

EPISODE 18

The morning sun shimmered on the surface of the Mediterranean, interrupting the darkness in Sarah's tent. When she opened her eyes, Sarah saw Clarence, lying on his back in quiet contemplation. "Penny for your thoughts," she purred.

He turned his head to meet her eyes. "Morning, my dear."

"No thoughts?"

"Oh, that would cost you a shilling minimum."

"That many, eh?" Sarah smiled but noticed just a slight crinkle around the corner of Clarence's mouth. "What is it, Clarence? Something bothering you?"

Clarence sighed. "Last night was a very moving experience for several reasons. First off, that cider took me to places I've never been before."

Sarah nodded. "Yes, very powerful. And that's the idea. Explore new worlds." She paused. "And...?"

"And... now, mind you. I'm no prude. But that was the first time I've laid with a woman other than Lucilla, my wife."

She reached out and laid her hand on his chest. "Miss her?"

"Yes, I do."

"Well, are you saying you didn't enjoy lying with me?" Her smile insinuated that Clarence couldn't have possibly entertained such a notion.

"No, of course not. I did." His left hand patted her arm, a gentle gesture of reassurance.

Sarah propped up on her left elbow. "Look—we are two spirits on this amazing adventure—together. If we can bring each other pleasure with a simple smile, a loving embrace or this physical act of love, then enjoy it. And allow it to nurture you in the days ahead." She patted his chest once more. "It shouldn't diminish your love for Lucilla. In this world we are free to love whomever we desire. And the ultimate goal... learn to love everyone."

The crinkle around Clarence's mouth broadened into a warm smile. "Agreed."

"And who knows," Sarah teased. "You may see her again someday."

After dressing, they went to the Great Hall where they ate some cake. Then they returned outside to join the others around the fire. Phosphorus approached and greeted them. He placed his hand on Clarence's shoulder, as the new member stared off toward the coast of Marseille.

"Beautiful sight, isn't it?"

Clarence's head bobbed in agreement. "Yes. But there is one thing I do not understand about this place," he wondered. "How is it you operate openly on the island, with no worry about the mainlanders observing your activities here?"

"How very astute, for a clockmaker," Phosphorus replied with a small chuckle. "Simple." Phos explained an invisible hologram had been installed around the island, surrounding them with a permanent image of a barren landscape with nothing on it, but scores of rocks and a few sea birds. "We can see out, but they can't see in." After the concept of a hologram had been offered, Clarence became convinced.

Then Phosphorus leaned over and in a purring voice asked Clarence, "Tell me—what is your true desire?" Phosphorus leaned back as if to study Clarence's reaction. "What would *you* like to do in your time here with the Vulkhans?" Phosphorus swept his left hand majestically, indicating the broader group before him.

"I am a clockmaker," Clarence said. "I make clocks and other timepieces that assist people in the measurement of time. Simple." He shrugged.

"Then that is what you shall do." Phosphorus patted Clarence's upper chest. "We will build you the finest facility with all the machines, the tools, parts and supplies you need to make..." He spread his hands apart, then opened them palms up, as if revealing a shining, beautiful orb. "Whatever you desire, Clarence."

Phosphorus hoisted a goblet of wine and shouted above the crackling fire, "To Clarence, our clockmaker!" But unlike the evening before, there were fewer people gathered around the fire, and fewer still who joined in the toast, so that only a smattering responded halfheartedly. "Clarence..." Phosphorus turned and with an enthusiastic grin said "See? We are all *behind* you."

Clarence bowed his head in appreciation to The Shining One, but in a sideways glance intimated to Sarah, *I don't believe the others share in his optimism.*

But Phos was a man, rather, an *angel* of his word. And not long after that day, he brought Clarence inside the front door of a beautiful new modern building filled with all variety of machines and tools, metals, wood and work benches galore, spread out in a room so large, Clarence's voice echoed in back when he responded, "My... for me?"

Phos slung his arm around Clarence's shoulders. "Why, we even put a cot in the back in case you wish to work—wait for it— around the clock!

"Yes, it's all for you, to be as creative as you can imagine in making the *finest* timepieces in the world." Then he patted Clarence's upper chest and purred "And you are under no obligation to produce even... please understand, this is not a factory, and you may sit on your breeches all day spinning the hands on the clock face if that is what amuses you, Clarence." He pulled away to gauge the reaction. "However, if you should produce new works and would like us to sell them at market and help offset the island's overall expenses... we certainly will not object."

It was clear to Phos and Sarah, who stood off to the side, hands prayerfully pressed together with the tips touching her lips, that Clarence Odbody né GOODbody was as happy as a pig in mud.

"Now, is there anything else?" Phosphorus asked with solemn honesty. As the question hung in the air, Phos interrupted the pressing pause. "Oh! I forgot. I've also arranged for an assistant to join you. Goes by the name, Streeter. Also from Britannia. One of our ablest, who will act as your dedicated servant for all things that go tick-tock." Phosphorus pulled back, crossed his arms over his chest and with a beaming smile added "Now, are we all set?"

Clarence's sparkling eyes shifted to and fro as the slightest smile crept to his face. "Well... eh, might I ask, do you suppose we could etch the name 'Goodbody' above the door, outside? Like I had back home: **Goodbody – Clockmaker.**"

Phos patted his chest once more. "It shall be done."

And two days later, it was. Except carved in the line below in much smaller letters was the phrase *A Division of Lucifer Lux.*

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(End sample)