**Chapter Twenty-Four: The Warden Part 3**

**Dorothy Blackthorn**

For nearly half a year, we continued to travel through the woods, often while being chased by one group or another. Lucas continuously protected me from anything and everything that he thought might hurt me while I took care of him. He was very brave, sometimes stupidly so, and he was surprisingly good at fighting, often winning against seemingly unbeatable opponents, but he was completely useless at anything else. It was true that I would not have survived long without him, but he would have also struggled to live on his own. Over time we grew to depend on each other which eventually grew into something else, something more.

It was strange. I had just gone through the most traumatizing times in my life following which I spent most of my days fleeing from pursuers and in fear for my life but I found warmth and happiness in the arms of my unfathomably handsome guardian angel. Lucas was my sun and my moon, he meant everything to me.

One cold Polish night, the two of us stood beneath an ancient tree and with the grass as our honored guests and the stars as our only witnesses, we exchanged vows that wrote ourselves. There was no priest to make it official, but that night, we became man and night.

Two weeks after we got married, we could no longer outrun all of our pursuers and one of them caught up to us. It was early in the morning when a single man dressed in a strange military uniform that I had never seen before barred our path. The all white pants and white jacket with golden buttons were pristine, which did not make sense since he was in the middle of the forest. His imposing tall figure was paired along with a sharp angular face and fiery red hair with streaks of gold running through it. His cold blue eyes also had the same golden streaks radiating out from the center. The man was completely unarmed and stood casually in the middle of the dirt road, but for the first time in my life, I saw apprehension flash through Lucas’s eyes. He pulled me back so that I stood behind him and stared straight at the alien looking man.

“Must we do this? I am not hurting anyone; must we act out this same old broken routine?”

The man looked at him sternly and replied, “Do you honestly believe the nonsense that you are spouting? Do you really think you can just go on your merry way without causing any harm? Who are you trying to fool, me or yourself?”

“All I know is that I am tired. I am fed up with this meaningless struggle. I just want to have peace. You have won, I give up. You and your army can do whatever you want and I will not resist, just leave me out of it.”

The uniformed man straightened out non-existent wrinkles from his cuffs and started walking towards us. Lucas panicked and raised his hands to signal him to stop.

“Wait! The girl is innocent. Let her leave first before anything else.”

The uniformed man looked at me for the first time and raised his eyebrows in surprise. “A mortal girl? This is why you are hiding away in this remote corner of the world after setting off the war? This is why you left your armies defenseless in the middle of your campaign? You! Girl! Do you know who this man is?”

I could not understand what was happening and I knew that Lucas had some past history with this mysterious man but his stuck-up holier than thou attitude rubbed me the wrong way so I answered him with vim and vigor. “He is Lucas, my husband.”

He stood stock still for a second and repeatedly looked back and forth from me to Lucas and back again, then he burst out into loud hysterical laughter. “Husband! HA! HA! HA! Did you just say husband?”

Lucas frowned frostily and put his hands on my shoulder to pull me back behind him again. “What is so funny? She is my wife!”

The man wiped tears of mirth off his cheek as he got his laughter under control with some difficulty. “Oh, I see it now. I didn’t notice it before because I didn’t know to look, but it is obvious now. You fell in love with the girl. You of all people fell into that trap. You are telling me to leave you alone so that you could live happily ever after with this girl? That is foolish. This is not allowed. It is against the scriptures that we were taught to obey.”

Now, it was Lucas’s turn to smirk. “I am already a Fallen, it is not like I can fall again.”

“Oh really? Then what about your new wife? Does she know who you really are? What you are? What you have done?”

“Shut up!”

“I’m guessing that is a no.” The man in white had an almost sing-song tone as he gloated.

“What is going on Lucas? Who is this man?” I could no longer suppress my mounting apprehension and sought some reassurance from Lucas but the only thing that answered me was silence.

“Oh, how rude of me; I mean, we are practically family and you don’t even know who I am. We should remedy this immediately, I’m your brother-in-law after all.”

Brother-in-law? This man was Lucas’s brother?

“I have many names and titles: the righteous flame, protector of order, sword of God, but the one you would probably be most familiar with is Archangel Michael.”

As he spoke, four pairs of massive wings sprouted from behind him like a giant peacock’s tail. Each pair had its own unique color; the bottom-most one was white and fluffy like the wings of a white dove magnified a hundred times, the ones above those were golden like they were made from delicate gold leafs, on top of those was a pair of metallic wings with sharp edges like a collection of swords and finally, in the most prominent position at the top were an eye catching duo of flaming monstrosities that were so bright that it hurt my eyes to look at them.

“It has been a long time since a human has seen my true form.” He flexed his shoulders and made his wings flutter like he was stretching out a sore muscle. As he moved closer, the white uniform he wore was slowly covered with gleaming golden armor, a flaming red spear appeared in his left hand and a glowing golden sword appeared in his right, completing his transformation into a heavenly warrior. “Well brother, it is time that we settled this.”

Archangel Michael? My first thought was that the man was insane, but reality disabused me of that notion. I gawked in disbelief but a part of my mind was whirring, performing the calculations.

He was the Archangel Michael? He was also the brother of Lucas? Who were the ones that the great Archangel would call brothers? Which one of these would he have such a deep enmity with? There was only one answer that fit.

Lucas turned towards me with a sad smile and pulled away from me. With a subtle motion, four pairs of wings burst out from his back. Unlike Michaels, his weren’t bright. They were just as large but their colors were much darker. The bottom most pair were pitch black like the wings of a crow, above those were a scary red and scaly bat wings, followed by an iridescent green pair spectral wings that flashed in and out of existence. The last pair were a relatively inconspicuous deep purple, but despite their apparent unremarkable appearance, my eyes were irresistibly drawn to them and it took me a while to extricate my gaze from them.

“Do you fear me? Do you hate me?” Lucas looked at his own wings and touched them gingerly. “This is what I really am. I am Lucifer. I am the great evil from your bible. Lucas was a lie. Everything that we shared was a lie. This is the truth.”

I closed the distance that he had put between us and slapped him, hard. “Never say that again! I don’t know who you used to be, but don’t you dare say that I don’t know who you are now. You are my Lucas. Whatever else you might have been in the past, you are and will always be my husband.”

Lucas rubbed his red cheek and smiled that familiar rogue smile. “You are really ok with this?”

“Of course not! There is a whole lot of questions you are going to have to answer and I retain the right to mete out some punishment for hiding so much from me, but I am not going to leave. I can’t leave you. “

Michael snorted at our little show of affection. “You bought into his bullshit too, huh? But I understand, he does have that effect on people. I know from experience that you can’t help but to love him and trust him, but I also know from experience that he will break your heart eventually.”

“You have no right to say that! You know that what I did in the past was as painful for me as it was for you!”

Lucas’s angry retort made Michael furious. His flaming wings flared up into a giant conflagration in response to his rage. “I have no right? I have every right! We were brothers! We fought side by side for millennia! You were the only one I trusted with my back and I would have sacrificed my life to protect yours! In the end, you betrayed me to make a grab at power. You threw away our brotherhood, and for what? To make yourself God?”

“That is not fair. You make it sound like I was greedy for power. The throne means nothing to me, just a means to an end. All I wanted to do was help the humans. Can’t you see it? The wars? The famines? The diseases? If I had succeeded, I could have stopped it all. I could have made earth into a paradise free of evil.”

“What you are proposing is against the Lord’s will. There is a reason for all the pain and suffering in this world and it is not our place to question the almighty’s plans. God gave the humans free will, what you want to do would take it away.”

“As long as they are happy and content, why would they need free will?”

“That is not for me to know. I am not God. I know my limitations. You on the other hand have always had the bad habit of overreaching yourself. It doesn’t matter how you try to justify yourself, in the end, you are the lowest of scum, a betrayer.”

“Why can’t you see what I am trying to do? Why are you so mad at me when all I have ever done was to try and make the mortals’ lives better?”

“Because I am your brother! They might be my God-given duty but you were the closest family I had! Whatever your reasons were, you stabbed me in the back!”

Lucas stood aghast and pointed uncertainly at his brother. “All this time, it was never about the word of God? It was personal?”

Michael lifted his weapons and advanced. “The moment you betrayed me, you stopped being my brother. Now I will avenge my brother by destroying the twisted monster pretending to be him.”

Lucas, or rather Lucifer, and Michael clashed in an explosion of bright red and dark purple like fireworks. The fight was short; it was finished before I realized what was happening and the result was also immediately apparent.

Neither one of them won. Both of them lay on the ground bleeding heavily and barely breathing. I rushed over to Lucas but it was obvious that he didn’t have long left to live.

“Don’t worry Dorothy. I am not mortal. I will come back in a couple of years.” He then raised his head with some difficulty and looked at Michael. “Are you satisfied now? We are both going to die, but have you thought about who would return first? The mortals think about me more than they think about you. My name might be notorious but it is equally prominent. I will resurrect years before you. Without you, who will be powerful enough to stop me?”

Michael coughed up some blood and somehow managed to get back on his feet using his sword as a crutch. “So this was your plan all along? To get me out of the way?” He staggered over to us and finally collapsed in front of us. “You think it would be that easy? You think I would let you win?” As he spoke, his giant wings which had dimmed down considerably started glowing brightly again before they started to break down into small motes of light. Before I could react, these small motes of light drifted over to me and started to enter my body, making me feel like my blood has turned into hot scalding magma. I screamed in pain and convulsed on the ground but the motes of light continued to stream into me without end.

“What are you doing? Why are you bequeathing your angelic authority to Dorothy?”

“Because somebody needs to stop you. It can’t be me so it is going to be her.”

“You are insane. She is my wife! She loves me! She would never fight me. You are destroying yourself for no reason at all.”

“Really? Do you think that she will not fight you once she finds out what you are planning to do with the baby in her stomach? Do you think she will not fight to protect her child when she discovers that you want to use him as a vessel? That you want to possess him and destroy his soul?”

I was in tremendous pain but I was still shocked by the sudden revelation. I was pregnant? I was going to have a child? Through gritted teeth, I looked at Lucas with questioning eyes and asked, “What does he mean? You want to kill our child?”

Lucas looked alarmed and a little ashamed as he looked away. “It is a necessary sacrifice. My plans can bring happiness and prosperity to all of humanity, what is one life compared to that?”

The last of Michaels wings disintegrated and he looked pale as a sheet of paper but he still managed to laugh. “Do you see that? That is his true nature!”

The motes of light finally stopped flowing into my body but instead, they combined to form a golden halo above my head before disappearing into my forehead. Michael vanished with a flash of light, leaving behind the echo of his laughter.

After an indeterminate amount of time, Lucas reached out his hand as if he wanted help getting up but I recoiled from him.

“Dorothy?”

I put my hand on my stomach and I somehow felt the life growing inside of me. This was my child! This was my son!

“Dorothy!”

Everything suddenly changed at that moment. Everything shifted in my world.

“I’m sorry Lucas. I can’t let you kill our child.”

Tears fell down uncontrollably from my eyes but my hand was steady as I summoned a flaming spear, the same flaming spear that was in Michael’s hand earlier, and thrust it through my husband’s heart. I knew he was already dying, but it was my way of drawing a line between us. It was a way to show him where I stood. He stared at me, his eyes wide with surprise and asked,” Why? What about your promise to never leave me?”

I cradled his head on my lap, just like I had done on that first night that we had met, and wept bitterly. “Because I am no longer just your wife. I am also a mother.”