Why To Get Away With Murder

by madelinescribbles

Summary

When Lucretia approaches Merle with a proposition, he really doesn't want to accept.

It's Always Sunny Font: Lucretia and Merle Kill Sazed.

Notes

hey my good friends, please pay attention to those tags. Lucretia's not in a good place in this fic, so if you can't handle the angst today, skip or come back at a later date! not suicidal, just really, really big on self-blame. keep that in mind. read safe!

See the end of the work for more notes.
“Take care, have a good one!” Merle waved as the last customer of the night slipped out the door with a final chime of the little bell.

3 years after the Day of Story and Song, Chesney’s saw a lot of tourists and fancy folks coming and going during the day, trying to get a glimpse at one of the seven birds, but evenings were for residents only. A place for the community to get together for a beer, play darts, and share concerns with Earl Merle.

Tonight in particular was reserved even more specifically for the worshippers of the Second United Church of Fungston. Merle wasn’t the pastor this time around, but he sure as hell had a soft spot for the people. The Parishioners always stayed until the witching hour, sharing their stories, listening to his, and leaving Merle feeling content when he finally wiped down the bar for the night.

He was finishing up, stacking the last few stools, when the bell above the door chimed again.

“Forget your hat, Jim?” Merle asked, walking behind the bar to retrieve it from under the counter.

When he resurfaced with the cap, he was surprised to find not Jim, but Lucretia, standing apprehensively in the doorway.

“Lucy!” Merle beamed with delight, rounding the bar and waddling towards her with his arms open. “Great to see ya!”

Lucretia flashed a half smile and shuffled forward slightly out of the doorway to meet his embrace, clearly feeling a bit nervous, if not extremely awkward.

Merle, hardly noticing and caring even less, wrapped his arms around her legs in a hug without hesitation. Lucretia, in a response that was muscle memory after a hundred years, put both hands on the back of his head, the closest thing to returning the hug that most of the crew could do without kneeling condescendingly.

“You as well, Merle,” she said warmly, finally seeming to relax with the familiar greeting.

“What brings ya to Chesney’s at this hour, kid?” he asked with a grin as he broke away.

Lucretia opened her mouth to answer, but was cut off when Merle held up a hand to stop her.

“Wait! I know, you’re here for the new Earl Merle Swirl Margarita!” he exclaimed, waddling hurriedly back across the room and standing on his tiptoes to pull down a stool from the bar, “I’ll make ya one! Just got a new shipment of the special mix this mornin’!”

Lucretia, with her much longer legs, caught up to him quickly, using her height to help him bring the stool down without hurting himself in his excitement. (He always had such poor dexterity.)

“I appreciate the gesture, Merle,” Lucretia said as Merle hurried back behind the bar and started pulling out a bottle of tequila and some frankly nasty-looking grey margarita mix the exact color of dirty bathwater, “but I’m good on the party drink front tonight.”

Merle’s face fell a little.

“Ya sure? I got plenty,” he goaded.
“Maybe some other time,” Lucretia pacified, “I wanted to talk to you about something.”

“Oh.”

At the gravity of her voice, Merle put the ingredients away and pulled out a bottle of scotch instead, pouring each of them a small amount in plain glasses. Lucretia seemed grateful that he knew her well enough to realize she still needed a drink right now.

“What’s on your mind, kiddo?” Merle asked.

Lucretia turned her head to look around the bar, unable to look him in the eyes as she tried to remember how she’d practiced this in the mirror.

“Merle,” she said carefully, “how much do you know about what happened to Taako in his decade alone?”

Merle was a bit taken aback at that one. He knew tension between Lucretia and Taako was borderline hostile on Taako’s end after the apocalypse, but he certainly hadn’t expected her to come to him about it. Figuring out Taako’s emotions was a trial really only Lup was ever good at.

“Listen, Luce,” he scratched the side of his face nervously, “I’m sure Taako will forgive you ev-“

“No, Merle,” Lucretia interrupted him, “He’s not going to. And that’s fine. He shouldn’t.”

“Now c’mon, kiddo-“ Merle started.

“I’m not here about that,” Lucretia interrupted again, “just let me finish, Merle.”

He sighed but held out his open palms in acquiescence, signaling for her to proceed.

“When I… placed Taako, I left him with a caravan and a young assistant, to establish a traveling show called ‘Sizzle It Up With Taako.’ It was, well, it was successful. Taako was happy - as happy as he could be without Lup, I suppose. I thought he was safe,” she sighed and set her drink down, rubbing her eyes.

“I thought - fuck - Merle, I thought he was safe. Next thing I know, the front page of the Neverwinter Times is about a massacre in Glamour Springs where a caravan performer killed 40 people and vanished. Taako was wanted for manslaughter, and I couldn’t even find him. I spent days on end burning every slot I had on location spells, but he must have somehow cloaked himself, because he was gone. I mourned for weeks. I was sure he was dead.

“After you three showed up, I was so relieved he was alive. I had Killian get you inoculated before the test, just so I could cast silence on myself and scream for twenty minutes. Seeing all of you again was a blessing, but seeing Taako alive was like resetting after my cycle alone. I could breathe again.”

She picked up her glass and downed the rest of the scotch in one gulp.

“I never believed for a minute that Taako was capable of slipping up so badly that he poisoned people. His magic and cooking are too good for that, whether he knew it at the time or not. After the Day, I had Angus dig up some old police reports for me. He did one better. He found a confession.”

Merle raised an eyebrow but didn’t interrupt, taking a sip from his own drink.

“Sazed, Taako’s assistant, confessed to attempted murder and 40 counts of involuntary manslaughter.”
“Hold up, attempted? Are you sayin’...”

Lucretia nodded.

“Yes, it was an attempt on Taako’s life. Sazed was gunning to headline the show himself, and poisoned some of the ingredients. The plan went south when Taako forgot to test his own dish.” Lucretia chuckled bitterly, “Maybe it was his ego over his own skills that saved him. Maybe some intuition that I couldn’t erase. But against all odds, Taako lived, and his life was ruined.”

She lifted her glass halfway before realizing it was empty and set it back down. Merle wordlessly swapped glasses with her.

“I have no doubt Taako was told when Sazed confessed,” she took a sip of her new drink, “I don’t know how he feels about that, but I do know he spent almost seven years with the weight of 40 deaths on his conscience, and still tests all his dishes for poison. You had his macarons on Candlenights; you know why they were all pink and a little salty. Magnus told me Taako freaked out and watched him like a hawk when he snuck one off the tray the night before. He’s so much more guarded now, too, but I’m sure you’ve had more firsthand experience with that than I do.”

Lucretia sighed and finished off her second drink.

“That man broke Taako, Merle, and he has a parole hearing this week. 40 people dead, not even three years behind bars, and he has the chance to walk free.”

Merle narrowed his eyes.

“What are you getting at, Lucy?” he asked cautiously.

“I’m getting at revenge, Merle,” Lucretia leaned in, “Sazed needs to pay, and I want you to come with me.”

Merle’s eyes raised to the ceiling. “Why me?” he moaned at the rafters, “Why does everyone come to /me/ with the vengeance plots? Do I just have that kind of face?” He angled his head back down to look at Lucretia.

“I’m a cleric, ‘Cretia, I only get so many non-accidental killings before I start losing credibility, and I just got back from the last one.”

“The last one?” Lucretia asked incredulously.

“Don’t worry about it,” Merle waved his hand dismissively, “Point is, why you askin’ me about this? I’m just the truth guy, don’t exactly got an axe to swing,” he winced. Anymore.

“I need someone to have my back, Merle,” Lucretia explained, “I don’t want Taako to know I’m doing this; that way he’ll have deniability if something gets traced back to me. So that rules out Lup. And Barry would tell her, so he’s out too. Having Davenport assist me would be... Davenport is off the table. And I think you and I both know Magnus wouldn’t be hot on going after anyone already in the custody of the law. You’re the only one I’ve got, Merle. I need you.”

Merle let out a long hiss of breath, dragging his hands down his face in frustration.

“What about the Bureau members? Killian is way more competent than I am.”

Lucretia stiffened.
“I can’t… Killian is retired, Merle. I’m trying to rebrand the Bureau. Everyone is either retired or not in that line of work anymore, and I don’t,” she took a deep breath, “I can’t drag anyone else into my missions anymore. No one else is going to have their life ruined.”

“Oh, but my life is fine for that?” Merle asked with indignance.

Lucretia levelled him with a glare.

“I already ruined your life, Merle.”

Merle shrugged, “Fair, but I’d like to think it’s less ruined after the whole ‘saving-the-world-and-becoming-an-earl-slash-camp-counselor’ thing.”

Lucretia grinned for a split second, but seemed to remember why she was here and dropped back into her worried frown.

“Please, Merle,” she begged, “I won’t make you do this, but I’d rather not go alone. Will you help me?”

Merle searched her face, attempting to hone in on any of her tells, just to find some deeper insight into her thoughts. The moment she realized he was looking, her demeanor became that of the Director; neutral and unreadable. That itself was telling.

“Y’know Taako doesn’t want revenge, right? If he did, he woulda Disintegrated the sonuvabitch the day after he got his memory back. Or had the Death fellow drag him to hell or somethin’. Instead, he’s just letting this Sazed fellow serve his time and moving on.”

“But-” Lucretia started.

“If Taako doesn’t want this, why do you?”

Lucretia didn’t answer. She continued staring at Merle with a her jaw set, gaze unwavering and determined, if not guiltily fixed on a point a little past him.

(Merle suspected she was having trouble looking anyone in the eyes lately.)

He glanced her over one more time, but all signs of emotion were gone. Merle found her eyes and stared into them, desperately trying to find something other than the hardness he saw everywhere else.

He didn’t find anything.

“Are you sure about this, Lucretia?” Merle asked, putting as much gravity as possible into those words. Desperate to make sure she understood what this meant, and praying to Pan that she had better reasons than what he suspected. Every fiber of his being begged her to second guess herself and walk away.

Her eyes finally seemed to meet him completely, and Merle thought he could see just a little bit of why she’s doing this in the glint behind them.

“I’m sure,” she said firmly.

Something tight began to form in the back of Merle’s throat. He tried to swallow it, but it didn’t go down. He found himself wishing he could find it in himself not to care what she does or why, that he could tell her “no, thanks” and continue to work the bar without wondering if she’d be okay doing
whatever horrible thing she had in store for Sazed.

Instead, he sighed in defeat and stood up from his seat, collecting the two empty glasses.

“Alright. I'll go. Give me a moment to ring Mavis and Lord Copperfield.”
Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Lucretia has a plan. Merle doesn't get humans. Fuck Sazed.

Chapter Notes

this was supposed to go out last night but i'm a thot so you're getting it now

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The wagon ride there was undeniably tense.

Merle could tell his questioning at least had an effect on Lucretia, even if it didn’t deter her. The ride was quieter than usual, even by post-Director standards. Every attempt Merle made to strike up conversation while she steered the cart lasted about 30 seconds, maximum, before petering out into awkward silence. Merle hated it. He was never the kind of person who could sit through clearly morose situations, but the fact that it was happening between him and Lucretia was the worst part.

Lucretia had never been the most talkative, but Merle always enjoyed her company, and liked to think they brought out a lot of the best in each other. He understood that she felt comfortable listening and observing in the same way he felt comfortable talking and distracting, so while Merle carried a lot of the conversation, it was never one-sided. Lucretia was so goddamn smart she knew exactly what questions to ask and when, or where he was going with a point after divulging into a tangent for ten minutes. She was probably the only person on the crew who’d ever shown genuine interest in his opinions, which warmed Merle’s heart (if not stroked his ego), and in return Merle was the only one who regularly checked up on her own mental and emotional states. It was a comfortable synergy, perfected after 100 years getting to know each other.

But that synergy was nowhere to be found today. If anything, Lucretia seemed actively bothered by the fact that Merle had been trying to ask about her mental state.

Merle was no idiot. While she had plenty of excuses back at Chesney’s, he knew that the real reason she invited him was because he /would/ ask about her motivations.

The thing about post-Director Lucretia? She wanted to feel bad about herself.

Not in a masochistic, attention-seeking kinda way, but in a self-flagellation, sin-atonement kinda way. The guilt of erasing her family’s memory and “ruining” their lives dictated most of the decisions she made these days, and Taako’s consistent coldness towards her certainly didn’t help.

Merle personally never saw the point in holding a grudge. They got everything back eventually! Except the arm and the eye. And something with a battleaxe maybe? It was kinda fuzzy. But it’s not like any of that mattered in the long run!

Of course, Merle also didn’t think he was responsible for personally killing 40 people for several
years. Sure, they had the whole Phandolin thing, but that was… different. Firstly, it was Gundren’s hands, not theirs, that directly killed everyone. It takes away a lot of the guilt. It also probably helped that they had each other; easier to laugh off the trauma if everyone else went through it too.

And Merle wasn’t missing a twin sister through it all.

Lup had always been the more substantial half of Taako’s moral compass. He wasn’t surprised that she forgave Lucretia immediately, even after being trapped in the hell-brella for so long. Lup just did that sort of thing. She could hold a grudge for a century over an asshole and a $15 bill, but her compassion was heavily weighted in favor of the well-intentioned.

Taako’s policy was always… different. Merle wasn’t sure where the divergence in that facet of their personalities could have possibly happened, but considering they seemed to have spent so long practically joined at the hip, it had to be something pretty extreme, he thought. Without his sister’s persuasion, Taako could be downright vindictive - and not just when he never knew she existed - during their century, too.

Merle wasn’t a psychologist, and trying to analyze Taako’s justifications and motivations for holding a grudge was above his pay grade (especially considering the IPRE hadn’t paid him in over 113 years), but what he did know was that it was doing all kinds of awful to Lucretia.

Taako and Lucretia both held grudges, but where Taako’s was against other people, Lucretia’s was against herself.

Merle hadn’t seen one this bad since the early years of their mission. As their journey went on, she became so much more confident in herself through taking risks that paid off and just plain talking to other people who believed in her. Merle hadn’t even seen any of that self-loathing after her year alone, but looking back on it now, that might have been just because he was so focused on helping her work through her abandonment issues.

Good Pan, that opened a whole other can of worms about her mental stability as the Director. And even post-remembrance, too, since “losing” Taako was probably a small slice of her worst nightmare to confront every day.

Merle dragged his hands down his face with a groan. Why couldn’t things just be fine for once? Why was there always another manifesting trauma or revenge quest to deal with?

He sighed and sat up, waddling to the front of the wagon to sit next to Lucretia as she drove the horses.

“This’d be a lot quicker if we had one o’ them battlewagons, huh?” He joked.

“I don’t want to draw any unnecessary attention,” Lucretia replied tersely.

“Discretion doesn’t matter if you’re faster than the cops,” he winked.

“I can’t let Taako suspect it was me,” she said with way too much gravitas for Merle’s shitty joke.

“Right. Yeah.”

More of that palpably uncomfortable silence.

It was starting to become a chore to lighten the mood, and as much as Merle hated any type of negative situation, he was going to have to lean into this one. The last thing he wanted to do was encourage this blood-for-blood mindset Lucretia seemed to have pulled from /somewhere/ in her
stew of self-loathing, but if she wasn’t going to have a conversation with him as a friend, he was
going to have to get through to her as an accomplice.

“All right, well, we’re getting close. What’s, uh, what’s the strategy for when we get there? I guess,”
Merle asked reluctantly.

Lucretia sat up a little straighter at the topic change, and began reciting her plan with an unnervingly
practiced tone.

“Sazed is currently being held in a police wagon, en route from his prison cell on the outskirts of the
Felicity Wilds to the court hearing in Neverwinter. The journey is just over a day’s trip, so the driver
will be stopping tonight to sleep, and the guards will set up camp. Based on my intel from other,
similar prisoner transports, the break will most likely occur between midnight and 5 AM, in order to
deliver Sazed to his hearing by noon the next morning. I have the route mapped in my bag, as well as
a stretch of about one mile in which I expect them to stop. We’ll park the wagon approximately one
mile perpendicular to the route, then walk towards it, covering the entire radius. I’ll set the horses free
before we leave, and abandon the wagon so that it is untraceable. After the mission, we’ll head out
about two miles away, and I’ll have Avi send down an orb for extraction.

"As for when we get there, I expect 2-3 guards to be stationed on watch. If we’re lucky, one will
already be asleep, but I’ll cast Sleep on all of them plus the driver to be safe. And I’ll have us under
an invisibility spell the whole time, of course. Once they’re all taken care of, you stand watch while
I… talk to Sazed…”

Her voice lost its confidence at the end. Merle suspected that she had never said that particular part
aloud in all her planning.

“Lucy, are you sure you want to do this?” Merle asked gently.

Lucretia immediately stiffened. The Director returned, closed off and purposefully unreadable, her
moment of apprehension evaporating like a cloud of smoke.

“Yes, Merle, I am. Sazed needs to pay.”

He knew that would be her answer, but he had to try. Someone had to give her an out.

Merle couldn’t deny that this Sazed guy deserved it. Seeing what he did to Taako? Yeah, Merle
would love to kick the guy in the gonads a few times. Hell, if Merle was a more vengeful man, he’d
probably kill Sazed himself. But as sleazy and morally dubious as Merle was, he wasn’t exactly
inclined to murder. He was a cleric, even by the loosest definition, a man of the cloth. His only
intentional murder (monsters and undead things aside) was Kalen, and that was its own quagmire of
ethical ambiguity and psychological implications. Merle was dealing with the fallout of that one on
his own time.

But this whole Sazed situation was something different. Kalen had been… requested. It was for
Magnus and the wife that Merle never got to meet because of that rat bastard, and more importantly,
it was because Magnus asked for it. Didn’t make it right, but like hell was Merle going to not kill the
sick fucker after seeing how deeply upset Magnus had been about losing the memory.

Taako did not ask Lucretia to kill Sazed. Taako chose to take his life back with the knowledge that
he was innocent, and never give Sazed the time of day ever again. It was very unlike him, but for
whatever reason, Taako closed the book on Sazed so hard that Merle had never even heard of him
until Lucretia arrived at Chesney’s.
Lucretia was taking it upon herself to kill Sazed. Merle couldn’t claim to know exactly what was going on in her head since she became the Director, but from what he could tell, this was a very, very selfish quest. And not even the productive selfish, where you get something out of it. As far as Merle could tell, all this was doing was opening the door for Lucretia to hate herself even more. And to directly kill someone on purpose was... again, Merle was dealing with his own recent dubious actions, and homicide was definitely the kind of road you can’t backtrack on.

He still wasn’t entirely sure Lucretia understood that. He could tell she was doing this to punish herself, or atone for her mistakes, or however she was justifying it, but it didn’t seem like she’d completely considered exactly what it could do to her, or that she had a vague idea and refused to let herself properly dwell on it. Merle would place money on the latter.

What was it with humans and revenge quests? He really hoped Barry didn’t decide to corner him for a private chat anytime soon.

Eventually the sun set, and Lucretia slowed the wagon to a stop on the side of a small forest path.

Without a word, she stepped out and began to unlatch the horses, using a modified Prestidigitation on the cart to rust the bolts and make the entire wagon look generally decrepit and long-abandoned.

Merle hopped out the back of the now-dilapidated wagon. Stretching a bit, he shook off the residue fatigue from his nap and joined Lucretia at the front of the cart.

“Lucretia, you know it’s not too late to call Avi and take us back up, right? You really don’t have to do this. We can just talk abo-”

“Merle, stop,” Lucretia interrupted him, “I appreciate you coming, but you have to stop trying to deter me. I want to do this.”

Merle shifted uncomfortably, “Well I know you do, Lucy, but it doesn’t mean you should.”

“Sazed is a horrible person who does not deserve to walk free,” she replied.

“You’re right, but this seems to be about something more, and we both know it.”

Lucretia didn’t respond, instead releasing the final latch on the horses and watching them take off down the path.

“I don’t think you realize how much taking a life will affect you, Lu-”

“I don’t realize?” Lucretia turned her body to face him now, head-on, “Merle, I have ruined the lives of countless people. I erased the existence of millions from the minds of their loved ones. I created a staff that slowly suffocated four major cities and countless small towns. I hit ‘forsake’ a total of 4 times in Wonderland, and left Cam there to die. I created an organization that sent dozens of people to retrieve cursed relics that thralled them and killed other people, until I sent Killian to kill them for me. Brian? One of my 20 original employees, Merle, and I had to tell his fiance that I sent an assassin after him. And that’s nothing compared to what I did to my own family. I watched the light fade from Magnus’ eyes as I made him forget, I put up anti-lich wards to stop Barry’s pleas that I fix everyone, I ordered a near-catatonic Davenport around like a butler for ten years, and I set Taako up with a goddamn serial killer when he had no memory of defensive magic or his own twin sister. I made you run around Faerun like a lap dog retrieving dangerous relics that would literally bring the apocalypse to this world’s front door. I did all of that, Merle, so don’t tell me that this will affect me more than I know. I’m already a monster, and the way I see it, killing this man will actually do some good in the world I ruined.”
Before Merle could even begin to imagine a response, she spun on her heel and stalked off through the woods, leaving him speechless next to the battered wagon.

Blinking in surprise, he shook himself out of his bewilderment and jogged to catch up to her, as fast as his dwarven legs could take him without tripping on the foliage.

“Lucretia,” he called, trying to catch up. His legs were short, and his lack of darkvision became painfully evident when he stubbed his toe particularly hard on a tree root, but he was eventually able to fall back into step beside her.

“Lucy, I know you did all that,” he paused for a moment, “Okay, actually, I didn’t know about the ‘forsake’ thing, but we forsook Lord WhatsHisFace and he’s now, like, my benefactor or something, so.”

Lucretia continued to stare straight ahead into the darkness, refusing him even a glance.

“Alright, so, you have guilt. That’s understandable. All our relics killed people, Luce. But killing this guy ain’t gonna fix anything. It’s just gonna add to the pile of things you hate yourself for.”

“That’s fine. I doubt I’ll notice it at the top of such a high stack.”

“This ‘stack’ seems more like a house of cards situation to me. And I’m afraid of what’ll happen to you when it falls over.”

“Merle, I appreciate your concern, but I know what I’m doing,” she snapped, “I’m not some timid 20-year-old kid who needs your cheap advice anymore.”

Merle flinched.

He knew he wasn’t the most… conventional cleric in the world, and certainly not the wisest man, but his conversations with Lucretia had always come from the heart. Back on the Starblaster, he’d bring her a cup of cocoa when she was upset, or wake up in the middle of the night to find her hunched over some documents, and would just… talk. Not just to her, but with her. It was - well, Merle thought it was - something they both enjoyed. But now, the slightest bit of insecurity from those days without memory peeked into his mind.

Were they really that unimportant?

Lucretia seemed to realize what she said and backpedalled.

“I didn’t mean that. I just… got caught up in my determination. I appreciate you being here, Merle, even if you don’t agree with what I’m doing.”

She paused for a moment, considering her next words carefully.

“I don’t think I would still be here without you,” she said quietly.

There was a lot to unpack in that statement.

At first glance, it sounded like it was about defeating the Hunger, but Merle knew better than that. For a moment he thought maybe it was about their conversations concerning her self-confidence and faith; the power within her to cast the barrier around the Hunger, and her belief in herself to continue with her plan for all those years. But it was still deeper than that.

Merle was starting to realize those talks meant much, much more to Lucretia than they did to him.
“I’m glad you are, kiddo,” Merle replied.

The rest of the journey was silent, except for the sound of leaves crunching underfoot. It was only a few minutes more until they saw the dim glow of a fire through the trees, and the unmistakable outline of a militia wagon.

The wagon itself was huge, a sturdy wooden box long enough to fit a cell against the wall nearest the driver, with enough space for guards to sit between the prisoner at the exit. It was currently open from the back, door swung open just enough for Merle to get a peak at the bars inside.

Outside two guards paced back and forth beside the open wagon, with one more plus the driver sleeping by the fire, as Lucretia predicted.

Lucretia silently pulled Merle behind a large tree, casting Invisibility on the both of them, as well as Silence on their shoes. The faint outline of Lucretia made some complicated hand signals that Merle did not understand, so he just nodded and winked conspiratorially.

Lucretia rolled her eyes and gestured for him to follow her.

For once in his life, Merle thought he rolled well on stealth, because they made it all the way behind the wagon without being noticed. Silently and with devastating accuracy, Lucretia hit both guards with a Sleep spell in rapid succession, both falling to the ground with a thud almost simultaneously.

The driver and other guard began to stir at the noise, but she Slept them too, before their heads could fully raise from their pillows.

Lucretia stood up and made her way to the wagon car’s entrance.

“Lucy,” Merle whispered after her in one last desperate attempt to dissuade her, “Are you sure?”

Barely visible under the magic and darkness of night, Lucretia looked Merle in the eyes, and even without darkvision, Merle could tell she was hurting.

“I’m sure.”

Lucretia pointed her staff, and the lock on Sazed’s cell began to vibrate and smoke, becoming increasingly more violent until the metal bolt shattered into several pieces like glass.

Sazed scrambled back into the far corner of his cell, staring with terror at the remains of the lock.

The cell door swung lazily open with a long creak. Lucretia stood from their hiding spot and stepped into the wagon. Her invisibility was still on, but her body blocked the entrance to the car, the only source of light, casting a long moonlit shadow across the floor and into the cell. Her footsteps echoed and groaned in the nearly empty wagon.

Merle stood outside of the car, peering through the door from the grass below.

“Wh-Who’s there?” Sazed stammered, pressing himself further into the corner.

Lucretia dropped the invisibility spell from the both of them, her cold gaze fixed on Sazed from entrance. From his perspective her face would be mostly shadow, but her eyes glinted.

His eyes widened in recognition of one of the Seven Birds.

“Wha-Why? Why isn’t he-”

“Shut up,” Lucretia snapped. Sazed’s jaw clamped shut immediately.
Merle watched from a safe distance as she placed a single foot forward; the prelude to a step. A threatening gesture. This was not Lucy, the quiet keeper. This was not Lucretia, the hardened traveller. This wasn’t even the Director, the distant manipulator. This was someone Merle had seen peeking from the cracks in her stoicism for the past few hours. This was someone that Merle didn’t know how to talk down.

If Lucy was driven by her passion for writing, if Lucretia was driven by protecting her family, if the Director was driven by the greater good, then this woman was driven by self-loathing.

“How could you do that,” she asked, with a voice as even and cold as a perfect sheet of ice, “To him? To them?”

Sazed’s eyes darted back and forth, searching for a way out, or perhaps just an answer.

“It was-”

“You damaged so many lives,” she cut him off, “Saw so much suffering and didn’t even have the goddamn decency to feel bad about it until the entire world knew the truth. You make me sick.”

She blasted him with some sort of electrocution spell and Sazed jolted, flopping onto his side and convulsing like a dry-drowning fish.

“He trusted you, and you ruined his life.”

Just as Sazed began to recover, she blasted him again, with a clearly higher spell slot, taking a step forward.

“All of them. You took everything from them.”

She took two more steps forward and hit him with the spell again before he could stop seizing from the last.

“You are a disgusting human being.”

Another step, another spell.


With every insult she stepped closer, slinging another bolt of magic at the thrashing body in front of her until she was practically on top of him. It was hard to watch, knowing who those insults were truly aimed at. With every spell, Merle felt a little piece of his heart chip away. He couldn’t stop her. Nothing he did was enough, and now he watched her, spell by spell, until she flicked her staff and nothing came out, all slots burnt out completely.

When the effects of the last spell wore off, his body went limp, collapsing on one of her shoes, smoke curling off of his clothes.

“Lucy,” Merle said hesitantly, “I think that’s enough. He’s dead. Just walk away.”

It didn’t seem like she heard him. She stared down at the body on her shoes in silence, deep in her own thoughts.

“Death was too good for what you deserve,” she told the corpse at her feet, “You deserve to live with the knowledge that everyone in the universe hates you. You deserve to be reminded every day that what you did was unforgivable. You deserve misery. And nothing you do can ever change that.”
She kicked the smoking carcass in the stomach, causing it to flop back down with a thud.

For a moment she said nothing, and Merle was about to call to her again when she pivoted stiffly and walked away from the corpse, staring straight ahead as she slid past Merle and out the coach without acknowledgement.

Merle climbed into the coach himself and peered at the charred remains in front of him. He didn’t quite have it in him to pity the sick bastard, but the corpse was symbolic of something much greater than a dead, abusive asshole. This was the beginning of something Merle didn’t know how to fix.

He kicked the carcass once anyway, in the burnt area that was formerly his balls, and hopped back out of the wagon.

After about an hour of eerily silent walking (Lucretia never bothered to drop that spell, and it was honestly kinda freaking him out), Merle finally reached an empty clearing to find Lucretia next to a huge glass orb, freshly shot and still smoking.

She was speaking hurriedly into the stone of far speech around her neck, and as Merle approached, she finished with a terse goodbye, tucking it back into her shirt.

“That was Avi,” she told him without looking up, pressing the button on her bracer, “I gave him an excuse to send another one. He and Lucas found a way to remotely control the orbs from the base. It will take you straight home.”

Merle didn’t bother humoring her with questions about the separate transport.

“You do know he’ll know it’s you,” he told her as she yanked the release to open the sphere.

“Avi? I sure hope so,” she said coolly.

“That’s not who I’m talking about and you know it,” Merle said gravely.

Lucretia paused with one foot in the glass ball.

“He won’t mention it,” she said simply, way too detached for what she really meant by the statement. She still refused to meet his eyes.

“But he’ll know,” Merle argued, “And he’ll think it was for him. He’ll hate that.”

Lucretia took a deep breath in and held it, like she was waiting for a reason to let it out.

“Then nothing will change,” she eventually replied, and turned her head to finally return his gaze, “And I trust you not to tell him what this really was.”

With that she stepped fully into the sphere, and closed the door behind her.

Chapter End Notes

i'm not letting myself fix this one you get to suffer with me.

this is my only completed multi-chapter taz fic and while its only two chapters anyway, im v excited! also a lil dead inside because let me tell you, CS is hard.
Anyways. Thank you so much for reading! Any comments and kudos appreciated! Hit me up on my tumblr for a chat!

End Notes

Part two is done and goes up next week y'all. Thank you so much for reading! Any comments and kudos appreciated!

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