other than the vampire, Robin of Locksley. Smoke fumed from the hand he had touched him with. Pierce had his coin necklace to thank for that. As long as he wore his single coin from Judas's thirty pieces of silver, no vampire could harm him.

The last time Pierce had seen Robin Hood—known these days as The Magician, Robin the Magnificent—it was on the Isle of Wight when they stormed Norwich Castle to save the girl, Clover. In exchange for the vampire's help, Pierce had agreed to surrender the coin, but Pierce fooled him with a simple switch. The bloodsucker sure did know how to hold a grudge.

“Still have it, eh?” Robin remarked, shaking his wounded hand.

Pierce touched the coin and said with levity, “Always.”

Pierce's good spirits vanished the moment Robin raised the gun on him. Pierce realized the vampire didn't need to use his fangs to fulfill his revenge.

“Robin, wait now.”

Pierce truly believed his face was about to be blown off when someone yelled, “Find it! Find that demon!”

*Darius.*

Of course, the bugger would still be alive. Robin possessed an insight into people's true nature, either granted to him when he became a vampire, or an instinct he had carried since he was mortal. Whatever the case, Robin wouldn't kill anyone who wasn't evil or hadn't crossed him as Pierce had done when he tried robbing him some time ago. Robin turned the gun around and held the handle out to him.

“Crack on now,” Robin ordered. “I'll catch up.”

Pierce arched an eyebrow at him. Did Robin want to drink his blood so badly he was willing to cut him loose until the coin was somehow removed? He decided not to ask, and instead, raised a shaky hand and took hold of his own Oak Leaf revolver. He tucked the gun under his waistband, and when he looked up, Robin was gone. Moments later, more shouting sounded in the forest, along with gunfire. Pierce mounted the horse and steered it toward the nearby road. When he came upon the path, his first instinct was to ride back south toward Dover, for it might be safer than trying to board a ship in the north. Then he remembered his parents. If he ran, he'd be leaving them to a horrible fate. He hadn't the foggiest idea what he'd do, but he would think of something on the way to London.

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