

Dawn of The Final Day

-24 Hours Remain-

"Why are you staring at the sky?"

Bendrick craned his neck up, squinting against the sun and frequent distortions of time and space. "I am checking for the Black City."

"I don't get it."

"Lucy has not demonstrated more than a professed aptitude for magic, yet she now has just transformed into a horse." Bendrick gritted his teeth. "After a week of undefined 'study' with no precautions. Without actually being a Mage. If only this was the Fade, it would make sense."

"It's that bad?"

"I can feel the First Enchanter writhing in his sleep from here. Shapeshifting is a delicate, difficult art that either requires innate aptitude or intense study. And it's not one beloved by the Chantry. I have only read about it in the tower myself: the theory remains, but the practical instruction techniques have been all but destroyed."

Lore bounded up to them from further down the road. "Keep following them, they'll rush off soon enough."

They managed to surf upon the second brief instance of truncated time, a simple **We arrived at the circle tower the next day**, without much of a transition. The three of them barely manage to scoot inside the tower's main door before the story swept them into the hall.

"I wish she'd narrate people walking," Aster grumbled. "It would make following them less full of hurting."

"Strange," Bendrick muttered. "The Tower is not as I remember it."

The walls were made out of something that resembled grey particleboard. The floor seemed to be an undefined beige substance. A little ways away, Knight Commander Greigor was conversing rather robotically with Lucy-Elissa while her companions-- and indeterminate number of her party, as the story was unsure if only the game's maximum of three companions were present, or if all of her companions were there. Poor Sten and Leilana seemed to flicker in

and out of existence.

"Amazing. She enters a freaking *wizard tower* and she can't be bothered to actually care that it exists, much less describe it. Bendrick, didn't you tell her about this place? Didn't she act pretty impressed before?"

Lore snarled quietly. "How a person acts and what they truly want are entirely different."

"Yes, but what has she done?"

"She's ripping the dialogue straight from the original story, and not bothering to expand on anything else she sees. I wish you could see the Words. Her offhand comments and whining are intolerable."

Morri suggested I buy some lyrium dust from the guy with all the supplies on the bottom floor. "I'll show you how to use lyrium," she promised. I used our limited funds to buy some and she mixed them into potions and handed me some. "Oh, remind me to tell you about some of the other uses for lyrium next time we've got some privacy." My eyebrows raised and I smiled. "Oh? This should be good."

Aster made a face. "She also thinks that one should perform intimate acts with toxic substances."

"Lyrium... *there?! Not... there...*how could... *why* would... Ugh..."

The enormous doors to the inner tower opened abruptly. "Inside!" Lore commanded, though that was mostly at Aster. Bendrick watched as he nearly dragged her into the inner tower. Bendrick followed, frowning as the bolt secured behind all of them. Strangely, Lucy-Elissa ignored the three of them. Then again, her companions manifested and vanished around her haphazardly, creating a kind of camouflage for them: the uncertain headcount shielded them from being inspected too closely.

Or, agents thought, Lucy-Elissa might not have cared. This was confirmed when an old lady smacked bodily into the entire adventuring party.

"That's Wynne," Bendrick whispered. "I remember her from my time at the Tower. She was a little younger, then. Why is she suddenly a rag doll?"

Lore pointed up at some Words with his blunt nose.

We ran into Wynne almost immediately

"That's odd. That's a totally valid figure of speech."

"This Not-Elissa has barely mentioned canon actions outside of dialogue. The story is not sure if she's speaking literally or figuratively. Never mind that Wynne really should be maintaining a magical barrier at the moment, protecting children. The most description allotted for events has been for noncanon ones, so I believe it is assuming that is the case."

Bendrick wrinkled his nose. "To simplify: the world is not sure if she is simply making things up or not."

"Precisely."

She was actually eager to join us and she squeezed my arm in thanks, then

jumped away from me like she'd been burned. "What manner of creature are you that has stolen this girl's body? she hissed at me, drawing her staff and looking ready to incinerate me.

"Wynne knows...!" Aster choked. But even as she said those words, the old woman's eyes began to dull and the mechanical dialogue caused her frown to slack. "No... Not for long enough..."

"It's the spirit inside of her that saved her life," Lore said. "She knows the unnatural when she encounters it."

Bendrick blinked. "Wynne is an abomination?"

"No, she just has a friendly ghost that helped her fight them." Aster said.

"Shush," Bendrick said. "I believe they're discussing my demise. Wynne reportedly saw me fall dead."

Lore snuffed in the dust for a moment, as if to clear his head. "I highly doubt that, considering you weren't canonically at Ostagar in the first place."

"But I was," Bendrick said hotly. His deep frown twisted his normally-handsome features. "You cannot denounce my entire existence."

"You were made to die at Ostagar," Lore said bluntly. "The sooner you accept that, the better. In this story, you are now little more than a plea for sympathy. Look at how she tears up when she mentions you. And then how quickly you are put aside for greater things."

I was eager to see these creatures from the place called "the Fade". Apparently they reside there looking for anyway possible to come into our world and hide under beds and in closets just waiting for the lights to go out and scare the bejeebers out of everyone.

Suddenly, Elissa-Lucy and her band vanished into thin air. "Quickly! Through that plothole!" Aster said. "Or we'll have to take the stairs!"

"What a tragedy."

Bendrick had already dived into the portal. It seemed he was all too happy to have left the stairs in the Tower behind. Aster barely made it before the plothole snapped shut. "What's happening?" she asked. She felt to be floating above the ceiling, looking down on some very small-seeming versions of the characters running desperately through room after room and fighting creature after creature.

"You would know better than me," Bendrick said.

Lore paddled in thin air, shutting his eyes from the blur of tiny figures and blue-and-red circles, and repeated pausing and unpausing. "This is the canon. What actually running through this area is like. It seems this is the Sue's point of view."

"From the outside looking in?" Bendrick said, frowning. "But Lucy is inside Elissa's body... not *outside* of it."

"Do you have any proof?" Aster said. "Or is that what Lucy-Elissa said to be true?"

"To his credit, Flemeth in an earlier chapter you missed did state she removed Lucy from her world. However, this Flemeth also had the power to travel to Lucy's world and arbitrarily

picked her from literally every other human on earth despite a lack of qualities Flemeth would value..." Lore grinned, licking his lips and displaying long, uncanine teeth. "While you were gallivanting around Redcliffe, I took the liberty of disposing of her. The real Flemeth and I had a rather refreshing chat about impostors."

Bendrick's jaw dropped. "Flemeth. The real Flemeth. No, wait... I remember she told me..." He winced. "Something is wrong with my memory. I'm forgetting things."

"No, this story is just kind of forgettable," Aster said. "And this totally explains why she's skipping over the actual fighting and the actual 'gameplay' of this. No reactions to scary darkspawn: they're all small and unimportant from the perspective of a player. Never mind that Lucy is *actually* supposed to be there, looking at the enemies. Actually there, looking at the settings. Only the parts that break from this format are important to her, the cut-scenes. And the stuff she makes up herself."

Traveling up the tower did not take much longer. Lucy-Elissa took time in a few places to make offhand commentary.

I really felt sorry for the templars taken in by the desire demons.

"I certainly hope she feels more than sorry. 'Horrificed' would be a better word." Bendrick muttered. "Their wills are bound to demons, doomed to die or be slaves forever, and she is 'sorry.' That has to be the understatement of the age."

The plothole finally opened up ***close to the top of the tower when we ran into a really disgusting looking demon. It was large and looked like a giant walking abscess, wrapped in a bubo, inside a plastic surgery performed by Dr. Salvador Dali.***

Peeking through a crack in the door, Aster, Lore, and Bendrick had the displeasure of setting eyes on what looked like a huge blob of pus encircled by plague sores, with a face-lift, rendered in surrealistic oil painting. It also had rather shapely legs.

"Charming," commented Lore.

"I am never eating again," said Aster.

Bendrick squinted. "Is it wearing *stockings*?"

My instinct for flight or fight was ripped away from me and I sunk into lethargy quickly followed by unconsciousness and dreams and I saw my companions melting into puddles around me.

"I don't blame them," Aster said as Morrigan the witch, Wynne the mage, and Alistair the Grey Warden liquefied where they stood. "If I was any closer to a zit that walked like a man, I'd melt, too."

Bendrick threw up his arms. "That's it then. Is that all you've taken me along for? Or shall I get a bucket and mop for these unfortunate souls?"

"The next scene takes place in the Fade," Lore said. "I suggest we all go to sleep."

"In the middle of an abomination-infested tower, with a *demon* in the next room?"

Bendrick asked, appalled.

Aster shrugged. "I dunno. I'm not from this world. I'm not even sure if I can go to the Fade in my sleep."

"If this doesn't work, you get to sleep through the next few hours of your assignment," Lore suggested. "And the DIA will be none the wiser."

"True," she said. "But I am going to need a lot of warm milk to get to sleep in *this* place."

Bendrick pulled out his staff. "If you are sure this is needed, I can put you into a deep sleep, and then enter The Fade myself. Will you be able to manage on your own, Ser Lore?"

"I will be fine," Lore said. "I will defend your bodies while you lie vulnerable."

"Thanks, buddy," Aster said. "All right, Bendrick. Send me to dreamland."

The mage muttered a few words, and with a touch to Aster's brow, she felt her eyes droop heavily. Her legs collapsed out from under her like so much dead weight. Dimly, she saw Bendrick tower above her, his breathing evening out and the weird glow of magic in the desolate hall. As her eyes closed, the last thing she saw was Lore's black hide twisting and growing. Sound was faraway: the nasty cracks as his bones snapped and changed shape. And finally... a beastly roar...

Ah, thought Aster. He knows the dragon trick.

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"Aster! Breakfast!"

The delicious smell of bacon wafted down the hall. Aster jumped out of her sheets, almost tripping over her own feet on her way to the kitchen "Yes! It's Halloween! Time for Halloween parties and Halloween costumes, and Halloween pranks..."

Her little sister was already in costume. She was a black cat. "Aster! Are you going as Batman tonight? Will you take me out trick-o-treating?"

"Sure thing. I still know the best route, you know." She ruffled her sister's hair. "But for now... Halloween breakfast!"

Her father ambled over, a rather gruff-looking man, and carefully picked some eggs out of a skillet for her. "Here you go, kiddo. You have anything to do before you go out tonight?"

"Nope," Aster said. "My homework is done, my reading is done, and my test came back an A! I got an A on my somethingology midterm!"

"Always what I like to hear," her mother said, cutting clippings out of a catalogue. "Do right and conquer this school year!"

"Oh geez, these eggs are so good," Aster said, shoveling her mouth full. "Hey, shrimpboat, have you picked what you want on your pumpkin yet?"

She nodded furiously. "Yeah! I want a rhomboid face!"

"And are you going to carve it yourself?" Aster stuck out her tongue. "Or are you going to make me carve it like every year?"

"But pumpkin guts are so icky!"

"She can help me put up the decorations outside," her father said. "That might involve less guts."

Aster looked out the window. "Yeah, what... do you have the scarecrows to put up? The fake tombstones? The floss spider webs...?"

Something was in the sky outside. Something... distant. And black.

"Why are you staring at the sky?"

"I am checking for the Black City."

And... Aster laughed.

"What's wrong, dearest?"

"Oh, you guys are pretty good," she said. "You almost got me. Great job. Trick-o-treat."

"The tricking doesn't start until after sundown," her father said curtly.

"Rhomboid faces. Somethingology. You have no idea what Halloween or public school are, do you?" She stood from her seat and spat out her eggs. "And who the hell has a 'Halloween breakfast' anyway?"

The young girl stood up on her chair and crossed her arms, pouting. "Did you wake up on the wrong side of the bed or something? You can't just toss out dad's cooking!"

"Also, I'm not goddamned Batman," Aster said. "I'm freaking Drizzt."

And with that, she beheaded the young girl with Twinkie. Frosting went everywhere. As her 'sister' slumped to the ground, her 'mother' gave an inhuman shriek and overturned the table to get at Aster. Howling with rage, Aster pierced the impostor through with Icing Death. It burbled angrily, and finally collapsed to the floor.

The thing that pretended to be a father had been halted momentarily by the upturned table, but quickly was scrambling to its feet: its bony, withered feet. In its skeletal hands it still held the hot skillet: spilling cooking grease and scrambled eggs everywhere. Aster angrily kicked out with a leather boot and sent the hot pan flying into the abomination's face. It wailed in pain.

"How DARE you?!" she yelled, hacking furiously at the shambling skeleton. "How DARE you impersonate this! The story wasn't even finished! Dad wasn't even in it! He never even was written in, and you... PRETEND?! Argh!"

By the time she stopped crying, the house had long faded, and three dead fade demons lay on the surreal, twisted ground. "Oh man," she sniffed. "I guess I'm crappy at fighting except when somebody insults my mama, huh?"

She looked around. The surreal landscape of The Fade arched in all directions. There was no up, or down, or inside, or out. It didn't make sense. It couldn't make sense. How the hell am I supposed to find anything in here, she wondered?"

Carefully, she reached into her bag and pulled out the MK-47 CAD, and noticed it was still on. Then she stopped to realize the implications of being able to do this in The Fade. "Hey, MK-47? Do robots dream of electric sheep?"

[RESIGNATION: Alas, I am not so lucky. INSULT: I seem to be stuck with you instead, meatbag.]

"So make the best of it. Do a scan and point me in the direction of the Sue, will you?"

[ANSWER: Only because it is in the direction of something to kill. REMINDER: You are

not my master, you are a meatbag borrowing me from the Department of Internal Affairs.]

"With your sparkling attitude, I might just borrow you indefinitely," said Aster. "That is, if you don't hurry up."

[PLACATION: All right, all right. ANALYSIS: There is a large mass of canon instability approximately 24 meters to your left, turn-ways. ADMISSION: Normally I would not use such unspecific terms, but my internal compass cannot detect 'north' at the moment.]

Aster walked a few feet to the left, but couldn't see anything beyond more odd sculptures and twisted scenery. "I've gotta flip myself... turn-ways? How...?"

[MOCKERY: I don't know. You tell me. You're facing the wrong way. The Sue is at the moment, laterally inverted from your current perspective.]

"I can't just flop myself any old way. I'm not symmetrical. I don't even know how I could invert myself anyway! I just can't face up to..."

She froze. Slowly, she pulled Lucy-Elissa's perfect silver mirror out of her bag. She shut her eyes. Then, she looked into it.

Aster's reflection stared back at her, pale and haggard on a blinding pink background. And then, suddenly, the mirror image was *her*, staring back into herself. Aster dropped the mirror. It shattered with the tinkling of glass.

Suddenly, the Fade around her swirled a sickening urple. Sham-Wow! towels floated in mid-air, along with several poor, frozen horses. Men. Men in the middle of turning into horses. Aster wrinkled her nose. "This isn't The Fade," she muttered. "This is The Fake."

The other horse changed into a human and then so did I.

"Bendrick!" I cried when I saw him. "You're alive!" I threw myself into his arms. "I thought you..." I couldn't continue, my voice was choked with tears.

"Shush, Lucy. I'm here," he said softly. He stroked my hair and I just clung to him, suddenly and painfully reminded how much I had missed him, how much comfort he had been to me in a very confusing world.

"How did you escape the battle?" I asked. "And you're a shape-changer? I never knew that."

He smiled at me. "We didn't really have an opportunity to get to know each other that well, did we? We can now, Lucy."

"Oh gods, Bendrick... No!" Aster said, whipping around to try and find the source of the Words. It wasn't far off. Just in the middle of a strange field, off to the right. She began running. "Just hold on, Bendrick! Don't do anything stupid...!"

"But the Blight, we have to take care of that. It will be good to have you with us. Did anyone else survive?" I asked.

"The Blight is over, Lucy. The Wardens won the battle and slew the archdemon. The King got his legendary battle and is enjoying himself in Denerim now."

I shook my head. "No, we lost the battle. Everyone died. Duncan, the King... Loghain withdrew when we lit the beacon. Alistair and I nearly died."

Bendrick took my hands in his and pulled me close. "Do I look dead, sweet Lucy?" He pulled me into a kiss and folded me up in his arms.

A rather forlorn desire demon pouted off to the side, scorned in favor of Bendrick. "You! You, demon!"

It turned to Aster, only to get a face-full of neuralyzer light.

"You are impersonating Bendrick, and are going to squeeze in there and replace the real Bendrick right *now*! A pitiful mortal can't take your spot!"

It nodded vacantly, and then made a wicked look. It instantly became a body double of Bendrick, and as Lucy-Elissa's eyes were closed, roughly shoved the real one out of the way and slipped into Lucy-Elissa's arms. Bendrick was less than pleased. But The Fake was drifting away from them, and Aster football-tackled Bendrick to the ground before he could lurch back into his lover's arms.

"Sweet Lucy! Hold on...!" His hands crackled with ice... "Get off! Get off of MHGHF-!"

Aster forced a dosage of dubiously real anti-lustin into his mouth, and clamped his mouth shut. He sputtered and flailed for a few seconds, concentration broken. But finally, he swallowed. And then he relaxed. His eyes went wide and afraid, and he broke out into a cold sweat.

Soon Aster deemed it safe to get off of him. Lucy-Elissa was gone. "You're lucky she did the deed with that unfortunate Desire Demon and not you! I don't even want to think about the implications of Sue-dream sex."

Bendrick sat on the ground and buried his fingers in his hair. "Oh Maker, what did I almost do...?" he muttered. "If that had been a real demon, and not just Lucy..."

"Uh, hello? She tempted you with your deepest desire? She was going to make you her slave? She only wants you around when she can have pleasure from you? How is that *not* a demon?"

"I suppose you're right." He frowned tightly. "She must be destroyed."

Aster smiled. "I like the way you think, Bendrick. I don't know how much time has passed in here, but I can think of no better way to end this three-day slog."

She noted his state of undress.

"Uh, put on your robe and wizard hat and let's go."

Bendrick went plum-purple and did up his clothes again. Soon he had his staff and was ready for action. "I can sense her," he said quizzically. "As surely as Darkspawn."

"Sweetest deal. Where did she go?"

Bendrick pointed at ***a Fade portal that reminded me of a Star Trek prop***. "Through that thing. Whatever it is."

"Oooh! A transporter!" Aster said with glee as the thing took form. "Stand on that white circle there..."

He did. Aster followed and puffed her chest out proudly. "Beam us down, Scotty!"

The world seemed to shimmer as the transporter materialized them in a different part of The Fake. Here,

I saw that Alistair was putting into practice what I had told him about "tasting" a few nights back. Even worse, it was me, or a demon that looked like me, he was practicing on.

"Oh no. NO. NO!" Aster said. "CUT! EVERYBODY CUT! STOP! Bendrick, you hold her! Shut your eyes while I neuralyze."

Lucy-Elissa barely got out a syllable before Bendrick cast a quick crushing-prison spell on her, freezing her to the spot. Aster stormed in, neuralyzer flashing. "YOU! Morrigan! You don't like being called 'Morri,' you don't have time for idiots who want to shapeshift into horses, and you don't give a crap about heating anyone else's bathwater! You were kidnapped by the demon Sloth just after the Warden found you in your prison nightmare. Hop to it!"

She dutifully winked out of the scene, banished by her own dreaming mind back to where she belonged.

"And YOU! Desire demon! The HECK are you doing pretending to be Elissa and having sex with this man!? He shouldn't even want Elissa as his heart's desire! Shoo! Go back to doing demon things somewhere else!"

The Desire Demon paused, confused. Then it flapped away.

"And YOU! Alistair! Your heart's desire is to have a family and live with your sister Goldanna! You want to eat mince pies, not eat out a minx's thighs!"

Aster nearly was snarling with rage. "And how dare she MOCK your lack of a family or home!"

Alistair blinked. Suddenly his armor was on. He seemed smitten with shock. "Really...? Mince pie?"

"Alistair, as much as I'd like to chat with you, we hold the same comedic archetype, we share similar names, similar deep desires, and nobody would ever hear the end of it," Aster said. "You are dreaming about living happily with Goldanna. Scoot!"

He vanished with a small 'pop.'

"How much longer must I continue to hold her?" Bendrick said. "I've used my spell of crushing prison and all of the ice spells I know. If you insist on trapping her much longer, I'll have to petrify her."

Aster scowled. "When I say so," she said. "Then get a stonefist ready." She tapped the frozen form of Lucy-Elissa. "You, Elissa Cousland, or Lucy Woodridge, are charged with severe crimes against canon. These include, but are not limited to: Trans-dimensional hopping, crunching and stretching time, forgetting canon characters are present, making canon characters act unrealistically, being unrealistically qualified to make military decisions, claiming that being a Grey Warden somehow increases your libido, trivializing sexual freedom, hogging the spotlight, having impossible fighting skills, making Bann Teagan love you, writing contextually confusing letters, being annoyingly nonchalant about things that should shock you silly..."

A crack appeared in the ice.

“...skipping over the story to get to dialogue that you can alter, being a mage when you should *not* be a mage, turning King Calian into a water main, claiming age makes you wise when you act like an idiot teenager, making Bendrick quote Anders out of context, being unreasonably attractive to every single male you have ever come in contact with, teasing Alistair as if he does not know basic Sex Ed. and changing his heart’s desire to sex with *yourself*, inventing ‘High Pink,’ riveting people to your face, bashing Isolde and turning her into a half-cow-half-woman thing, facilitating improbable magic sex moves, suggesting that lyrium be applied in *coitus*, making a giant plague zit walk like a man...”

Angry urple sparks began to fissure out of the ice. Bendrick tried to pour more power onto the spell, but his attempts to frost over the cracks seemed to fail.

“...and if Lore is to be believed, romancing *Teyrn Loghain* and solving all of his problems with healing sex, abusing his daughter, killing Arl Eamon to enable your romance, literally sleeping your way across Ferelden to the point of seducing *THE ARCHDEMON*, making Zevran speak bad Italian, making a big deal about Grey Warden infertility and then somehow becoming pregnant in the sequel, having impossibly *strong* magic to the point of *teleportation*, surviving killing the Archdemon without any dark ritual...”

A horrible burst of pink light ruptured the prison, and a great siren call of pure *rage* at being revealed shook The Fake.

“And being a Mary Sue!” Aster roared. “Bendrick, *NOW!*”

He shot petrification at her. She deflected it. He threw a fist of stone at her. She repelled it.

“I’M NOT A MARY SUE!”

She rose before, then radiant. Her form was so bright, it was impossible to look directly at it. Her waves of bright red hair burned hot as the sun, undulating of their own accord. Her true form in the Fade was not a haggard old lady. Her true form was that which titillated men across Ferelden... many against their will.

“I’M JUST SPECIAL!”

“Lucy! Stop!” Bendrick commanded. “It’s over! Let it be over!”

“NO!!”

Aster pulled out her copy of the Dragon Age: Origins strategy guide. “Desist, Sue demon! In the name of Andraste, I deny you! You are an offense to Bioware! David Gaider! Mike Darrah! Dan Tulge! Brent Knowles! Mike Laidlaw! James Ohlen! Dean Andersen! Hear their names and despair!”

Lucy-Elissa screamed in pain and clamped her hands over her ears. But then she ***lashed out with her arcane warrior magic*** and sent Aster sprawling back. The agent’s right pauldron was torn clear through, though her shoulder escaped wounds.

A blast of flame engulfed the Sue, and for a few seconds, she seemed pinned. Bendrick bore down on her harshly, pouring his hottest into the assault. But the Sue teleported out of the way, still on fire, and snapped his staff in half with her karate skills.

"No, you don't!" Aster impaled her with Icing Death, causing bright glittering urple blood to pour out of her, as if she was a punctured bag of pudding. "There! Die already!"

But Lucy-Elissa merely smiled, and the glittering blood began to steam and boil threateningly.

"Oh shi-"

Aster went flying and slammed into a nearby disturbing statue (Teyrn Loghain in tight-fitting jeans). She reeled, covered in glittering blood.

Bendrick dropped the remains of his staff and walked over to Lucy. There was an eerie calm in his stride, and his eyes were set with steel. "Lucy. Come here."

"YOU BETRAYED ME!"

"I'm sorry, my love," Bendrick said soothingly. "Just come here. I want to talk to you."

Aster blinked, struggling under the weight of the pinning blood magic. "Bendrick! Don't you dare!"

***"BENDRICK... WILL YOU COME
BACK TO ME?"***

"Hush." Bendrick's eyes watered; Lucy-Elissa was so close that he was almost lost in her glare. Her sparkling arms enveloped him. If one listened closely, they could hear an acrid hiss in the air. Bendrick's robes were pockmarked with twinkling holes from her corrosively glittery touch. "Hush, Lucy."

Her enormous earthy eyes teared up. Her tears were like liquid opals.

***"PLEASE DON'T LEAVE ME... THAT
HORRIBLE DEMON RUINED
EVERYTHING..."***

"No, Lucy." He inched closer for a kiss. "You are the demon."

And with that, he shoved her own used panties down her perfect, pretty throat. She gagged and sputtered, her screams muffled. But it wasn't enough. Aster could see him raise his off hand...

"No! Bendrick! Don't!"

Crackling tongues of lightning erupted from Bendrick's fingers, surging into Lucy... and into himself. Aster could only watch as Bendrick went up in a great boom of thunder.

She woke up.

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