

Chapter 3

Angelica woke with a severe headache. She kept her eyes closed for several minutes, as she remembered what had happened before she blacked out. She was almost scared to open her eyes and find herself in a dungeon of some sort.

But it did not feel like a cold stone floor beneath her. She reached out her hands and felt cloth. Angelica opened her eyes to see a canopy above her. She was lying in a bed with light yellow sheets, but it was not her bed, or her sheets, and it was most certainly not her room.

The princess sat up. There was a window on one side of the room, and a collection of furniture all with sheets covering them. There were also two doors on different walls. Angelica stood up slightly shakily and moved over to one of the doors.

Inside was what looked like a washroom. There was a basin raised high enough to wash her hands and face. On the other side of the room, below a window, was a tub. Next to that appeared to be a chamber pot. It was not unlike the washroom she had in her own room.

She closed that door and moved to the other, which opened with an easy twist of the doorknob. The hallway was empty when she peaked outside. A vase sat on a small table across from her room, and it held a bouquet of fresh flowers. She listened for any sounds that would betray other people nearby.

The figure that had attacked her the night before had been a demon and demons were known to kidnap people. *But where did it bring me, and why would it put me in an unlocked room with no guards?* That was not even mentioning how it had gotten into her room in the first place. The Choir protected the castle with magic to keep demons from getting inside, and there were guards surrounding it at all times.

"I didn't pray last night!" She cried with sudden realization. Angelica dropped to her knees immediately, making the sign of the Heaven. "I beg your forgiveness for my forgetfulness, Goddess Lucinia. I put the worry of earthly issues above my praises to you." She made the sign of the Earth, closing her eyes tightly. A demon had been sent after her, a child of the earth. Terranok was obviously displeased. "Please, forgive me, Father of the Earth. My praises to you are many, and my heart does not falter in this. If you need me to prove myself, please send me a sign." She remained silent for several minutes, praying that something, anything would happen. If she were home, she could have gone to the temple, and had the priests help her prayer to reach the Gods.

Angelica opened her eyes and stood up, then screamed when she noticed a figure standing just a few feet away. She retreated into the room, and slammed the door shut, her heart beating in her chest. Was it the demon? She had not gotten a good enough look.

There was a knock on the door. "I'm sorry. I did not mean to scare you," a voice said through the door.

"Who...who are you?"

"My name is Dusty, Miss Angelica."

"You...how do you know my name?"

"Do you mind if I open the door? I would much rather see you while we are talking."

"Are you a demon?"

"No."

Angelica reached forward and then pulled the door open hesitantly. Standing on the other side of the door was a young man, approximately her own age, with dark brown hair, blue eyes, and a collection of freckles across his cheeks.

"That's better." He smiled. "Hello, my name's Dusty," he repeated, bowing.

"I'm Angelica," she said warily, even though he seemed to already know that. "Where are we?"

"The doorway to your room," he replied immediately.

She blinked. "No, I mean where is this house? How far from home am I?"

"This house is located in the Arcona Mountain Range, though I am not permitted to tell you our exact location. You will have to ask Master Dylan if you want to know more."

"Who?"

"You."

"No, who is Dylan?"

"He is my master."

Angelica studied the young man for a moment. He appeared in every way to be a servant, one limited in what he was allowed to say it seemed. If she was going to get any straight answers about why she was here, this "Master Dylan" was going to be the one she needed to ask. "Take me to see Dylan."

The teen offered his arm. Angelica looked at him skeptically, but he waited patiently until she put her hand on his arm. He then escorted her down the hall.

All of the doors she passed were closed, betraying no clue as to what was on the other side. Bedrooms? Torture chambers? Washrooms? Dusty matched his pace to hers.

They descended a staircase and Angelica heard music floating toward her. It was a beautiful tune, played by a single violin. The song was coming from the room into which they went. A fire, crackling in the fireplace, was the only source of light, and it silhouetted a figure with a violin in his hands. The music floated around her, light and happy. Then the figure stopped playing and reached forward to mark something on the stand sitting in front of him.

"I see you brought our guest, Dusty."

"Guest? Are you are the one who had me brought here?" Angelica demanded.

The figure finished writing and set down the pencil before turning to her. She could not see his face against the glow of the fire. "You're not injured are you, Princess?"

"What does that matter? I'm not worth any ransom."

"And what makes you think I care about ransom?" He moved over to the side of the room, and pulled open a pair of curtains. Sunlight poured into the room, and across the man's face. His skin was pale with dark blue hair. His clothes were fancy, like those of a nobleman.

He turned back to her, and she noticed the man had two small horns peaking out of his hair, and what she had thought was a cloak were actually two wings draped over his back. The blood seemed to freeze in Angelica's veins. *Lucinia protect me*. She stumbled backward, reaching for the sword that was not on her belt.

The humanoid demon chuckled. "Dusty, would you make lunch for our guest?"

"Yes, Master Dylan," the young man bowed, and disappeared out the door.

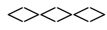
"Dusty will find you when he has your meal prepared." The demon continued. "So feel free to look around until then."

Angelica did not waste any more time backing out of the room, never taking her eyes off the humanoid demon, even though his attention seemed to have shifted back to the music stand in front of him. As soon as she was away from the doorway, she turned and hurried down the hall, torn between the urge to drop to her knees and beg the Gods' forgiveness again, and the desire to get as far from the demon as possible.

At the end of the hallway was the foyer, and what appeared to be the house's front door. It opened with a twist of the lock, and she lit out across the yard. As Dusty had said, the house (which actually was more like a mansion now that she could see it all from the outside.) was nestled in a valley, surrounded on all sides by mountains; the Arcona Mountains. She knew the mountain range was on the eastern border of Ryall's lands, but she had no idea how far into the vast mountain range she was.

The wind whipped around her coldly, reminding her of the fact that she wore only her sleeping gown. Rough rocks poked at her bare feet under the carpet of grass. "Anything's better

than staying here," the Renegade Princess assured herself as she continued walking. She could not help wondering why it had been so simple for her to escape. *If that humanoid demon went through all the trouble of kidnapping me and bringing me here, you'd think he'd at least lock...* Angelica's vision went blurry. She paused, shaking her head at the sudden wave of tiredness, but found that to be a mistake as the world spun and she fell into darkness.



Angelica's eyes opened to the same yellow canopy, and the same pounding headache, but this time, the humanoid demon sat on a chair next to the bed, watching her. She clutched the blankets to her, fear racing through her system again.

"Did you really think it would be that easy to leave, Princess?" he asked with a mocking smile.

"No more than you thought I would simply resign myself to being a prisoner, Demon," she retorted before she realized what she was saying.

The demon chuckled, and then continued. "This room is yours to do with as you like, but you are not restricted to it. You may enter any other room you can get into, though I see little point as most have not been cleaned in many years."

"Is it my job to clean them?" she found herself asking. Now that she knew this demon was not just going to fly into a rage and kill her, she was back to wondering why she had been brought here in the first place.

"I was not aware you enjoyed such tasks. The option is open if you like." He shrugged.

"So that is why you brought me here," she accused.

"No, you are my guest in this house. You will be expected to do your share of the chores, but you are not my servant. Dusty holds that title as my apprentice."

"Guest?" Angelica asked incredulously.

"Yes, guest. Dusty has left your lunch here, if you would like it." The demon nodded toward a covered dish sitting in the middle of a cloth-covered table. "Dinner is served at 7 in the dining hall, and that meal will not be brought to you. If you need anything else, don't hesitate to ask."

Angelica looked at him carefully. After everything she had heard about humanoid demons, she was slightly disappointed. The humanoid demon was not nearly the impressive presence she had been expecting. He did not seem that strong and was treating her civilly. She

felt something about him that was somewhat familiar, but there seemed to be no malicious intent or bloodlust.

"Ah yes, and I filled the wardrobe with a number of outfits for you. I am not sure of your size, but most should fit." The demon pulled the doors of the wooden cabinet open, showing an array of dust free clothes. "Now if you'd like to get dressed, I can give you a tour."

"A tour?"

"Yes, it is when I show you where things, like the dining hall, are so you don't have to stumble around until you find them yourself."

Angelica bristled at the condescending tone. She had not been spoken to like that in years. Not since her high skilled and quickly fired math tutor had thought it the best way to make her listen to him.

"I'll be waiting in the hall." Dylan made his way out of the room, closing it after him.

It took Angelica a few minutes to convince herself to get out of bed, and cross to the wardrobe. Inside, as the demon had said, was a wide selection of clothing, from summer dresses, to winter tunics. She fingered a light green tunic and then pulled it from its place. Anything was better than being around a demon, especially a male demon, in nothing but her nightgown. Not that she could do much to stop him if he...she shook her head and tightened the belt. The shirt was a bit tight across the front, but she had gotten used to that since most tunics were made for men. On a lower shelf, several pairs of shoes and boots were sitting neatly beside each other. She picked out a pair and put them on, before going to the door that opened to the hallway, and stepping outside.

Dylan was standing there, and he looked her over quickly, without commenting. "Now if you'll follow me." He started down the hallway, and after a brief pause, Angelica followed him. "We are currently on the second floor, which is where all of the bedrooms are located. If you go either way, and turn only when you've reached a dead end, and follow the new hallway to the end, you will come to the stairs that lead to the lower level. To the right," he began walking in that direction. "You will also come across the library on your left just before the stairs."

Angelica followed after him. All of the doors they passed were closed.

"You will recognize the library by its double doors." Dylan pushed the doors open into a huge room. "The library takes up all three floors, and has doors on each floor"

Angelica moved into the room, looking on rows and rows of books, stacked up toward the ceiling, which was a great distance above her head. Below, down a set of spiral stairs was the lounge area where she had first met the demon the day before.

Dusty was sitting at a table in the lounge, books and scrolls spread out in front of him. He ran his finger along a line in one book, and scratched something on a piece of parchment.

"You said he's your apprentice. What do you teach him?" Angelica asked.

"Many things," Dylan replied leading her out of the library. "History, politics, math, magic, and music. He learns extremely quickly."

"You're teaching him...magic. But humans can't learn magic without the Choir's consent."

"Hm, I suppose I will have to mention that to him the next time he sets fire to the drapes." Dylan looked thoughtful as he closed the doors, but there was a smile on his lips.

He was teasing her. Magic was not something that was taken lightly. Only the very privileged were permitted to have lessons, and the Choir watched anyone who did learn magic very closely.

The demon walked down the stairs. "You should recognize the main hall. That was the door by which you left."

"Yes." As far as she could tell, he had done nothing more to bar its opening than had been there when she had tried to escape. Of course that spell was more effective than any lock could ever hope to be.

"Down this central hall is the bottom floor entrance to the library, and at the end of this hall," He continued to lead her forward. "Is the dining hall. I believe those are all of the most important places."

"Do you and Dusty live here alone?"

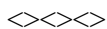
"Yes."

"But having no servants..."

"It is much easier than you would think, Princess. You simply need to realize what things are not necessary, and soon you'll have time for everything you need to do." Dylan's manner of speech was exquisite, and he held himself very well. Were all humanoid demons like this, or was he somehow an exception? The humanoid demons they reported on the radio were all violent monsters. "Do you need help getting back to your room, or will you be okay on your own, Princess?"

"My name is not 'Princess', it's Angelica. And yes, I will be fine on my own."

"Then I will see you for dinner, Princess."



Angelica made her way back to her room with minimal trouble. She closed the door, and found herself quickly locking it from the inside. The situation did not seem real.

For a spilt second she wondered if someone might actually come to try and rescue her. Her father would fly into a rage on finding she had been kidnapped, surely. She might be a little rebellious, but she was his daughter. Once he realized she had been kidnapped...but then they might not consider it to be all that odd for her to have disappeared. She had done so in the past, and no one would think it strange that she was upset about her sister's wedding and wanted to get away. It could be months before anyone even realized she had not left of her own accord, if they ever did. Even Penelope would not find it hard to believe Angelica had run away after what had happened the night before.

The human sighed heavily before looking around her new room. It was at least as large as her room at home. She pulled the curtains open, looking out over a colorful garden. The ground sloped down beyond the garden, and she could see a rather run down building surrounded by a fence in ill-repair. There was a stretch of green valley before the mountains rose into the sky, topped by snow.

Angelica bent down, making the sign of the Heaven. "Thank you, Lady of the Light, for your protection during these difficult times. If it is your will, please grant me the strength to persevere." She hesitated as her hand went to trace the familiar sign of the Earth. She found nothing for which she could thank Terranok. 'Thank you for not letting your child kill me,' seemed a little too ridiculous to say to a God. She could not imagine he would even bother to listen to such a statement.

Behind her a clock chimed. It was sitting on the fireplace mantle, free from the dust that coated everything else.

"Dinner at seven." Her eyes drifted to the cloth covered piece of furniture beside the bed on which she saw a covered plate. She moved over pulled the lid off to reveal a sandwich and a bowl of soup. Her stomach felt too tied up in knots to eat anything now, so she recovered the dish, and looked out the window. Mountains stretched out into the distance. She could not see what it was that had stopped her from leaving, but it was there. She made her way out of the room.

Angelica walked down the path away from the mansion, the same way she had earlier that day. This time, however, she slowed her walk as she approached the place she had lost consciousness. She moved forward, a step at a time, feeling the air in front of her, until she felt sleep tug at her mind. At that, the human jumped back quickly, and waited for her head to clear. It took several minutes before the sleepy hazy seemed to clear, but she remained awake this time.

Angelica held out her hand again, feeling the air in front of her. There was a spell there, she knew. Invisible, but present just in front of her. Then her hand came into contact with, well nothing, but there was the slightest shimmer in the air. She pulled her hand back quickly, looking over it for any damage or lingering effects, but saw none.

With a deep breath, she reached out again. When she saw the shimmer, this time she moved her hand down and up and to the side, seeing if there was a break anywhere in what she assumed was the spell. When she did not find one, she began walking to the side, keeping her hand in the spell, watching for any interruption.

The line of the spell led her down the hill, around the garden, and out around the run down building that appeared to be a barn or stable that had fallen into disrepair. After circling around that, it moved back up the hill toward the mansion.

She saw Dusty sitting on a stone wall in the garden, watching her as she came closer. The spell apparently came rather close to the garden on this side of the house. She paused as she reached him.

"Aren't you going to ask me what I'm doing?" she asked after a few moments of silence.

"I know what you're doing," he replied. "Though I admit I'm slightly surprised that you're doing it."

"I'm not about to assume that the spell goes all the way around the house without checking it out for myself."

"I'll save you some time in telling you that it does," Dusty said.

"I have no reason to trust you." Angelica put her hand back in the spell and continued walking.

Dusty hopped down from the wall, and followed her.

"What, are you here to keep me from running away when I find a hole in the spell?" She glanced at him over her shoulder, and then tripped on a piece of uneven ground. Dusty was at her side in a moment, steadying her. She pushed him away.

"No, I'm here to carry you back inside if you get too close to the spell."

"What does that demon even want with me?"

"That, I do not know," the young man replied.

She continued along the spell. It was not as restrictive a spell as she had assumed. It went all the way around the entire barn, and all of the gardens surrounding the mansion. It seemed more like a fence marking off property, than a spell to keep her inside. An invisible, magic fence, but a fence all the same.

"Why isn't he like all the humanoid demons I've heard about?"

"Pardon?"

"That demon, Dylan. He's not like what I've heard about humanoid demons."

"I suppose that's just because of what you've heard. The humanoid demons they report on the radio are all ones who attack humans or towns, and generally cause what trouble they can for the Choir. Most of them are pretty violent."

"And your master doesn't do that?"

Dusty shook his head. "Not to say he isn't powerful. He is a humanoid demon after all, but he's not violent and dangerous. Unless you get him really angry that is." He smiled.

Angelica wondered if he was trying to make a joke. A human who lived with a demon. She could not imagine a human resigning himself to serve a demon.

"Are you really a human?" she asked.

He looked surprised. "As opposed to...?"

"A demon in disguise or an illusion."

"What do you know about magic?"

She knew very little, but she was not about to admit it. The idea of magic had always scared her. Magic made one able to do things they were not meant to do. What she did not had come from conversations she overheard, or bits that were mentioned in books she had read.

Dusty continued in the silence she had left. "Casting a spell requires three things: knowledge, power, and will, or energy as some call it."

Angelica looked at her hand, rippling through the spell. Even though she was not supposed to know about magic, she was curious. She could not help if she just happened to overhear while she was trying to escape.

"The most obvious thing is that you need to know the spell and what it is meant to do. Finding a spell is fairly easy; there are numerous books and other sources. Then you also need the magic, and the ability to bend that magic into the spell. And how much magic and energy you need depend on the factors of the spell." He paused. "You mentioned thinking I was an illusion somehow, so let's go with that first. Basic illusions, like ones you can only see, use little magic, but a good deal of energy. Of course interacting with an illusion like this, your hand would go through it, it wouldn't make any sound, or give off a smell. The more realistic the illusion, the more difficult."

"But it is possible to make an illusion that would look, feel, sound, and...smell like a human." Angelica accused.

"It is, but...well you won't really understand amounts of magic. Shaping magic into a spell takes energy from your body, the same way walking or running does." He reached out and

took her hand, pulling it to his chest. "You can feel my heart beating, you can hear me talk. If I were an illusion, it would take the amount of energy it would take to run many miles. And as long as the illusion lasts, it continues drawing in energy and magic."

Angelica suddenly realized what he had done, and pulled her hand back sharply. He released her hand. "So while such an illusion is *possible*, it's not *feasible*," he continued.

She could still feel his warmth, and the gentle thump of his heart. "So you're really a human. You could still be under some sort of mind control."

Dusty just laughed. "It seems not only were you told just enough about what magic can do to scare you, but they greatly underrepresented the difficulty of learning and casting magic."

"You're going to tell me it takes too much energy to cast a mind control spell for it to be feasible as well?"

"Mind control spells are a bit different, because you have the mind of the person you're casting it on to contend with. The stronger the person's mind and magical skill, the more energy it takes. Making someone with no skill subservient is easy. Making someone, even with no magic knowledge of their own, speak freely and respond to stimulus around them as a normal person would do, is quite a bit more difficult. And on top of all of that, I am trained in magic."

By this time Angelica had completed the circle around the mansion, having found no breaks. She pulled her hand away with a slight sigh. She had expected it, but seeing the lack of a way out seemed to settle heavily on her shoulders. "Why are you telling me all this?" she let the annoyance she was feeling creep into her voice.

"I guess I'm just trying to put your mind at ease. I am just a human like you."

"But one who serves a demon master, who happens to be holding me captive," Angelica said icily.

"Like I said, Master Dylan is not like the demons about which you've heard. He's always protected me, and treated me well, and I have no reason to think he will not do the same for you."

"And I have no reason to trust either of you."

"I can't really argue with that. I suppose all we can do now is continue to show you we mean you no harm." Dusty bowed, holding out his arm. "Now if you are done with your tour of the barrier spell, I would be most pleased to escort you back inside."

She studied his face for a moment, before turning and walking toward the mansion. Her head felt heavy with everything the demon's apprentice had told her about magic. She was a prisoner here. They could make her do anything they wanted. He had even said that using mind control on someone with no magical training was very easy.

However, if they were going to use that, why give her a room, and tell her about magic, and let her wander around the spell keeping her here, another part of her mind argued. Why would they care about gaining her trust?