

Dual Obsession

A cool breeze crept through the air, rustling the Duchess' black ringlets which cascaded down her neck. Never in his life had Pandolf encountered such beauty. The blush of her cheeks reminded him of the sunset after a storm. Was it possible that one lady could espouse so much etiquette and charm that a man might feel weak at his knees? Even finishing the last strokes of the portrait, Pandolf knew that not even he, a painter of such high credibility, could capture her alluring beauty. Lucrezia alighted delicately from her posing chair and danced her way across the marble floor to where Pandolf sat moulded to the cushions. His eyes were held prisoner by the vision cast before him. Lucrezia perched so close to Pandolf that he could almost taste her sweet lips. He leaned in closer to her, and only then did he notice an old bruise fading to a yellow high on her cheek. A sudden despair swept over his body, engulfing any romantic essence which had been in the air. Pandolf knew he had to leave, desperately, before the anger consumed him; the initial stages of the metamorphosis had begun. Brushing Lucrezia aside, he moved urgently to the large gold and ivory doors to escape the room.

It was late that afternoon that the Duke encountered the Duchess. The sun was now shielded by grey clouds and the smell of rain brewed within his nostrils. Even with the darkened light, the main hall in which Alfonso stood still shone in an exquisiteness so inimitable. The intricate paintings of his ancestors lined the stone walls, showing how grand his nine hundred year heritage really was. The pearl roof was so immense that even the light stretched to find its concerns. Alfonso saw the Duchess peering through the grand doors fronting the portrait room. Lucrezia had not pleased him lately, making her presence spark a match of hatred within his soul. If only she could give him the affection he yearned for.

A new painting rested on an easel behind Lucrezia, its contents obscured by her station at the door. She stepped quietly into the hall, unsure of the consequences of her action. The Duke looked through her, focussing on the painting, his eyes penetrating the dark. A portrait of the delicate lady was dearly visible and contrasted starkly against the white walls of the room.

Alfonso studied the painting hard, as if looking for a secret buried within each stroke from the brush. He took a few steps forward, then stopped to study it from a closer position. In this portrait, Lucrezia was the epitome of opulence and exquisiteness. Her long hair wafted around her like black smoke, framing her soft, hazel eyes and delicate lips perfectly. She wore a grandiose, dark gown with funnel sleeves as deep as the blue of the ocean, complementing her fair skin. Looking at the brilliance of this artwork should have made Alfonso pleased; however all he felt fermenting within his blood was despair and anger. There, painted across his lady's cheeks, was a warm, glowing pink. Never had she blushed such a sincere pink for him. For the first time in his life, the Duke was jealous. He wielded so much power, yet no amount of money in the world could make the Duchess truly love him. Betrayal walked through his mind, leaving a path of despair as the realisation set upon him that her love was not exclusively his. Alfonso's disposition darkened as evil thoughts ruptured his brain. He deserved to be happy and he deserved to be loved completely by a woman.

Alfonso already knew what had to be done. He could go on no longer. He deserved respect. With a goal set in his mind, he turned and marched towards the tight, spiral staircase at the end of the hall to the dungeons, calling for Lucrezia to follow. The light cast from the flaming torches danced and flickered on the stone walls. The cold, damp air wrapped around him, like a heavy coat of chain mail. They reached the end of the staircase to the giant, steel doors which separated the castle from the dungeons. As Alfonso entered and Lucrezia followed, he noticed the wariness in her footsteps as she stepped as soft as chimney smoke. Closing the door behind him, Alfonso reached for the dagger

tucked away in his belt. A silent assassin had slipped into the room. Lucrezia's eyes flickered back and forth between the knife and the door. "I see the way you glance your eyes upon him, Lucrezia", Alfonso bellowed towards her. A whimper escaped Lucrezia's lips as she scrambled against a hard wall. How this entertained Alfonso, seeing her as a helpless doe. He was the hunter. Alfonso abruptly lunged towards Lucrezia, using his right arm to pin her throat and his left arm to point the sharp blade at her heart.

"A-A-Alfonso my dear, but it is only you whom I fancy. There is not a day the sun rises that I do not love you." Lucrezia said it with more urgency than honesty. Hearing her lie only made Alfonso's cruel heart beat harder, pumping the treachery throughout his body.

Pressing firmer on her throat, Alfonso replied, "The image of your face in the portrait belies your tongue," the veins on his forehead evident, announcing his resentment towards her.

A distant, familiar voice shattered his moment; it called him to stop. It was Pandolf. Lucrezia realised the change in Alfonso's face. "Pandolf "she cried, "I know you are there! You are stronger than this. Please help me!" Alfonso shook his head to clear his mind. He knew he had to act now, this was his time, this was his right. He once again tightened his grip on Lucrezia so she could barely escape a breath. A soft tear escaped her eyes as she whispered with one last gulp of air, "I love you, Pandolf".

For Alfonso, that was the last straw. The thrill of the battle surged within him, a blessed and beautiful sentiment. Alfonso's blood pumped so loudly within his ears that he could barely hear the last few cries escaping the Duchess' mouth, and the constant banging of the painter yelling at him to stop. With the dagger aimed at Lucrezia's heart, he cut her life away. Her body slumped to the floor. Her blood became a small river as it thickened from the wound, a brilliant red, to announce her retreat from this existence.

Alfonso stepped aside to allow Pandolf to witness the horror before him. The scene was breathtaking in its repulsion. His lips parted to cry with pain, and with his eyes averted to the ceiling, he realised his greatest treasure had been lost. Alfonso smirked. Pandolf felt the desolation sweeping throughout his body. With his hands trembling, he knew the Duke would forever be in control. The war between the two had raged within his mind for his entire life. Strength of character was not his forte. In the back of his mind, he felt Alfonso begin to take control. The painter gave into the darkness one last time, retreating to the recesses of the mind; Alfonso was now alone.

Written by Tiahna Cooper