**Swiss Resort**

In another couple of months or so this would be an expensive restaurant in an expensive ski resort. Then it would be packed with well-heeled skiers spending big on fine dining. Now it was host to just a few diners. One side of the restaurant was a glassed in balcony, showing a view of snow covered alps, turning golden in the setting sun.

Near the windows a stylishly dressed African woman sat, toying with a glass of wine. A second place setting implied she was expecting company.

Elanor was thinking about her husband dead these twenty three years, her children, all grown up now, and a few events that had happened over her life. She was in a peculiar mood tonight - strangely empty and melancholic. She had met Abe Johnson when they were both attending university in London. He was fifth generation African American, they’d married while still studying and after graduation they had moved to the U.S. Abe was a lawyer, they’d both been active in the anti-war movement. She was pregnant with their third child and he’d gone to a peace rally without her. When she saw him again it was to identify his badly beaten body in the morgue.

Friends who had been to the rally and had been arrested with him later told her the police had beaten him unconscious before throwing him in the back of the wagon. He’d died in the cells a few hours later. No one was charged.

It had all been too much for her. His parents had tried to help her, but the continual racism of American whites forced her to move back to England where her parents could care for her and their grand children.

She’d healed and gone on to be active in Amnesty International, and worked for Oxfam and Care, aid agencies for third world countries. She felt she had made a difference to people’s lives.

Then, about six months ago, just two weeks after the birth of her first grandchild, Elanor had been diagnosed with terminal cancer and given between six months and a year to live. It was so unfair!

She wasn’t about to give in, though. Radiation treatment and chemotherapy made her sick, her hair had fallen out, and her skin became as fragile as paper. The cancer was still there, though her hair was growing back. The aches and pains were getting worse and her skin was still like paper. She had spent the last two weeks in an experimental cancer clinic in Switzerland and now she was here with a week to kill before she went back for more treatments.

Holy Mother, she thought, let me see my grandchildren grow up. Don’t take me yet, there is more I can do. She stared unseeing at the mountains outside, thinking. Then there was Luke, whom she’d met last night. Charming, urbane, cultured, some how familiar, he’d made her feel happy within herself. He had promised to return tonight, but why had he told her last night when they parted that Luke was short for Lucifer? That worried her.

When she looked up he was making his way across the floor toward her. He was tall, pale skinned, with dark hair and eyes, good looking in an Egyptian way. His age was hard to determine, but she guessed somewhere between thirty five and forty. He was shorter than she, but at six feet three most men were. Expensively dressed, but with that understated elegance the Europeans seemed to do so well. Younger than her, her first thought was that he was a gigolo.

“Bonjour Elanor.” He spoke in French. “I am glad you could make it tonight.”

Something inside Elanor warmed, her melancholy was evaporating. She greeted him in return, smiling at him, waiting while the waiter handed out menus, explained the specialties, and took his drink order. There was something about him that gave her a sense of déjà vu. “Yes, I decided that since I enjoyed last night’s conversation I would meet you again.” she replied in French. “Are you really Prince Lucifer? Are you after my soul? Am I in danger just eating with you here?” Of course, she thought, if he really is, then he won’t tell me, but I have to ask.

“I did not mean to worry you. But no, your soul is safe.” He smiled angelically at her for a few moments before saying “You do not recognise me, do you?” Elanor shook her head. He continued “Do you remember the time in North Africa when you and some companions were captured by rebels? I said to the rebels that I was Lucifer, and I had been sent by Abaddon.”

Elanor took a deep breath. “Luke?” This was a bolt from the blue. She had been one of several hostages held by the rebels, and things were about to go very bad for them when a man calling himself Lucifer had walked in and ordered the rebel leader to release the hostages. He had cowed the rebels by telling them Abaddon had sent him, and they had done as he had ordered. “It’s been so long... I didn’t recognise you... You look...” She was going to say it was about eleven years, and he looked younger than before and his skin was paler.

“Different?” he supplied. He tilted his head and moved his chin around. “It’s been a while, and I’ve had my face changed a bit. There’s a price on my head in a number of places.” He looked amused.

“Goodness! Does that worry you?”

Luke shook his head. “Not personally, but it could be dangerous for my companions.” He caught her eye. “They can kill the body, but not the soul. That goes on, and is reborn time and time again.”

“So Abe, my husband, would be around somewhere?” She hadn’t meant to blurt that out, but her dead husband was on her mind tonight.

Luke smiled and glanced over her shoulder out the window. “He could be here watching you right now.”

Elanor looked around, feeling spooked, and then looked back at Luke. He was wearing his angelic smile, and she found herself smiling too. “You spooked me, but I can’t see anyone. Do you think he could be here?”

“He is not here. I think he might be looking at his grand daughter, or maybe preparing to be reborn. Perhaps you will have a grandson in another year or so.”

Elanor nodded, not fully understanding and wanting to change the subject. “It’s been eleven years since you rescued me. You promised you would visit me, but you never did. And why didn’t you introduce yourself last night?” She detected a petulant tone in her voice.

For a moment Luke looked like an indulgent father watching a small child complain. “Last night I wasn’t sure until almost at the end of our conversation. You didn’t even recognise my mention of the name Lucifer.” He countered. “I did not intend it to be that long before we caught up, but always there were places to go, people to save, crises to settle. Perhaps you didn’t need my help until now.”

That last puzzled her, unless he knew about her cancer. “What makes you say that? I don’t think there is anything you can help me with.”

Luke smiled again, shrugged. “Oh, you never know what might turn up. But you asked me to have coffee with you, and finally I am here with time to do just that. I am sorry it was not sooner.”

Elanor felt her mood lifting during the exchange. She smiled at him. “What shall we order? I was thinking of the duck.”

“How about an entrée?” They discussed food while Luke’s drink arrived, and then placed their orders. Luke ordered seafood as entrée, beef with chaseur sauce, and a large cheese platter for them to share along with a bottle of Château Lafitte. It was expensive, beyond what she would normally consider, but Luke recommended she should try it. What the hell, the she thought to her self. If I’m going to die soon then I should try it once. Elanor also suggested an off dry white wine for her duck, and Luke ordered one of the German spätlese wines.

She tried to get Luke to talk about himself, but he demurred, saying “I’m the man of mystery, remember? I still cannot tell you a lot about me. I will be here for a week though, there is a conference on. I have things to do with ensuring the safety of the attendees.”

She nodded thoughtfully. Last time he’d claimed to be some sort of U.N. trouble shooter, and it seemed he was still in that role. “Isn’t the American President going to attend?”

“Yes, along with the heads of state of Britain, France, Germany, Russia and China. They will be prime targets for protesters and would be assassins. That is probably as much as I can say at present. Tell me about yourself. You have taken up karate again? I see you have calluses on your knuckles now.”

She smiled and nodded. The last time she saw him she had given up karate years before. “Yes, those rebels made me realise I needed to keep my skills up to speed. I am a third dan black belt.” Elanor was rather proud of that. “I haven’t practised much in the last few months though.”

“You should keep it up. Maintaining a toned body will ease the burden of growing old. I would also recommend some chi gong or tai chi for energy work.”

Elanor nodded again. “What about you Luke? You don’t seem to have calluses on your knuckles.”

Luke smiled. “Ah, because I have progressed beyond that, to energy work. I no longer need calluses to protect my hands.”

“This I would like to see.”

“It’s possible I will have time this week to show you, and if you are interested even teach you some techniques.”

“I’d like that!” she replied quickly. The prospect of spending time with him was exciting.

“Then I will arrange that.” Luke responded with a smile. “I know that as a black belt you have done some energy work, although you may not have recognised it. You can break bricks and boards with your bare hands.”

“Yes, it is one of the tests for black belt.”

“You may not realise that your chi is used in this. But you may have heard of karate masters who can break bricks and boards without touching them.”

“I have heard of it, I have never seen it though.” She had heard the stories often enough during her training that she did not dismiss them, merely kept an open mind.

Luke smiled. “It is possible to direct your chi into the object and break it so.” He mimed moving his palm toward the table in a slow blow that stopped centimeters above the surface. “I won’t actually do this of course. The table is composed of atoms, they are like miniature solar systems, mostly empty space. And the protons and neutrons and electrons that make up the atoms are basically vibrating clouds of energy. Your chi can affect the energy of the world around you, and the energy of the world around you can affect your chi.” At this point the waiter brought the entrée.

After the waiter left she began talking about herself. She talked about her childhood in Kenya, then the upheaval of moving to England, where everything was different and so much colder. Snow had been a shock to her, as were the endless grey rainy days. When she spoke of meeting Abe for the first time as an African American exchange student as university her eyes sparkled.

Then she came to the anti-war protest. “I was pregnant with our third child, so he went with some of our friends, and I stayed home.” She broke off, seeing the image of his beaten body in the morgue again. “Some white cops arrested him, they beat him unconscious and left him to die in the cells. Some of our friends were arrested with him, they told me about it. They beat him and beat him and beat him, and then locked him in the cells. I had to identify his body!” she stopped, unable to continue. “He was all broken and bruised. Those bastards killed him and they got away with it. There was no investigation, no one was punished. I was left alone with two small children, and pregnant.” She stopped again, the emotions overwhelming her. Her fists were clenched before her face, her knuckles white. There were tears in her eyes and she was shaking.

Luke was looking at her and nodding. What would he think of her, going to pieces like that? She was trying to pull herself together, say something coherent when he spoke. “There is no justice in this world. There is just us, those who care enough to make a difference.”

Elanor tried to compose herself. “I’m sorry, I don’t normally react like that. It’s just...” she stopped.

“He proposed to you about this time, you have been thinking about him, talking about him. But you have a lot of unresolved anger about what happened.”

Elanor nodded mutely. She drew a deep breath. “It’s twenty three years ago, almost twenty four. I should be over it by now.”

Luke nodded. His eyes seemed to be scanning her body. “Anger is an energy, dangerous to those around you, but dangerous to the wielder as well. It can make you ill.” He stopped; his eyes narrowed, and then went out of focus. Elanor thought to herself, the unresolved anger is probably what caused my cancer.

Luke sighed. “Forgive me, but your anger is like a huge ball of yarn, all tangled up, and there are threads running through your entire being. It is eating you alive. We will have to do something about it this week.”

Elanor bit back a smart retort, shocked. He could see her cancer! But how? She drew in a deep breath, composed herself. “Luke, I don’t know how you know, but...” she could not bring herself to tell him. Instead she finished “I am sick. But how can you help?”

“Energy work. On this you must trust me. I said you needed my help. I will see what I can organise this week. That should be sufficient.”

Elanor felt the hairs on her body stand up, and she remembered that time in Africa when he had walked into their prison. She was defending young Janice’s honour and had just knocked the rebel leader out with a punch, the others were threatening to shoot her when Luke made his presence known. They had threatened to shoot him, he had barked orders and they had obeyed. He had an air of command that people felt instinctively. The same was happening now - and there was that undertone of certainty that it would happen.

“Thank you Luke, you are going to save my life again. I am here for the conference so you can arrange to see me whenever it suits you.” I can’t believe I just said that.

“Thank you Elanor, it’s not too late, you can be healed. But please continue - talking it through is a good place to start.”

Elanor had calmed down and spoke more dispassionately. As she talked she realised she hadn’t talked about it in detail to anyone before. As she spoke she came to realise a few truths. She was angry with Abe for getting himself killed, for leaving her with two children and a third on the way, she was angry with herself for not going with him - she might have been able to prevent his being arrested, and she was angry with the system where white cops felt they could beat blacks and leave them to die, where white judges and politicians turned a blind eye, where many whites she came across were prejudiced against her often without even realising it.

At that point the cheese platter arrived. There were six different cheeses, assorted dry biscuits, grapes and fresh figs along with reasonably fresh dates. Luke poured some Château Lafitte for her. The wine was lighter than she expected, but with a very long fruity finish. “That’s a very nice wine. I am glad you suggested it.” They continued chatting.

The cheese platter was finished, and the wine drunk. Elanor was feeling the effects of at least one full bottle plus too many emotions. It seemed to her that something was running out of her, flowing out through her skin and evaporating, or maybe pooling on the floor like sweat. But she still found things to say.

“Do you know, there was a white guy I knew while I was in the U.S., he was married to a black girl, and had children with her. There was also a young Indian girl who was working with me, we all used to hang out together. If he went out with his wife he would get funny looks, but if the Indian girl came along with them, white people would treat her as the wife and his wife as the black nanny!”

Luke nodded thoughtfully. “Europe never had slaves, so the general population never developed the prejudices the Americans did. And you have your parents in England to help you. I am not surprised you found it much easier in England. I know you didn’t remarry, but why not?”

“Oh lord no! I was busy bringing up my children, busy with human rights issues, busy saving the world as you put it, and besides, I missed Abe, it never really occurred to me to remarry. I had money, I had my job, my parents. Besides, I don’t think I wanted my children to have a step father. And as you said yesterday, marriage is about children and inheritance. I don’t think I will ever marry again, but a man who could be a friend and companion would be good.” What am I saying? I am going to die soon. “What about you Luke? You said you never married, but are you in a relationship?” Elanor felt she was prying, but wanted to change the subject.

Luke looked amused. “I never found time to marry, and with my lifestyle and work I was never a good family man. I have been in relationships, and I have several children that I know of. Maybe more that I do not. Does that shock you?”

Elanor chuckled. “It takes more than that to shock me. I prefer honesty, no matter how unpalatable the truth, it is something we can work with.” The coffee arrived along with a selection of fine chocolates and the Benedictine she had ordered, and the Drambuie Luke had ordered. She waited until the waiter had left before continuing.

“Luke, you know all about me, but I still know very little about you. You have said a few mysterious things, and sometimes I almost think you are reading my mind. Tell me something about yourself. But be honest, don’t make things up.” She sipped her coffee and watched him carefully.

Luke sighed, steepling his fingers. Then he smiled his angelic smile. “There are many things that if I told you now, you would not understand, or not believe, or think I am mad.” He must have noticed her disbelieving look, for he added “For example, you feel that I am somehow familiar to you, but you cannot think why.” She nodded, thinking that for some reason it did seem as if she had known him for a long time. “You and I have been together in previous lives.” Then he smiled again. “But you do not wish to believe that.” He waved his hands around. “Just so there are many other things you will not wish to believe yet. They can wait.”

Elanor shrugged “I guess I am familiar with the idea of reincarnation, but the people I met that believed in it were new age westerners, and they were always on about meeting people from past lives. If I had more to do with Indians or Asians I might think differently.”

Luke nodded. “I am something of a mystery even to myself.” He met her gaze steadily. “I do not remember my parents, but I do have those that I call relatives. I believe I have children because their mothers have told me I am the father, though a man can never be truly certain a child is his. I have passports declaring my citizenship of half the countries of the world with many different names. In their own way they are all valid. I consider myself a citizen of the world. I detest war and violence, but I have spent most of my life in war zones or areas of civil unrest. In many ways I am a rebel, I side with the victims, the oppressed, the downtrodden against their overlords, their rulers, their tyrants. You saw how I work when I rescued you. The only injury was the man you punched, and we took him to a UN doctor. I manipulate oppressors by preying on their fears and convincing them to do what I say.”

“Yes, you told them Abaddon sent you, and they were afraid enough that they let us go. I always wondered just how you managed that. I know you told us that they thought Abaddon was the crime boss, but then you told me that Abaddon was the arch angel of destruction. When I got home I checked what you said, and you were right, but he is also regarded as a demon, as is Lucifer.”

“That has happened many times. Old gods and goddesses become biblical angels, and then if they have negative aspects, they eventually become demons. In this particular case both the Moslem fundamentalists and the Christian fundamentalists recognised the name Abaddon, and we spread rumours, claimed responsibility for particularly gruesome underworld killings, and the legend of Abaddon the crime boss was born. As you saw, it worked. The rebels did not even argue with me.”

Elanor felt he was evading her questions. “Luke, you said you name was Lukios in Greek. Are you Greek? Did you grow up in Greece?”

Luke sipped his Drambuie, rolled it around in his mouth. “You requested honesty. I have assumed so many aliases over the years I am forgetting what is fiction. But if I tell you a few truths you will think them fiction.” His smile slipped, he looked like a youth but with the eyes of a very, very old man. “I keep most people at a distance, you are one of a few I have allowed to get close. Please permit me to tell you a few truths, and do not dismiss them out of hand, and do not become afraid. Will you promise me that?”

Elanor sighed, a feeling of excitement mixed with dread flowing over her. There was something special about this man, and she wanted to get closer to him, under his shield. She nodded. “I promise to keep an open mind, not to laugh and not to be afraid.”

Luke’s smile was back. “You said that last time.”

“When?”

“Last life.”

She chopped off a chuckle. “You promise to be honest, I promise to accept that. Should I be afraid of you?”

“No, you have nothing to fear from me.” He drank off his Drambuie, signalled the waiter for a refill. “When I rescued you, I told you to think of me as something like the Phantom, the Ghost Who Walks. You in turn said I was like Dr. Who, because I don’t carry a weapon. Do you remember?”

“Of course! That was when you did some magic on Joe to make him forget what you were saying.”

“Luke comes from the ancient Greek Lukeios, which is Lucius in Latin.” He pronounced the ‘c’ as ‘s’. “The root of that word in Greek means wolf and also bright light. So one of the epithets of Apollo was Lukeios - ‘wolflike’, ‘wolfsbane’ and ‘bearer of light’. In Latin, light bearer is Lucifer, and referred to the morning star, or Venus as we now know it. I think you have heard of the Light Bearers? Sometimes referred to as the Angels of Light?”

Elanor nodded, speechless. She knew what he was going to say.

“I am one of them. The ancient Egyptians called me Horus the Hawk that flies at Dawn. The ancient Greeks called me Apollo Lukeios, the Romans called me Lucifer and confused me with the morning star. So I am Lucifer the Light Bearer, Lucifer Morningstar, Lucius Morgenstern among many other names. I am not evil, despite some bad press on the part of some early Christians, and I am certainly not a demon.”

Elanor found her voice. “I almost knew you were going to say that. But I don’t know how to react. Are you saying you are a god?”

“No, but as someone with powers others do not have you can understand how people could think that. In modern parlance I would be a super hero. But you don’t have to believe any of that, just do not think I am mad.”

What to make of all that? If anyone else had made those claims, she would think him mad, but Elanor had seen Luke command her abductors and be obeyed without question. “I think you will have to prove that to me somehow. What do you mean by Light Bearer? And how old are you?”

Luke smiled, nodded. “I will prove some things to you this week. But think of me as someone who flits around the universe trying to make things better, by shining a light into the darkness, and helping the poor and oppressed.”

“You are not really a U.N. Trouble shooter then.”

“I am, but I am more. I am on the side of the oppressed against the oppressors. In many ways I am a rebel, for I look at how things are and say there is a better way. That I can make a difference to people’s lives when they lack the ability themselves.”

Elanor was nodding again. He seemed to be saying things she wanted to hear. “You will have to prove what you claim, but based on what I saw in North Africa you can make a difference. I believe you are a good man, but are you really a man?”

Luke chuckled. “I can assure you this body is not something I bought in a second hand shop! Everything is in good working order. But you don’t have to take my word for it ...”

Elanor smiled to herself. He’d propositioned her, something she was beginning to think might not happen. Now it had she felt more comfortable, more relaxed within herself. “That’s something else you will have to prove to me, but not tonight if you don’t mind.”

“Tonight would not be appropriate. We shall see what the future brings.” Elanor felt relieved. Luke continued “Tell me, would you view me differently if I had said I was a wizard or sorcerer?”

“Probably. It would make you more ...” Elanor stopped, not wanting to say what was in her mind.

“Human?” Luke supplied, reading her mind. “What is human anyway? If you hit me I will feel pain, if you cut me I will bleed, and if you tickle me I will laugh. There was a time when white people in America declared that only those with white skin were human.”

“I didn’t mean that,” Elanor apologised. “I didn’t say it.” But it does sound racist. She wondered how to change the subject.

Luke laughed and shook his head. “Have you read ‘The Merchant of Venice’ or seen it performed?”

“No I don’t think so.” She was puzzled, but at least he was changing the subject. And that meant the hundreds of questions she wanted to ask would have to wait, which was probably a good thing.

“There’s a passage in there where the Jewish merchant Shylock is complaining that Christians do not treat him as human, and he says something very similar. And then four hundred years later look at what Hitler did.”

Elanor shook her head, not sure how to respond. “It was disgraceful. But there are still things like that happening around the world.”

“Which is where I come in, because I can sometimes stop it.” Luke drank down his Drambuie. “I used to know Shakespeare, did you know?”

“What, the playwright?” Elanor refrained from referring to how long ago that would have been. “What was he like?”

“A jolly sort of person, liked a drink, very much like Falstaff in character. Quite ruthless and hard headed when it came to making money. He didn’t write all those plays you know.”

“Really? I heard there was some theory that he didn’t write them.”

“No, many of them were written by Christopher Marlowe, who was said to have died, or been assassinated, but was living in exile in Italy. I think he staged his death to get away from his enemies. Marlowe got money for his plays, Shakespeare edited them to what he thought was more suitable for his audience, and got money and fame. And since Marlowe was in hiding, he could not complain.”

“I never knew that.”

They talked for a while longer before Luke looked about “I think they are closing the restaurant, and hinting they want us to leave.”

“Yes, I need to sleep. I am feeling a little tipsy from all the drinks. You are an interesting person Luke.”

“Thank you. You are too.” They paid their respective bills, with Luke paying for all their drinks. Luke offered her his arm and walked her to her room.

Elanor stopped at the door. “I hope you don’t mind if I don’t invite you in.”

“No, you have ghosts to lay to rest tonight. Will you be here tomorrow night?”

“Yes, would you like to have dinner with me?”

“I would. I enjoy your company. I will be in the restaurant between six and six thirty.” He bent and kissed her hand, as he had all those years ago. “Good night.” He turned and began walking down the corridor, back the way he had come.

Elanor watched him, but then her eyes watered and she rubbed them briefly. She blinked and looked around. Luke was nowhere to be seen, it was as if he had vanished into thin air.