(Every character depicted in the story below is a consenting legal adult over the age of 18)

As mentioned at the end of the first chapter, I am aiming to get this Story Poll out to the public before the New Year. As such, there will be double chapters for the next two weeks, released on Tuesday and one other day each week. The schedule will then return to Weekly Updates from Chapter 5 onwards. So make sure to always vote as quickly as possible!

A/N: Just a casual five hundred year time skip, I'm sure Amadeus won't have any trouble with it whatsoever.

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Blinking owlishly at Grayfia's strange behavior, Amadeus takes another look around the room. He… doesn't recognize it. But then to be fair, he barely recognizes Grayfia either what with the maid uniform, the general subservience, and the whole referring to him as 'Master' thing.

"… Lady Grayfia, what's going on?"

Coming up out of her bow, Grayfia blushes.

"Please do not address me by that title, my Lord Valefor. I am no lady. The Lucifuge Clan is defunct."

What?! Amadeus finally flings himself out of bed, only to stumble as he gets to his feet. Grayfia is at his side in an instant, moving with the speed of an Ultimate-Class Devil even as she helps him catch himself with incredible gentleness.

“Please Master, do not move too quickly. You have been resting for quite some time. Your body might need to acclimate to being active again.”

That… Amadeus wasn’t sure Grayfia was right about that. Aside from his initial moment of vertigo, he’s actually not having much problem standing up and moving around at all. He feels good… healthy even. At the same time though, he rather likes having Grayfia’s hand on his arm and her concern written across her face.

He remembered, back when he was younger, trying his best to make her react to his antics. She was often reserved to an extreme, her composure and poise second to none. Making her crack a smile, let alone getting a laugh out of her… well, the handful of times he’d managed it were some of Amadeus’ fondest memories.

Now though… her face is much more expressive. She’s not hiding any of her emotions at the moment, he notices. Everything she’s feeling right now, which seems to be largely worry and concern for him, her ‘Master’, is writ large across her features.

… Was this some kind of alternate universe? Had he died to Lucrezah Gremory’s Power of Destruction only to wake up in another world where the Lucifuge Clan was defunct and Grayfia was his servant instead of his friend? Fuck, Amadeus sure hoped not. That sort of bullshit sounded awkward as hell.

“How are you feeling, Master? You just survived the Power of Destruction. It’s alright if you’re not feeling one hundred percent yet.”

Oh. So not an alternate universe then? Now he was even more confused. He survived the Power of Destruction? How?! But no… he couldn’t keep panicking, he needed answers. Taking a deep breath and letting it out

again, Amadeus tentatively regains his composure and looks to the silver-haired woman still holding his arm.

“Grayfia… tell me what happened, please.”

“… Very well, but at least sit down so you don’t fall over, Master.”

“Only if you sit with me.”

“I… alright.”

And so that’s what they do, Amadeus sitting back down on the side of the bed and Grayfia reluctantly joining him. She lets go of him then, much to his disappointment, only to look down at her hands in silence for a few moments. Finally though, she speaks.

“That bitch Lucrezah almost killed you. I assume you remember that much? You came out of hiding and called upon the hidden defenses of your clan’s lands in order to try and block the Power of Destruction from annihilating me.”

Amadeus grimaces but nods.

“Yes. I remember. I also remember it didn’t exactly… work out.”

Grayfia’s head snaps up, her eyes wide.

“But it did, Master. You saved my life. And your own, it would seem. Your barriers did ultimately manage to stop Lucrezah’s attack. And after you passed out from the loss of your hands, the simple intelligence behind your clans’ security systems saw fit to put you in a state of stasis, before

teleporting both of us safely away from the battlefield. And then it healed you, slowly but surely."

Looking down in wonder at his reconstituted hands, Grayfia shakes her head.

"I never would have thought it possible… but your family was clearly far more powerful than anyone truly suspected. Not only did the stasis stop the Power of Destruction in its tracks, but it also managed to snuff it out over time and then even saw to regrowing your missing appendages."

… Yeah, admittedly that was more than Amadeus had been expecting as well. He'd only known about his family's magics because of a single locked trunk left behind by his clan, filled with texts that could only be read by someone of Valefor Blood.

Lord Lucifuge had been a devil of true honor and nobility, because most in his position would have raised Amadeus and taught him to read and write solely so that he could transcribe the contents of the Valefor Tomes so that in turn the Lucifuge Clan could steal all of their secrets. Instead, Grayfia's father had always made it clear that the remnants of Amadeus' family were his and his alone.

His birthright, Lord Lucifuge had called it. Amadeus had taken that and ran with it once he was old enough to really understand the treasure trove of knowledge for what it was. That was how he'd known what lay dormant within his seemingly barren family lands. That was how he'd known he could help Grayfia in this one battle in particular.

But even Amadeus hadn't known that those barriers were capable of all of this. The ability to fight back the Power of Destruction and repair the damage done by it? That was beyond even his wildest expectations.

“… I assume we lost the Civil War then, if your clan is now defunct.”

Grayfia hesitates… but finally nods.

“Yes. The Civil War ended with the defeat of the Old Satan Faction, as they eventually came to be called. The Anti-Satan Faction became the defacto rulers of the Underworld at the end of the war. In fact, you’ll recognize the names of our new Satans quite well, I suspect. Falbium Asmodeus, Serafall Leviathan, Ajuka Beelzebub… and Lucrezah Lucifer.”

Ah… yes, he did recognize all of those names. Even now, Grayfia can barely bring herself to say Lucrezah’s name without her face contorting and her lips twisting into a sneer. To be fair, after his brush with death at the Super Devil’s hands, he had no desire to come face to face with the new Lucifer any time soon either.

Sighing, Amadeus runs a hand over his face.

“How long has it been then, exactly?”

Grayfia’s silence tells him he’s not going to like the answer. Huffing, Amadeus shakes his head.

“Look, I can’t imagine it was easy for my family’s magic to tackle the Power of Destruction, let alone heal me. You don’t need to sugarcoat it… it took years, didn’t it?”

The silver-haired devil looks away; lips pressed into a thin line. Amadeus’ eyes narrow… and then widen with realization.

“… Decades?”

Finally, she turns back to him, looks him right in the eye, and tells him the truth.

“It’s been five centuries, Master.”

Five… centuries? It’s been five hundred years?! Amadeus is stunned. Fortunately Grayfia had them sit down for this conversation because… shit! In the end he just has to sit there for a moment and process it.

“Oh. Damn.”

Grayfia fidgets beside him, her fingers twitching in her lap.

“Can I get you anything, Master? Food? Drink? You must be starving… or at least a little thirsty.”

Was he? He didn’t feel any hunger or thirst, not at the moment. And more than that…

As Grayfia takes his silence as agreement and moves to stand, Amadeus reaches out and grabs hold of her wrist.

“Grayfia, wait.”

She stiffens… and then sits back down right there on the spot. Even though he knows the difference in power between them, even though he knows he’s not strong enough to actually physically stop her… she obeys. That’s both a blessing and a curse because Amadeus still doesn’t fully understand. Why is she…

“The only thing I need right now is information.”

Looking away, Grayfia nods.

“Of course. I’m sorry… what else do you need to know?”

“Please look at me when we’re talking.”

He hates to use this weird authority he suddenly seems to have over her like this, but at the same time he can’t carry a conversation with someone who won’t even look him in the eye. Especially not a woman he respects more than anything else in the world. A woman as strong as Grayfia Lucifuge should not be so… uncertain of herself.

Breath hitching, Grayfia turns to look at him. At the same time, she tries to school her features like she used to do. Only now does Amadeus realize why she’s so bad at hiding her emotions now. Five hundred years… and she’d likely been alone all this time. Especially if…

“Well… for starters, have you been watching over me this entire time?”

Blinking, she slowly nods.

“Yes… I… of course. I’ve been tending to the property and taking care of things while you were recovering. I’ve also kept abreast of the general goings-on of the Underworld as much as I possibly could. I would leave from time to time for supply runs… but don’t worry, I always made sure to disguise myself and I never interacted with anyone outside of transactions, nor did I lead anyone back here. Not that the Valefor Magics would have allowed that to happen anyways.”

That… Amadeus shelves that last bit for the time being and asks something else.

“Where exactly is here? I don’t recognize this room… what is this place?”

“Ah… a Valefor Safehouse, I’m fairly certain. We’re underground of course and hidden away from aerial view. This place is located on the edge of your clan’s old territory, you see. In fact, we’re a mere fifty miles away from the site of the very battle that you saved my life at five hundred years ago.”

Amadeus grimaces for more reasons than one at hearing that.

“… I imagine the lands my clan once laid claim are owned by others at this point.”

After all, five hundred years was a long time. Except, much to his surprise Grayfia shakes her head with a satisfied smirk on her lips.

“You’d be surprised, Master. A combination of different factors has left these lands empty, even after all this time. For one, the Devil Population is still much smaller than it was back before the Great War. Even with the widespread use of those Evil Pieces that the new Beelzebub invented, there still aren’t enough Devils to fill the Underworld.”

Huh. Evil Pieces. Amadeus vaguely remembered something about those. Something about using magical items in the form of Chess Pieces of all things to turn other species into Devils. The traditionalists had absolutely hated them, of course, so he’d never learned much more than that.

“For two, even now the Valefor Reputation lives on. Superstitions and talk of the land being cursed abound. And the numerous failed settlement and mining attempts have left most to give up this territory as a lost cause by this point.”

… Grayfia looks way too smug right now. Amadeus narrows his eyes, an idea coming to mind.

"Hm. And how many of these attempts failed because you took direct action, Grayfia?”

Immediately, the smugness drops and Grayfia looks contrite.

“… All of them, Master. At least in part. I and the simple intelligence behind the Valefor Defenses worked together to ensure your safety. As Lord Valefor, it was only expected. But if I have overstepped in your absence…”

Okay, enough was enough. He’d dodged around the question for too long at this point it felt like.

“Grayfia… since when are you my maid? Since when am I your Master? When did that happen, exactly?”

Grayfia pauses… and then speaks in a quiet tone.

“Four hundred and ninety nine years, ten months, and twenty-three days, Master.”

That was… oddly specific. Luckily, he doesn’t have to press more. Grayfia continues on a moment later.

“It was a month after the battle. The simple intelligence behind your family’s magics allowed me to come with you because it seemingly sensed our friendly relationship, but it deemed my continued access to you to be too big of a threat as things stood. The only way in which I could be allowed to stay by your side and continue to look after you… was if I named myself

Head Maid to the Valefor Clan and Personal Maid to you, Lord Amadeus Valefor."

Amadeus feels dawning horror as Grayfia shrugs like it's no big deal.

"I swore my oaths and made my vows… and have continued my vigil ever since, Master."

"Grayfia… I'm so sorry. You shouldn't have had to do-!"

Her face becomes incredulous as she cuts him off.

"What? Why are you apologizing? You did nothing wrong. You *saved* my life, Lord Amadeus. Swearing myself to your service is nothing in comparison to that!"

Scowling, Amadeus' hands curl into fists.

"You say I saved your life, but it sounds to me like I stole it instead! You were only six decades of age last I checked. And now you've spent five centuries as my servant… my *slave*! All because of my dead family's magic!"

"Master, no! You don't understand… I chose this!"

"Maybe at first, but-!"

"No! Always! For the entire time! All five hundred years! I chose and continue to choose this! I'm not enslaved to you; I could have walked away at any moment. The Valefor Intelligence isn't keeping me here against my will. If I wanted to leave, I would have just left."

… Oh. He'd misunderstood then, from the sound of things. Amadeus had leapt to the worst case scenario without a moment's thought. But in all fairness…

"Why did you stay then? Five hundred years, Grayfia. You didn't even know if I would live or die for most of it. Why would you not go live your life?"

Scoffing, the silver-haired devil shakes her head.

"Live my life? And do what? Knit?"

She says it with such derision that it startles a laugh out of Amadeus. His first laugh since he woke up. Grayfia smiles upon hearing it, only to sigh and look down at her hands.

"There were only two paths for me after you saved my life, Master. Either I watched over you and protected you until you woke up… or I went and got myself killed trying to avenge your death on Lucrezah Gremory."

Amadeus flinches hard at the deep, deep certainty in Grayfia's voice.

"If at any point the barrier keeping you alive had failed and the Power of Destruction had finished eating through you, that second option would have become the default. I live as long as you live, my Lord. The moment you take your last breath, I will follow after you, Master. That is my vow. That is my oath."

She's serious. Deathly so. Amadeus lets out a shuddering breath.

"… I never wanted to be your Master or Lord, Grayfia."

"I know, I-!"

“I wanted to be your husband.”

Grayfia falls silent, her eyes widening as she stares at him in disbelief. Amadeus looks back at her, jaw clenching.

“I thought maybe, after the war, after all was said and done… if I still became Lord Valefor, then I could petition your father for your hand in marriage at that time. It would have been a worthy match, I’d hoped. In fact, sometimes I even tried to fool myself into thinking it was the entire reason Lord Lucifuge took me in and raised me in the first place.”

When Grayfia just keeps staring at him, Amadeus smiles crookedly.

“I know. It sounds ridiculous, doesn’t it? But I’m a young devil and I had big hopes and dreams. Even if my eyes were bigger than my stomach I-mmph!”

Suddenly, Grayfia’s arms are around his neck, her lips on his own. Suddenly, they’re kissing rather heatedly. Amadeus’ own hands go to Grayfia’s waist… but not so he can push himself away. No, if anything he leans into the kiss, feeling and tasting the sweetness of her mouth with his own.

… So this was happening now, apparently.

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Remember to go back and VOTE!