

Chapter Two

Great. Stuck in an alleyway with some poor kid. He'd just abandoned us, maybe he didn't have the good side I'd hoped for.

Where could I take her? I couldn't just drop her off at the Police Station. No. She'd stay in the dream for a while yet, I needed her to be awake. I needed to know she wasn't going to drop me in it.

There was nowhere to go but the squat. At least Hugo would have to go back there, give us a chance to get our stories straight. Damn him. Talk about make life difficult.

I shouldered the door, Prudence was so out of it she didn't wake. I flicked the light switch. Nothing happened. Should've seen that coming.

I sat with Prudence breathing softly against my shoulder. Every time I heard someone in the corridor my muscles tightened, getting ready for the next row. Had he dealt with that slime ball? God, what a mess. Cradling the child's head I rocked and became the pendulum counting the hours.

I waited.

Nothing happened.

As the blackness in the room softened to grey it seemed more likely he wasn't coming back. Time for a new plan. I stepped back into her dream.

"Hi Libertine! Look what I made you!" She held out her fist and a dozen daisy chains hung from it. I slipped them over my head and smiled at her.

"Prudence, I need to ask you to be brave. I have to take you to the Police Station so they can find your mummy."

"But I want to stay here! Please let me stay with you." She stared up at me with a look that could melt an ice laden heart, but I had to resist.

"I would love it if you could, but somewhere out there your mummy's heart is breaking and you carry the magic that will fix it. All you have to do is go back to her."

"Really? I have magic?"

"We all do. It's called Love and if we are strong enough to give it, it can fix anything." I wasn't sure I believed that but Hell, she's just a kid. She started picking more daisies, pursing her lips as she thought.

"Can I stay a bit longer? Then I'll go. Promise!"

“It’s morning now, sleep for a while longer, but we have to go tonight, OK?” She nodded and laid her head in my lap, sighed deeply and slept again.

An image took shape in my mind, a woman with long dark curls and eyes as captivating as the child. She could have been Prudence all grown up, but I knew she was showing me her mother. Prudence seemed to be at peace, for now at least, so I left her there with her head on a pillow of daisies and returned to the squat.

We were no longer alone.

Hugo sat on the chair opposite me, staring at my eyes. I jumped as he came into focus, a dark shape framed by the pale window.

“What the hell are you doing here?” He spoke slowly and deeply. I was learning fast, this was his angry voice, less velvet than usual. “More to the point, what is she doing here?” He jutted his chin towards us, barely perceptible, simple contempt.

“What was I supposed to do? You disappeared. It’s not like we had a gameplan.”

“We? You and me are so not we. You were supposed to get the girl and take her away from here. I did my bit.”

“You said get the girl, that’s all.”

“You really are dumb aren’t you?”

“Well I thought this changed things, seems I was wrong. I’m taking her to the police tonight, then I’ll go.”

He curled his lip in a silent snarl.

“So, is he dead?” He answered with a cold hard stare. I waited.

“I keep my word.” He handed me the Jack Daniels and I took a hefty swig. “There were more of them.” He looked at his hands, his fingertips white as they pushed into the table. “He tried to shout for help and one came out. They were in the warehouse setting up a camera.”

I slid the JD back to him and he started turning the bottle in his hands.

“They’re all dead.”

I nodded. What was I supposed to say? Was that guilt in his eyes, or was he just pissed off that I was still here?

“Libertine, I may not have my soul but I still have my heart. I saw what they were planning to do to her. They’d probably done it before. They got what was coming to them.”

Only one answer. Perhaps he was warming to me.

“Don’t go picking curtains. We get the girl back home, she’s not safe here, then you get out of my face.”

“Well, while you’re in my head, remember this.” I recalled the image that Prudence had shown me.

“Who’s she? What are you dragging me into?”

“I’m not dragging you anywhere, you’re already involved. Look, I think she’s Prudence’s mother. I need your help, Hugo. I can’t find her and look after the child can I?”

I sighed and arched my aching back. My arms were weakening, I couldn’t keep sitting here like this.

Hugo stood and reached out his hands. I recoiled.

“I’m just going to put her to bed, don’t worry it’s clean. You can stay here today, but that’s all.” His voice was softer now so I relaxed. He scooped her up, her tiny frame so fragile in his arms.

Feeling protective I followed but for all his strength he treated her so delicately. I stood in the doorway watching as he tucked her in and brushed her curls away from her face.

Who was he? Moody git seemed to have a heart, maybe not for me, but for this child at least.

“Do angels need food?” He pushed by me back into the kitchen, just as the front door burst open and a short guy stumbled through it.

“Arty, this is Libertine, Libertine, Arty.”

Arty nodded and handed Hugo a blue and white striped carrier bag.

“Sandwich or toast?” Hugo asked as he lit a camp stove.

“Butty for me.” Arty headed for the bedroom. “Bloody Hell!”

He appeared back in the kitchen.

“Why is there a kid in my bed?”



Breakfast seemed almost normal, apart from being cooked on a camp stove in a squat and shared with a vampire and a...well, I wasn't sure what actually.

If I'd closed my eyes Arty would have seemed to be your average nice guy, you know, big heart, reasonably intelligent, likes a laugh. It was the outside that I couldn't figure out.

Being gothic involved style, each one different, each one unique. Arty had gleaned the best of the lot, but not in a good way.

His hair was long and black with a hint of red. His fingernails were black. Every finger had a silver ring – skulls, snakes, bats, crucifixes. Most of the exposed flesh was covered with tattoos, and I suspected the unexposed bits were too. His ears looked spiral bound and a stud glinted from the side of his nose. A t-shirt peeped through a black shirt, showing the letters Cu, I hoped it was The Cult. A black leather belt with silver skull studs and a huge silver skull buckle held up his skinny black jeans. Black boots finished his look with studded bootstraps just in case there wasn't quite enough silver.

And then there was the make-up. It was smudged, as if he'd been licked all over by an over enthusiastic puppy. Guess he got lucky last night then.

“So, Arty. What's that short for?”

“S'not.” He spoke through a mouthful of egg and bacon sandwich. Hugo stepped in.

“He adopted a new name, bit like you. It's just Arty.”

“Fact.” Arty butted in.

“OK, I believe you.”

“No. Arty Fact. It's my stage name.”

I pretended to choke on my bacon to stifle my giggle.

“Stage name? Let me guess, guitar?”

“Drums actually.”

I looked around the room.

“I borrow Eddy's. He's cool about it. I'm saving for some, no point buying 'em until I've got proper digs.”

“Course.” I looked at Hugo, hoping he’d rescue me. He looked as if he was enjoying watching me squirm.

“I’ll show you the hearse later.”

“The...what?”

“I’ve got an old hearse. Looks really cool when we turn up to gigs in it.”

“I bet. Listen, I’m just gonna check on Prudence, she might have woken up.”

And I couldn’t stop the laugh any longer.

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Prudence lay there looking as peaceful as a child should. I lay down next to her. Instinctively she turned and snuggled close, I guess I had been the first in a long time to make her feel safe.

As I started to relax a little I could hear Arty congratulating Hugo on pulling me. Shame he didn’t see it that way really.

I was just getting comfortable when Hugo shook me.

“I’m going out. I’ll be back in a few hours, we’ll take her then.” He leant over me and brushed the back of his fingers across her cheek. “Just make sure she’s ready.”

“But it’s daylight!”

“Oh! So that’s why I can see your wrinkles clearer. Be ready.” I frowned. I couldn’t decide whether to react to the cheap shot, or the fact he was about to walk out into the sun. He sighed and with the patience of a teacher trying not to scold a child said,

“We get sunburn easily, we don’t burst into flames. The movies lied, get over it.” He turned to leave.

Touchy.

He responded with a glare over his shoulder and I smirked back.

Arty was still in the other room. I should have gone for a chat but making daisy chains with Prudence would be much more fun so I stepped back into her dream.

The sun shone brightly, the birds sang, the grass and flowers swayed in the breeze. Perfect, except for one thing. The meadow was empty. I laughed, Hide and Seek, hadn't played that for a while.

"I'm coming to get you, ready or not!"

Silence.

I peered around scanning the hedges and trees. Not a sign.

I shivered as a giggle away across the next field caught my attention. Shit! Something was wrong. I ran trusting my senses to find her.

"Prudence!"

The sound of a man laughing chilled my bones. Surely it wasn't him. She wouldn't have gone with him would she? Anyway, he was already dead, wasn't he? I reached a gate and saw them, Prudence and a different man. She held his hand and skipped by his side. He turned to look at me, grinned, then launched into the air on vast white feathered wings. Prudence squealed with delight as they disappeared from sight.

"No!" I screamed as I was thrust out of her dream.

"Fuck!" Arty yelled as the front door flew off its hinges.

I froze. Prudence slept on beside me. Nothing could wake her now.

The sound of Arty hitting the wall turned my stomach. A strange voice, booming yet musical permeated through the wall and the scent of roast meat filled the air.

"Hugo."

Arty whimpered and forced himself to speak.

"Out. B...B...Back soon." His voice was strained and he started to choke. The table and chair scraped along the floor; a low thud and the rattle of metal hitting tiles followed.

"I will return at dusk"

Arty screamed in agony and then all was quiet again.

I edged towards the bedroom door, not quite sure if he'd gone. The only sound was Arty gasping for breath as he lay crumpled on the floor. I sat him up against the kitchen unit and held his chin up to try to help him breathe.

Dark black fingers were still wrapped around his neck where the man had left his mark, more burn than bruise.

“Calm down Arty, try and take slow deep breaths.”

I placed my other hand across his chest and looked into his eyes. The shuddering began to ease as the air filled his lungs once more.

“Who was that?” Arty just stared back at me, his eyes wide with fear.

“Have you ever seen him before?” He nodded, took a long deep breath, exhaled slowly then said,

“At the club. Last night, just after you left with Hugo.”

“OK. Arty, we can’t stay here. We need to find Hugo and warn him, do you know where he went?” He nodded again and I started to stand up.

“You didn’t hear what he said.” Arty had grabbed my wrist, his fingers digging so deep that he almost drew blood.

“I heard. He was looking for Hugo.”

“No! You don’t understand. He shouted. In my head. It was so deafening it hurt. He said ‘If you know what’s good for you he’ll be here, or I’ll have your soul instead.’” Between the remnants of his make up Arty had gone pale. “What did he mean, Libertine? Who was he?”

“There’s some sick people in this world, he’s one of them. Come on, we have to go.”

“Wait. There’s more.” He had both hands on my arm now and his face was twisted with desperation. “He had wings. Black leathery wings, man. I thought I was tripping but I haven’t touched anything in days.”

“Arty, listen to me. You are going to have to trust me. He’s after Hugo, not you. He will follow you so you need to look as if you are going to find him. We have to go to St Alban’s Cathedral, but we have to go separately. Can you keep it together and do that for me?” He nodded once more.

“I’m going to need that hearse of yours.” Another nod.

“And I’m going to need my arm back.”